

# Douai Oblate

November 2005 No 25

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## Notes and News

### *First Oblates Congress*

THE first international Oblates Congress was held in Rome in September. By all accounts it was a great success; the Abbot Primate, who took a leading part, established the theme by saying 'Oblates are called to be in communion with God, with the monastery and with the world'. Throughout the week there was repeated stress on the importance of *lectio divina*. After the first liturgy the Bible was carried aloft in a solemn procession from the church to the auditorium where it was placed prominently on a lectern facing the gathering throughout all the sessions. Three hundred of the world's 24,229 oblates were present. Personal reflections of our three oblates who were there are printed on page two. Each of them has or will give a talk at one of our retreats. Most of the papers given are on the internet at [www.oblatesworldcongress.com/](http://www.oblatesworldcongress.com/) and we shall be discussing some of them at future retreats. It is planned to hold a congress every four years.

### *Foundation in Douai (France)*

As you know we have made a foundation in Douai, France, where our monastery was situated from 1818 until 1903. Fr Finbar and Fr Peter went there on November 2. Fr John drove them and their equipment in a hired van. They were received with great kindness

by the parish. Fr Peter was invited to preside at the evening Mass on the day they arrived. The house was not yet ready for occupation, so until they are able to move in they will be staying with the sisters of La Sainte Union nearby.

The formal opening by the Archbishop of Cambrai will take place on Sunday February 5, 2006. Four oblates and their spouses have been invited. Would any oblate who would like to receive an invitation please let me know before November 20. If more than four apply then I shall draw four names out of a hat.

### *Internet*

From time to time I send out messages such as requests for prayers, to oblates on the internet. Would any oblate who does not have internet connection arrange with one who does to have this information passed on, as I do not have time to send out these messages by post.

### *Oblation*

Congratulations to Peter Griffiths who made final oblation on December 8, 2004, taking the name Aidan, and to Dick Donnison who made oblation on April 9.

Also welcome to three oblate novices, Fodhla McGrane on July 9, Mary Overington on October 1 and Gill Hall on October 26. *Continued on back page*

## Personal Impressions of the Oblates' World

### *1 by Zina Neagle, obl OSB*

THE First Oblates' World Congress was an extremely interesting and exciting experience. It was everything I expected it to be - spiritual, academic, stimulating and more, and not least, with my keen interest in languages, I was in my element!

It was a great awakening for me spiritually, opening me up to a deeper level of personal commitment and encouraging me to 'grow'.

The Congress's international diversity highlighted the universality of Benedictine Spirituality, and while it is expressed in many different ways in different parts of the world, there was a shared experience that was extremely affirming.

It was an intensive and exhausting week, but vibrant and 'alive'. In some ways there was too much to absorb without time for further reflection.

This Congress was a marvelous experience that captured and crystallized how oblates must continue to live the Benedictine way openly in the world, and how we are called to holiness and to evangelization through our communion with God and with the World.

It was indeed a privilege to be there and I was honoured to be one of the Douai Abbey representatives. Thank you.

### *2 by Ali Wrigley, obl OSB*

The first World Congress of Benedictine Oblates was an awesome experience and one which I felt really privileged to have been a part of. From the opening address by Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, through all the talks and services in a variety of style and languages, to the visit to Monte Cassino and the audience with Pope Benedict XVI, the Congress was a wonderful opportunity to learn the true

value and importance of Benedictine spirituality in the world.

Of all the messages given out during the Congress, the idea of oblates being crucial in promoting Benedictine spirituality came up time and again, and not just from those who were delivering the 'official' talks. Casual conversations with fellow oblates from all over the world gave insight into how, no matter what our circumstances or situations in life, we still have opportunities to bring Benedictine spirituality into the world.

In the Introduction to the bound copy of the talks, Abbot Notker writes: "The treasures of the Rule of St Benedict must not remain hidden behind the walls of a monastery. They must be brought out all over the world for the good of humanity and for the greater glory of God."

God only knows what my part in this sharing of treasures will be, but I am grateful that I got the chance to go to Rome and be totally inspired by what I learned there.

### *3 by Sylvia Parkes obl OSB*

Arriving in Rome the first thing one experienced was the heat!

The subject for the Congress was communion—KOINONIA, "a reality that deepens and unifies all aspects of Christian life", a sharing in the benefits of Christ, with one another and with the world.

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf in addition to his more formal activities, shared meals with us and joined us whenever possible.

It was exciting to see and meet people of so many other nationalities (83 countries were represented) involving a diversity of languages and cultures yet, integral to all, the common language that flowed from the

## Benedictine Saints: *two Gertrudes*

Benedictine way of living the Gospel. The rhythm of the offices and the Eucharist celebrated in different languages, enlivened the order of each day. Different national groups shared responsibility for the prayers, readings, music and singing. On the day the UK group sang 'Eat this bread' in offertory procession, a group of African men and women in national dress came dancing and singing down the aisle. Discussion groups were international. At meals there was complete hubbub! Prayer cards were exchanged and information about our abbeys.

In the congress group photograph, it is amazing how many people one recognises of that great assembly.△

### *Some quotations from the congress*

"When we became oblates, we started anew personal search for God. ... We must evangelise and be evangelised. ... Oblates can make a contribution in the family, at work and in public life."

*Abbot Primate Notker Wolf*

"Oblates should take the monastery home to their parishes, and the liturgy should be the centre of their lives"

*Archbishop Piero Marini Oblate of St George's Abbey,  
Venice.*

"The oblate must move the cloister, and install it into his or her heart."

*Françoise Melard, Oblate of Paix-Notre-Dame Abbey,  
Liège*

"These planting images (of trees) suggest to me what I believe God is doing today with oblates - walking abroad into all the places that need nourishment, slowly but persistently tending the spaces that need softening and sheltering, planting where there is a need for healing from brokenness. I sense that God is sowing and planting the Benedictine heart among men and women who live and work in sensitive and vulnerable places in our world today, sending oblates to bring Benedictine values just there."

*Norveen Vest, oblate of St Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo,  
Calif. USA △*

### *St Gertrude of Nivelles*

GERTRUDE was born in 626 in Landen in present day Belgium. Her mother, Itta, built a double monastery of monks and nuns at Nivelles where she herself became a nun while Gertrude became abbess. At the age of thirty, she resigned her office to devote herself to prayer and reading and she died in 659. Her cult became popular in the Low Countries. In Louvain there is a mediæval church dedicated to her, next to which was a convent of Benedictine nuns, now moved to Louvain-le-neuf, where we used to go to celebrate her feast on March 17 when I was a student there.

St Gertrude's emblem in art is mice. The reason for this strange association is unknown. However she is invoked against rats and mice: in Cologne Cathedral gold and silver mice were offered at her shrine. She is also a patroness of travellers and pilgrims, as well as the recently dead.

### *St Gertrude the Great*

THE date of Gertrude's birth is unknown. She was educated in the monastery at Helfta in Thuringia under St Mechtild. She became a nun there and at the age of twenty-five underwent a conversion experience. For the rest of her life she had mystical experiences. She lived in an age when an emphasis was being placed on the humanity of Christ and she became a pioneer of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

She concentrated her study on the Bible, the Liturgy and the Fathers and she was responsible for a book *The Herald of God's Loving Kindness* also known as the *Revelations of St Gertrude*. She is considered one of the most important of the mediæval mystics. She died in 1302 and although she was never formally canonised her cult was recognised and she was included in the Roman Martyrology in 1677. Her feast is on November 17. △

**Notes & News** *continued from front page*

**Oblate Day**

On Saturday July 9 we held the first Douai Oblate Day. We hoped to get as many oblates here as possible and a large number came. Several met each other for the first time. After Midday Prayer all the oblates renewed their oblation. It was a beautiful summer day so we were able to have lunch in the Cottage garden, at which several of the monastic community joined us. After group photographs Simon Bryden Brook gave us an interesting talk in the Conference Centre. Photographs of the event are on the website [www.douaiabbey.org/douaiob7.htm](http://www.douaiabbey.org/douaiob7.htm) Copies of these can be ordered from Oblate Ali Wrigley.

Our thanks go to the organising committee, Jim O'Mara, Zina Neagle, Mary Macauley and Simon Bryden Brook, who worked hard to make the day so successful and who between them had planned everything so exactly that the whole day ran exceedingly smoothly.

**Michael Blackburn**

Michael has set up his own website of religious writings at [www.religiouswriting.com](http://www.religiouswriting.com)

**Prayers**

We prayed for Colin Johnson who has had a serious operation and it is good to know he is making a good recovery. We prayed too for June Bartlett who had a stroke and she, too, is recovering. But please pray for her husband, Paul, who has cancer.

**Woolhampton Chapter**

In August a Woolhampton chapter was formed. It was agreed to meet once a month alternately on the first Monday or Thursday, until January, when the situation would be reviewed. We gather for a cup of coffee before Compline and continue until about 9.15pm. Those who come to Vespers may come for supper provided they let us know beforehand.

**New Time for Vespers**

Vespers is now at 6pm everyday. This allows us to have a half hour afterwards as a time for a second period of *Lectio Divina*.

It is of course a silent time, and visitors are requested to use it as a prayer time too and not to talk.

**Retreats**

By popular request a mid-week retreat has been added to those already scheduled for Advent 2006. It will run from Monday - Wednesday December 11 - 13, 2006. Here is a complete list of retreats planned.

2005

Fri - Sun Dec 9 - 11

Mon - Wed Dec 12 - 14

2006

Fri - Sun Apr 7 - 9

Mon - Wed May 15 - 17 *date alteration*

Fri - Sun July 7 - 9

Fri Sept 29 - Su Oct 1

Tues - Thurs Oct 14 - 26

Fri - Sun Dec 8 - 10

Mon - Wed Dec 11 - 13

2007

Fri - Sun Apr 20 - 22

Mon - Wed May 14 - 16

Fri - Sun June 22 - 24

Tues - Thurs July 10 - 12

Fri - Sun Sept 28 - 30

Mon - Wed Oct 22 - 24

Mon - Wed Dec 3 - 5

Fri - Sun Dec 14 - 16 ◊

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