

Immense Hope

Launch of Strategic Document

Prelude

Welcome to the launch of the final stage of the Immense Hope Project, the strategic phase. Over the past three years we have been engaged in re-evaluating our current missionary practices to see if we are in step with the reality of today's world and the basic call to us through the charism of our founder Saint Eugene de Mazenod to evangelise the poor.

We gather for the launch of the Strategic Plan which names where we will place our future missionary commitment as a Province. You will have the choice to name where you want to commit your future missionary energy. It is a day to vision the bringing of the Kingdom to places well beyond our imagining.

Our History

The Immense Hope initiatives are linked to our history. It is a journey of looking at how God is working through the Oblates and going deeper in our commitment and vision. When we look at the Oblates history in Australia we discover an utterly exciting story. Oblates are frontier Priests whose lives are dedicated to building the Kingdom of God. They encounter the utter mystery of God and are shaped through prayer and the lived experience of their ministry. The story of the Oblates is how they developed the Church through introducing people to the person of Jesus so that they should encounter the mystery of God.

A few weeks ago I was privileged to attend the final weekend of the Oblates in Massey. Many present and Former Priests who had served in Massey were in attendance at the celebrations. What was evident was the great love of people for their priests. While there was sadness at the leaving of the Oblates there was a far greater joy for the blessings that had come to the parish through the Oblate ministry of pastoral care. There were so many stories of Oblates who had been available for people at the key moments in their lives to offer support, advice, encouragement and compassion. One of the local Priests said to me, "When the Oblates came to New Zealand they were quickly known for their outstanding pastoral care. No one was better". I was very proud to be present and see the overwhelming support and appreciation for the Oblates. It was an appreciation based upon the generous witness to and sharing of faith.

We have a proud history of building vibrant faith communities. We have achieved this through our pioneering work in Missions, Parishes and Schools. The Gospel was preached in difficult circumstances. The early mission teams had to live for months out of a suitcase and had to negotiate difficult conditions while giving a Mission. They lived to be the best preachers of the Gospel. Our Parish men were pioneers. Father John Ryan spent his first year living under the school stairs as he established the parish of Moe. At Eagle Vale in more recent years it was not unusual to see couple preparing for Marriage being instructed on the front lawn. Our first college at Iona commenced with limited facilities and no money. Sometimes there was not enough in

the bank to meet the bills. Yet in spite of all the difficulties that the Parishes, School and Missions faced they were effective at building community and evangelisation.

Where the Church and Oblates are at present

“Our Principal Service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches least” (Const 5)

Through our Immense Hope discernment we came to a realisation that we (the church) cannot simply keep doing things as we have always done them. It is not working. We are in a declining and greying church. The Catholic Church is no longer having the spiritual impact that we once had on society and the country is poorer for it. We run good and successful schools and parish’s plants but the baby is dying. Perhaps part of the problem is that Parish life is seen as maintaining the buildings and programs that served people’s needs in the past. The question needs to be asked: “Have the needs changed so that we have to devise new programs and ministries to meet them?”

I am sure that all those who have served in parish ministry have had the following experience. You spend months preparing children for First Communion or Confirmation. The big day arrives and the event is celebrated with a moving liturgy and a sense of commitment, to be followed by family celebrations. The following we look for their often absent faces at Church. Too many Catholics have been Catechised and Sacramentalised but never been really evangelised. They have never formed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They have learnt the rules and doctrines but do not know the Lord. Are we willing to move from a maintenance model of Parish and School Ministry to an evangelising, mission driven ministry?

Immense Hope clearly named the Mission of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Australia. Most Oblates are satisfied that we are working among the poor and are would like us to continue in our current ministries. The poor with their many faces, the unchurched, the solo parent, the divorced, and the economically poor are already present where we minister. The question raised was not where we minister but how we minister.

The critical issue is the viability of our Colleges and Parish as places of evangelisation. How do we effectively evangelise in a post-modern society in our current ministries? The future vision of the Province was named as being more effective evangelisers.

Some groups are being reached and their needs effectively met. Many of the people who make up our congregations are in the over 60s. They are comfortable with what we are doing. They are very comfortable and appreciative of the services given. They grew up trusting loving the Church. This group has been effectively evangelised.

This older age group trusted in the institutional Church. However, research shows that younger generations have a mistrust of all institutions including the Church. While this is a generalisation there is some truth in the comment. The church to a large extent has lost the younger generation.

The younger generations are those the Church touches least. Still, surveys have shown that the younger people in our parishes are looking for spiritual experiences and the sense of belonging to a community. They are not necessarily looking for these things in a specifically Church environment. When they do come to church, what they can find is that they do not have their spiritual needs met or find a sense of Community. The viable future of the Church will depend upon how successful we are at building a sense of real community and meeting the spiritual needs of those to whom we minister. The vital question is what we invite these people into. What sort of communities are we creating?

If we are to be successful in the future we must have attractive, friendly welcoming liturgies. We must build a community environment that gives people a sense of belonging. Belonging comes not just from attending Church but from real participation and collaboration in the decision making process. It comes from our people taking responsibility for their own faith community.

In our immense hope meeting we identified that the only way forward for the church to grow is through the offer of meaningful liturgies and the invitation to join communities that can connect with the real issues of life. Underlying the possibility of success would be the ongoing formation of clergy and laity. It is through the quality of leadership at all levels that success is possible.

Good leadership skills are essential for effective ministry; it is like the engine that drives the car. These tools are necessary and indispensable if we are to be good practitioners. For many of us the tools given at ordination are not enough to meet the challenges of present ministry.

The primary use of good leadership skills is for the building up of the community. Many strategies could be used to build community. Some centred on interest groups while others on more formal structures. Many strategies could be used.

Our Church is living in a new cultural environment that is in a period of transition. It is characterised by lack of openness to institutions and organizations, and therefore is not as open to formal ecclesial reality. While younger people are not as open to the institutional church they are open to spirituality and community. Part of the new direction is to be able to form community in a less formal and non-institutional environment.

Challenge of Immense Hope

In choosing to be Oblates we have heard the call of Jesus to be evangelisers. This is a call to commit ourselves to make a difference.

“Sometimes it seems much safer to follow the good old beaten path. It seems safer to be a member of a flock. The road less travelled always seems so risky. Sometimes we

have to take chances, run risks.” (A Life-Giving Vision, John Powell) This is not the way of St Eugene who dared all to establish the Kingdom of God. The daring needed in our mission is captured in the words, “Toujours L’Audace”.

Since we first heard the call to become Oblates so much has changed in the Church. Many of the young have voted with their feet. The old magic does not seem to work any more. Once we felt part of a winning team but now we are not so sure. “We are doomed to stay in the same place if we do the same things we have always done. We become stagnant and stifled” (John Powell).

Well we are doing something about it. The present moment in our history is a moment with spiritual maturity that is bright with hope. There is so much we can do no matter what our age or health. Your response to Immense Hope is a living sign that you have the courage to tackle the issues and walk the walk. I do not believe it is our way to take the comfortable or easy path. As Oblate we want to make an impact in our Ministries and be outstanding Missioners.

Background to the Process

In 2001, the Provincial council met, in step with the rest of the Congregation, to re-evaluate our current missionary practices through the General Council’s Immense Hope initiative. Father Mark Edwards was appointed to facilitate and animate the process. He followed the process as set out by Rome to the letter.

Phase I

The Province met in a series of four regional meetings:

- To focus our vision
- To evaluate our current missionary practices and the process of our personal renewal.
- To identify new missionary perspectives
- To respond to new missionary calls

The insights of the regional meetings were gathered into the Working Document. This formed the basis for all other discussions.

Phase II

An Assembly of 29 convened to focus and refine the Working Document. In its deliberations, the Assembly attempted to remain faithful to the aspirations and expectations of the small groups who had gathered previously. It dedicated its efforts to putting the ideas into a workable and achievable context, so that a realistic strategy document could be produced.

The Assembly generated a Vision Mission Statement and a Planning document. These documents were then submitted to a Drafting Committee, which was commissioned to refine the work of the larger body. The document was submitted to the Provincial and his Council for approval. The Planning document named the goals and values of the Oblates for the next five years. The Vision Mission Statement named out identity and what we should be about.

Phase III

The Council then met at three monthly intervals to produce the Strategic Plan. During these meetings, the goals and values from the Planning Document were expounded, with the members of the Council building each idea out to its limit and then refining it to present a clear and concise Initiative. Also, Ideas from the regional areas meetings were noted for use in the plan.

Phase IV

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Mission Values and Vision

We, the Oblates are a community of missionaries, living as apostolic men of prayer and holiness, following in the footsteps of St Eugene De Mazenod as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Mission of the Oblates is to:

**“Lead people to the Kingdom of God –
By proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ”**

St Eugene put it in another way when he said “We must lead people to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints”. We want to lead people to have a personal experience of God in Jesus Christ.

The Values of the Oblates are the development of

1. Holiness (Personal Formation)

The Oblates are called to live lives of personal holiness out of which can flow the being and building of the Church. Holiness is the result of living our oblate spirituality. This means finding ways of visiting our inner world and allowing a relationship with God to grow. It is only when Jesus is a real person for us, when his life and teachings thrill us with joy that we can start to have an impact upon others. Immense hope gives priority to our personal formation.

2. Community (Oblate Formation)

The Oblate Mission can only be achieved in community. Father Jette said in his writings, “.in Eugene I see a man who served humanity in an integral way by showing who Christ really is ...In Eugene I see a man who answered the Church’s call, not as a loner, but in community, a religious community”. To be an Oblate means being committed to community life as that is where we find support and strength. Immense hope gives priority to Oblate community development.

3. Evangelisation. (Community Formation)

The breakdown of community at all levels has impacted on the mission of the Church. The family and community structures that supported the faith have grown weaker. Traditionally faith was passed on and received within a supportive community. So much more time and effort must go into building community. Immense Hope gives priority to the building stronger communities in our Parishes and Schools.

The **Vision** contained within the **Strategic Plan** is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ by leading in a way which moves people to live and experience, the Gospel. The **Strategic Plan** requires the Oblates to model a way of leading which promotes the leadership of the laity in line with their rights and responsibilities accepted in Baptism and Confirmation. These rights include active participation in the building of community and assuming responsibility and accountability for producing a genuine response to the gospel.

The **Strategic Plan** places the principle focus on the **development of leaders** within the Oblates. The intent of the plan is to ensure that, through the strength of remarkable leadership, programs, ministries and projects undertaken to proclaim the Good News, will be successfully realised.

To be a missionary Oblate one must be a man with a deep interior life. He must have a regular prayer life, a regular personal experience of Christ, live in apostolic community and have the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles.

Leadership Perspective on Evangelisation

The Parish Priest is the most crucial person in the Parish. The college rector is the key person in our colleges. It is almost unfailingly true that where a Parish or College enjoy vitality, the leadership of the Oblate in charge has been central to this vitality. On the contrary, where there are problems, the leader's part in the Problems has been significant.

There are already many good styles of leadership in our Province. Some Oblates are good teachers, some are good liturgists. Some have good organisational ability while others are remarkable for their one to one care. Still others are strong community builders, while others have the gift of hospitality.

“There is no one style of good pasturing (leadership), yet there are some common qualities. Good pastors seem to have a confident sense of direction. Aware of their own abilities and weaknesses, they have a good notion of what a parish can be. Secondly, good pastors care about their people. They show care about their people. They show respect for the experience and abilities of people and are as ready to listen as to speak. They listen carefully and hear what people are saying. Thirdly, good pastors are able to share decision making and leadership. Their strength evokes the strength of others. Weak pastors evoke the weakness of others, their tendency to dependency, pettiness or divisiveness. Fourth, good pastors seem to be interested both developments in theology and the life of the larger church beyond the parishes.”
(Philip J Murnion, Parish Renewal: State of the Question).

We need good leaders in our Oblate communities and ministries. We need a shepherd who can provide direction while at the same time recognising that he is a pilgrim who walks the journey not always ahead of his people but sometimes with, and now and then even behind, them.

The centrality of the role of leader cannot be overemphasized. "...the quality of life of a community will be determined largely by the quality of its leadership" (John Carroll Futrell)

The Oblate Vision to Evangelise is achieved through outstanding leadership. Leadership skills are necessary to build and sustain community life. Therefore it is necessary to have Individual Formation, Oblate Formation and Community Formation. We therefore need to continue to develop our leadership skills to drive the Mission.

Focus of the Strategy

The intention of the Provincial Council was to formulate the best five-year strategy for promoting effective evangelisation. After considering a number of plans, it became obvious, that without exceptional leadership, none of the proposed Initiatives would succeed. It also became clear that if we attempted to do too many things we would be unsuccessful due to our limited time and resources. So we decided to focus our energies and resources on doing one thing particularly well and so the drive for exceptional leadership became the critical imperative. With this focus, the Plan took shape. The drive for leadership excellence would be first and foremost in the Plan and all additional programs and projects would flow from it. We would do one thing exceptionally well.

Our leadership training would be based on the four centres of energy - intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical - and the program will attempt to lift all these four centres of energy to their maximum level.

The leadership skills that will be taught to individuals in the program will then enable them to build up the capabilities of the communities in which they serve. (This is represented on the Chart on the previous page.) The leadership model is to be one of subsidiarity; it requires creating and sustaining the critical leadership essential at all levels of formation.

The training is aimed at enabling the Oblate to view his role in the Church differently. He moves from one of doing for others to modelling the Christian life. He learns the skills to involve others and pass on responsibility to them. Specific goals are reached through the proper use of committees. Leadership is needed to give guidance, direction and to facilitate change. In this model the laity are trained, resourced and supported till they can run the program or activity and then things are passed on to them. The community leader in this model becomes free to do other things because he has enabled people to make the ministries of the Church their own.

Project Management Process

All Initiatives in the Strategic Plan will form the basis of Projects to be carried out by specially created Ministry Teams. The process established through the development of the Strategic Plan will be mirrored in all Projects going forth. All those affected by the outcome

**of the project will be involved in its planning and implementation.
This process,
Is as follows:**

Issue / Challenge / Initiative Raised

- Project Sponsor Identified
- Ministry Team Selected
- Project Manager Designated
- Project Plan Outlined
- Project Time-Frame Established
- Forum Conducted, Involving those Effected by the Project
- Project Plan Draft Formulated
- Project Plan Finalised
- Project Plan Implemented (PILOT)
- Pilot Evaluated
- Project Plan Implemented (ROLL-OUT)
- Evaluation / Follow-Up

The Strategic Plan has identified future projects. The projects will be planned and implemented by selected ministry teams. All Oblates will be given the opportunity to be a member of a ministry team. All projects initiated will mirror the same process set out below.

Strategic Initiatives

INDIVIDUAL OBLATE DEVELOPMENT:

Leadership Development
Initial Formation
Ongoing Formation
Personal Development (Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Emotional)

OBLATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Relationship Building

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

Parish Development
Lay Leadership
New models of Parish ministry
Spiritual Rejuvenation I Liturgies
Spiritual Rejuvenation II Oblate laity
Youth Programs
School Development
Creating Missionary structures in Oblate Colleges
Staff Formation
Evangelisation of Students

The following projects have been identified as important strategic initiatives and come out of our identified mission (Planning document). They focus upon individual Oblate development, oblate community development and community development. These projects need to be viewed in the context: they will be implemented over the next five years a long period of time and Oblates buy into the projects they are interested in. These projects are not meant to add more to an already heavy work load but to give us an opportunity to choose and prioritise how we can most effectively use the time and resources at our disposal for evangelisation.

Time frame overview

Use diagram on overhead projector

The time frame will continual be reviewed and monitored. Projects must be done in a way that is sustainable with the resources at our disposal. Timelines may need to be adjusted.

Leadership Development

Having chosen leadership as the principal means towards effective evangelisation, the first initiative of the Strategic Plan will be the implementation of a Leadership Development Program.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the following goal from the *Planning Document*: "Through consultation, shared leadership and appropriate structures, the people, as co-evangelisers, are empowered to take appropriate responsibility for the service of their community. We share our charism with them." (Goal 11). Excellence in leadership is vital in developing the quality of community life (Goal 7).

PURPOSE: To develop the skills of the Oblates so that they can become inspiring leaders in their ministries and communities, models for others to follow.

A leadership development program has been put together to help us to become more effective evangelisers. It is designed to help us increase our leadership capability. In the afternoon some details of the program will be spelt out.

At present the Oblates work out of a variety of leadership models and structures. The leadership program would educate Oblates on the various kinds of leadership models so that we can determine the process of selecting the appropriate model. This would enable us to construct a leadership model that promotes community involvement and community experience.

Many Priests find themselves saying, "I just don't want to be a priest who's only an administrator. I was ordained to be a spiritual leader". The leadership program would seek to give priests greater skills in managing change, time, resources and people.

Initial Formation

Initial Formation prepares candidates to face the challenge of future ministry.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement “The formation of Oblate missionaries is a life-long process. Initial formation is achieved by our formation community, who prepare candidates to face the challenges of future ministry.” (Goal 9)

PURPOSE: To ensure that the Formation Program promotes the deepening of the spiritual lives of the candidates in order to meet the rigorous demands of today’s challenges in ministry. It should also provide the appropriate skills to proclaim and witness to the Gospel in an ever-changing world.

The formation community of Saint Mary’s Seminary Mulgrave have been committed to the training and formation of Oblate students for the past 40 years. In this time there have been enormous changes in the nationality, social culture, and religious environment and from which students come. The Australian Religious and social culture is almost unrecognisable from the past. The future of the Province depends on the formation of students in the Oblate charism and missionary practices. These Priests need to make an impact in evangelisation in the present Australian culture.

While first formation is the particular concern and responsibility of the formators at St Mary’s, it is also the responsibility of the whole province. Therefore the formation program would involve the Province looking at:

- The development of a policy book for first formation.
- An audit of the skills and attitudes needed for ministry (such as running a good meeting, communication skills, confrontation management, and leadership course) will be taken and programs and experiences to advance these will be developed.
- Oblate candidates will be equipped and trained such that leaving their first formation community does not disrupt their formation.
- Candidates for the Oblates will be inculcated with the mores and habitus of our Province.
- At final vows the formation programme will be adapted to better match the level of commitment of the Oblate as he makes his life commitment.

Ongoing Formation

Heightening the awareness of all Oblates to understand that education for ministry is a life-long endeavour, and requires continuous updating... As the demands of our ministries change, so must our skills and behaviours.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, “The formation of Oblate missionaries is a life-long process...For all Oblates, ongoing formation is an important priority.” (Goal 9)

PURPOSE: To build a cultural expectation that continuous learning is a way of life for all Oblates. To involve all Oblates in developing a personalised ongoing formation plan.

Over the next year all Oblate will have the opportunity for ongoing formation by participating in the Leadership Development Program. At the end of the program the ongoing formation team would be formed and a program developed. The team would explore and develop ways for Oblates to continue their ongoing personal development with consideration for many initiatives such as Sabbatical programs.

Personal Development

The focus of this initiative is to encourage all Oblates to pursue a continuous sense of balance in their lives, ensuring good health, a deep and authentic spiritual life, the acceptance of ongoing intellectual challenges and their expression of a sense of feeling strongly about people and events in their lives.

CONTEXT: This initiative if linked to goal 5, “So that together we may grow to our full stature”, and goal 7, “committed to personal prayer and holiness”.

PURPOSE: To focus on the total health of each Oblate, in order to serve from a position of well-being of mind, body, and spirit. This implies spending ample time for reflection, being refreshed and renewed in order not to get caught up in just “doing” without purpose.

As Oblates we are renowned for our pastoral care of others. We give, give, and give, without counting the cost. While we are good at attending to the needs of others we are not always as good at attending to our own personal needs? Priests do not care for themselves. Clergy are often deprived of emotional energy. They don't share and they need support. How good are we at keeping the energy and enthusiasm high for ministry? I believe our effectiveness as ministers will decrease unless we attend to our own needs, spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual.

We would like to see the skills of attending to our own needs increased so that we remain alive and vibrant in ministry. While each person is responsible for their own growth, a program will be designed to assist in make us more aware of how to:

- Deepening Our Personal Relationship with God. (Spiritual)
- Promotion of ongoing Individual formation. (Physical, Emotional, Intellectual).

Everything in life starts with my relationship with God and the willingness to renew and share that relationship. God expects us to care for ourselves, his creation.

Relationship Building

Every Oblates life is linked to the lives of other Oblates. Our lives are not defined as “a desert experience”, but defined as “a community of celebration”. When we become consumed in tasks, we lose what we stand for: a community of men, who genuinely feel for, care for and reach out to others.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, “Our community life and prayer is vital to our lives and daily ministry. We are dedicated to more authentic sharing and mutual support in our communities. Thus, each member of the community takes ownership of the shared mission.” (Goal 7)

PURPOSE: To build genuine, caring communities among ourselves, to gain a clear sense of belonging, which in turn serves as a living witness to building community with those we serve and touch.

It is within Oblate Community life that we find strength and support for our Mission. In an age of individualism we need to consciously commit ourselves to building stronger communities. There is an expectation that one will find in oblate community life a level of satisfaction as we eat, pray and work together. We could all ask the question, “How satisfying is the community I live in and what am I willing to commit too?”

It is up to each community to establish their own guidelines for community living. However a simply program will be put together aimed at Enhancing community life amongst the Oblates. The objectives would be to:

- Make a concerted effort to know, respect and appreciate those you live and work with.
- Be consciously aware of those serving in isolated Ministries and support them.
- Provide opportunities / structures for groups to meet – Provincial Level.
- Provide opportunities / structures for groups to meet – Community Level.
- Younger Oblates need more support in first 5 – 10 years.

Lay Leadership

The focus of this strategy is to call the laity into their rightful role, as defined by the Vatican Documents. It is also to encourage and enable multiple opportunities for the laity to serve as authentic leaders in their communities, to work side by side with the ordained in responding to the demands of the Gospel message in a practical and effective way.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statements, “Through consultation, shared leadership and appropriate structures, the people, as co-evangelisers, are empowered to take appropriate responsibility for the service of their community.” (Goal 11)

And “whilst respecting our current ministries, we review our priorities, keeping in mind the pressing needs of the people we serve.’ (Goal 10)

PURPOSE: To provide learning opportunities, by offering development programs, which enhance the leadership skills of the laity and to institute programs, ministries and services in which the laity can lead, manage and maintain. This aims to free the clergy to focus on the spiritual leadership they are ordained to perform.

This project is an attempt to get the laity to take ownership and responsibility for the life of their Parish. It is not Father’s parish but theirs and they have a responsibility through Baptism to live and pass on their faith. The key to the success of this program is to pass on leadership skills for the building up of the community. Skills are used to build community at all levels.

People frequently evaluate parish life on the quality of community. Judging whether the parish is an “alive” or “dead” is often merely a reflection on whether or not people discover community there.

The church has always been involved in building faith communities. The faith is caught and sustain by the life of the church community. With the breakdown of family and community life many of the natural community structure that supported the faith life of the church have been lost. The church needs to find new ways of building community.

One strategy to grow or build the church is to build communities around interest and network them to the church. Structure around interest can lead to pathway to worship. The following groups could operate in any parish.

1. Issue Groups (localized – societal issues – politics / pornography / social disaster etc)
2. Interest Groups – After School Care, Prayer Group, Social, Sports
3. Ministry Groups – all about getting the Parish to own its ministries.
4. Corporate Citizen groups – partnership between the business and the Church. (Paint Program etc) Apex / Lions

No Priest has the time, energy or capability of organising and running all the groups in a parish necessary to build community. However, groups can establish and handed over to the laity. This is achieved through the passing on of leadership skills. Group leaders need to be trained, resourced, empowered and supported. The aim is to have the laity able and capable of running as many programs in our parishes as they are able to free the Priests for more spiritual or creative things. This is not the abdication of responsibility on the priest’s part but recognising that each has their rightful role in the Church. For this model to work effectively would require close collaboration between Priest and People.

Tony Maher has put forward his name as a team leader. He is willing to model this process of leadership in his Parish. Consider implementing a Pilot Church for the first 6 months. Then have those involved in the pilot talk to the next group of 6 or so churches to get the different leadership model involved there. This model of lay participation could be used on many projects.

New models of Parish ministry

Oblates choose to live in real apostolic communities. Our missionary communities give us an opportunity to respond to the real needs of people through the genuine sharing of: Oblate values; creative outreach; and shared leadership with our parishioners.

CONTEXT: This aligns with the statement “We are committed to living Apostolic Community life. The mission to respond to the most urgent needs of the Church and the world is accomplished through our community life. In living this life, as expressed in the Oblate Constitutions and rules, we are united and energised.” (Goal 8)

PURPOSE: To create and identify a common Oblate vision of Parish so that we may better work together among ourselves and with our parishioners.

At the General Chapter in September ten major issues have been identified for discussion and one of those issues is Parish Ministry. In many provinces by far the largest numbers of men are involved in Parish Life. The question is this truly Oblate work. The question is obviously, yes, but there must be an Oblate way of running parishes that is truly missionary. While not an immediate priority, a Parish assembly would enable the sharing of missionary approaches to this ministry and the naming of an Australian way of being missionary in our parishes.

Spiritual rejuvenation I – Liturgies

As a trusting community of believers, we celebrate Christ's presence among us in Word and Sacrament. Therefore, in this most important aspect of our work in our Schools and Parishes we want to give priority to significant liturgical experiences.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, “People are searching for an experience of God. We give our priority to the Word of God through the preparation of our homilies and liturgies. To enhance the proclamation of the Word, we avail of the increasingly wide range of modern technology where appropriate.” (Goal 12)

PURPOSE: To provide Oblates with the skills and resources to give significant spiritual experiences in liturgies. We will make every effort to provide our people with nourishing liturgical experiences.

The entire Sunday Eucharist ought to be an evangelising experience. People come looking for an experience of God. This includes the type of welcome, homily, reading, music and sense of prayerfulness. The Liturgy can have a powerful evangelising effect.

A person's experience of Sunday Mass is often judged by the homily. St Paul said, "Faith comes from what is heard". The most common reason many of us have heard for non-attendance at church was that the sermons were lifeless and boring. Preachers talk about issues that have nothing to do with my life. No matter how good a homily is the question is always one of relevance, "What does this have to do with the people lives before us today" (relevance mother's day, no mention)

Good Liturgy seeks to create an environment for others to experience God. A Liturgical Program would seek to assist in the delivery of well prepared and meaningful liturgies. (Con Campbell homily notes)

Spiritual rejuvenation II - Oblate Laity

Conscious that the Church is a presence of Christ in the world and that we are fragile, we rely on our confidence that God is with us. Knowing that we have something to give, we welcome and accept all people and offer them the opportunity to share our faith so that together we can grow to our full human stature. We will avail of every opportunity to help people perceive the presence of God in their lives.

CONTEXT: This aligns with the need recognised in goal 12, "People are searching for an experience of God,"

PURPOSE: To provide, in new and innovative ways, opportunities for people to recognise and experience God's presence in their lives.

We will develop and offer a spiritual enrichment course for men and women. This could be over six months and commence with a retreat weekend. This could be suitable for practicing Catholics, non-practicing and possible non-catholic. The content would be aimed at the issues in people's life experience.

Many men are interested in being good fathers, husbands and good men. Mothers like the idea of getting away for the weekend and of doing something for themselves. We could run a retreat focusing on the individual so that they function better in relationships. How do I become a better...? In developing a program we would involve a variety of laity who can name the issues that participants would be interested in. We bring the gospel message to issues in which people are interested and instil those issues with strength. The programs can be handed over and run by the laity in our parishes.

Youth Programs

Knowing that the future vitality of the Church lies with the youth, it is imperative that we are successful in capturing and retaining the hearts and minds of our young Christians.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, "We place great value on the evangelisation of youth. We strive to know the young people with whom we come in contact, to listen to them, to journey with them, maintaining a

respectful openness and approachability. We encourage young people to be lay leaders who can, in their own way, build true Christian community.”

PURPOSE: To create youth programs and opportunities which encourage the building of a life long vocation to living and spreading the Word.

We have placed a significant proportion of our resources in youth ministry. We wish to continue to have significant spiritual impact upon the youth. A youth program would develop and enhance what we have already. Such things as the oblate youth network, oblate youth internet site, youth retreats and other local initiatives have huge potential.

Creating Missionary structures in Oblate Colleges

While we want our Colleges to be institutions of excellence, we focus especially on developing the faith and leadership capability of our staff and students. The Province will endeavour to develop a common plan to achieve these goals.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, “We are blessed with the opportunity to reach youth and work with them in our Oblate Parishes, Colleges, Parish Schools, Rosies and other youth ministries. We dedicate ourselves to exploring, developing and extending these avenues to achieve greater scope and effectiveness in the future.” (Goal 2)

PURPOSE: To design and establish structures which promote and develop the faith and leadership capability in our colleges.

A desire was expressed through Immense Hope to maintain our presence in colleges and for them to remain places of significant ongoing evangelisation. The College environment has changed noticeably over the years and so the structures needed to support that change in our colleges were discussed. The outcomes from the day indicated:

- The need to form stronger links between the colleges and provincial administration.
- The establishment of a school board in all Oblate Colleges. A school board was seen as necessary to ensure greater collaboration in decision making.

Staff Formation

The focus of this initiative is to build a viable community and to enrich the religious life of each staff member so that they in turn can assist the students in their faith development.

CONTEXT: Aligns with the statement, “Our involvement in education in Oblate Colleges is a special opportunity to touch the lives of young people. Urged on by the Oblate Charism, we, together with the staff,

parents and students evangelise and develop the faith of the school community.” (Goal 4)

PURPOSE: To provide the staff in our Colleges with the skills and behaviours which are essential in community faith building.

It is essential that we continue to build on the Oblate staff formation in our colleges. They work with us in the mission of evangelising students. Therefore they need to be trained to evangelise. A training program for staff needs to be developed on how to evangelise. Develop a more comprehensive plan for sharing our charism with the college teaching staffs.

Evangelisation of Students

The focus of this initiative is to bring the students of our Colleges to a true experience of Christian community, giving life to The Word that is being taught. This supports the primary aim of every Oblate involved in education: to bring students to Christ by providing authentic spiritual leadership.

CONTEXT: Also aligns with the statement, “Our involvement in education in Oblate Colleges is a special opportunity to touch the lives of young people. Urged on by the Oblate charism, we, together with the staff, parents and students evangelise and develop the faith of the school community.” (Goal 4)

PURPOSE: To develop the faith and leadership qualities of our youth so that they may give a strong and effective witness to Christian values in the world.

The students in our college come from a very materialistic and secular culture. We aim to give them a school environment with a strong lived faith. Many opportunities could be created or built upon for evangelisation initiatives. Opportunities could be created around:

- School retreats
- Program called “Gospel Coaching” / Gospel Program – where students / youth can learn through experiential learning. Mime / Theatre groups – experiencing the feeling of characters in the Gospel – the Last Supper – feeling the pain of knowing that Jesus was going to die.
- Youth being involved in all parts of Sunday Liturgy – providing youth with reasons to be part of the worshipping community.
- Could Students could work with Rosies (or other social issues) for a specified time period?

- An Oblate, not necessarily qualified as a teacher, is involved in a faith development team in each of our colleges.
- That there is an assembly of Oblates interested in education to discuss evangelisation in colleges.

Summary

Immense Hope is not changing the mission but deepening it. We need more effective evangelisation – better Parishes, Schools etc – through the vehicle of leadership.

I am asking that you commit to one or two programs. I am not asking that you do more work. Many Oblates are overstretched already. We need to review our priorities and be committed to those things that will make an impact. To take on this initiative will mean reviewing our present priorities. If we feel these initiative are worthwhile we need to create time and space for them to happen.

The success of the projects depends of the style and quality of leadership. I strongly encourage all Oblates to do the first module of the leadership course. The second module is for those who are in leadership positions or feel they would benefit. To do this course is a privilege and only volunteers will be accepted. I would encourage you to consider what impacts this can make on your current ministries.

All can contribute by serving on a committee. I need names to serve on the committees. Please look at the programmes offered and put you name down to serve on one or two committee. These programs are over five years. It is not as if all this is going to happen tomorrow. There is plenty of time to spread out the commitment.

Suggestions and ideas are needed for the projects and can be given to the project manager. There will be time to work on this in the afternoon.

Thanks for your time and attention this morning.

Father Vincent Ryan OMI
Provincial