



*Nothing Dearer than Christ*

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines, Elgin, Moray, Scotland. IV30 8UA.

Ph. (01343) 890257 fax 890258

emails [oblatemaster@gmail.com](mailto:oblatemaster@gmail.com) and

[oblatemaster@pluscardenabbey.org](mailto:oblatemaster@pluscardenabbey.org)

Website [www.pluscardenabbey.org](http://www.pluscardenabbey.org)

DMB Oblate Letter No 60 Advent and Christmas

2023

## **Voice of our Oblate Delegate to the 2023 World Congress of Benedictine Oblates:**

### **Bryan Miller's report:-**

Fifth International Benedictine Congress, Sant' Anselmo, Rome.

Sant' Anselmo Monastery, September 2023, Rome.

It was a huge privilege to attend the International Oblate Congress as an oblate of Pluscarden Abbey, held at the Sant' Anselmo in Rome. This is the home to the Abbot Primate, an abbey and the residential college of Sant' Anselmo. The monastery sits on the top of the Aventine Hill with the most superb views over the city of Rome. As I was taken up to my room on arrival, I



*British Delegates Bryan front right*

could see the great dome of St Peters Basilica below. I certainly felt 'in the panting heart of Rome'!

It was wonderful to be in a Benedictine house and to feel at home with the common customs shared by the great Benedictine family. As we all know St Benedict had very definite things to be said about receiving guests and this was evident at all times at Sant Anselmo. The guest master, Fr Benoit Allogia, was superb at making everyone feel at home while keeping the very busy programme running to an extremely tight schedule. He was supported by a team of lay oblates who were equally efficient.

Each day's activities took place within the structure of the liturgy. I was delighted that the offices were sung in Latin to Gregorian chant as indeed was the Mass. Scriptural readings were in different languages each day. The use of Latin allowed 156 participants from 25 countries to join in one voice praising God. These times of worship were very special to me - this time of common prayer which was offered in the beautiful basilica church that is part of the monastery of Sant Anselmo. The community of monks based at Sant' Anselmo joined us for all our services, having rearranged their own schedule that week that they might join with us.

Our meals were taken in the refectory with the monastic community, breakfast being in silence and evening meals with talking. It said something about the general friendliness of the oblates that we soon branched out from our national groups,

allowing many new friendships to be formed and fascinating stories to be told. One learnt so much about the varied lives and experiences of fellow oblates. I was fascinated to speak with a group of oblates from the United States who run a chapter of their Oblates within a local prison and where they have had great interest and involvement of many of the inmates, many who are incarcerated for life.

The theme of the congress was Living the Wisdom of the Rule.

We had three speakers, a French Benedictine Sr Marie Casseau OSB, Abbot Donato Ogliari OSB, abbot of St Pauls outside the Walls in Rome and finally Abbot Gregory Polan OSB,-----Extract from latter:- *“First, how may Oblates around the world unite to support one another in living the Benedictine charism beyond the Congress? I would suggest that you stay close to the monasteries of which you are Oblates. Be known as someone to whom the monks or sisters can turn as true helpers, as people who stand with them as people of prayer and faith, as ambassadors of reconciliation. Inspire one another with the various involvements you may have in your monastery, your parish, among yourselves. Instead of thinking universal, think ”local,” that you can make a difference where you are. Second, “What is your “call to action” to Oblates around the world? I think it is important to distinguish between “doing” and “being “ in the life of an Oblate. And what is more important? I think “being” is most important because it involves your personal growth as*

*someone who is an extension of a monastic community – that means people see you as a person of faith dedicated to service for this monastic community . Your service flows out of your faith and your love of the community. As Oblates of communities, be people whose life resonates with reconciliation – wherever you are or whatever you are doing. I will conclude as I began, with the inspiration of St. Paul: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,....", Abbot Gregory Polan OSB, the Abbot Primate.*

Each speaker was looking at ways the oblate might live out their oblate calling in the 21st century. I encourage all oblates to read these talks or indeed watch them. The congress Masses with addresses were also recorded and can be watched.

The link is...Benedictine Oblates World Congresses Facebook Page:- <https://www.benedictine-oblates.net/5th-international-oblates-congress/>

After lunch were discussion groups to reflect on the keynote speeches and a set of workshops helping those interested to develop forms of Christian mediation.

Visits to Montecasino and Subiaco

We were to have two trips out. On Monday we visited the abbey of Montecasino, where after a tour and time to pray at

the tomb of St Benedict, the abbot of Montecassino sang Mass in the main church for our group, followed by a delicious lunch with the community in their rather palatial refectory.

The second trip was to Subiaco and the monastery formed around the cave, 'sacro speco', that St Benedict initially used in his retreat from the world. The interior of Subiaco is beautifully painted in frescos telling the life of St Benedict and of his sister St Scholastica. The oldest image of St Francis of Assisi is rather incongruously found on the walls of this Benedictine monastery! We again enjoyed lunching here before our descent down from the great hill that Subiaco sits on.

On both our trips we were joined by Abbot Gregory Polan, who lived out the rule of welcome, continually speaking with groups and individuals, a holy and unaffected person that everyone quickly warmed to. His keynote address was superb, and even more so as we had seen him live out his words with us in the week that we were his guests. A small aside, but telling I think of the man: when I returned home, I wrote him a letter of thanks and appreciation and to my surprise received a personalised, full A4 letter in return.

### Private Audience with Pope Francis

It was thanks to Abbot Gregory Polan that there had been organised an audience with the Holy Father on the Friday, the last full day of the congress. We had initially thought this would be a general audience, but on the Thursday evening we

were informed it would be a private audience with Pope Francis in the Apostolic Palace and that we would be presented individually to his holiness. You can imagine there was quite a bit of excitement at supper that night!

The Friday of the audience began with a very early breakfast as we had to be in the Vatican by 8am ready to go through all the security checks. I had brought with me to Rome a small piece from the foundation stone of the St Joseph guesthouse, onto which Philip Chatfield, the sculptor, had carved a small cross. I had hoped to get the Pope to bless it but was unsure if I would get it past the security. I managed to do so, much to the amusement of our UK group, few of whom thought I would manage it.

We were escorted by Swiss Guards into the apostolic palace and through corridors and up staircases until we came into the Sala Clementina. Here we were all given seats, but all eyes were on the large white chair before us. It was all very real. The Holy Father came in, full of smiles and blessings, though obviously in some discomfort.

The Holy Father then gave an address to the Oblate group which again can be read online. After this everyone had the opportunity to meet the Pope individually, who engaged with each person, blessed untold numbers of rosaries as well as my piece of stone from Pluscarden! I think for all of us it was a quite unforgettable experience and a wonderful end to our time together, to meet the successor of St Peter at the very

tomb of Peter encouraging oblates to live the Benedictine life in the world. The Holy Father said that by living the rule, we are made whole, and we come to possess ‘a heart expanded by the unspeakable sweetness of love’. He also reminded us of the Benedictine tradition of hospitality and that listening was one of the deepest forms of hospitality, true spiritual hospitality.

Return to daily life.

Throughout the week we heard that Oblate Benedictine charism was a powerful counter cultural challenge to contemporary society. We lived that charism powerfully throughout the week of the congress, especially in our times of liturgical prayer, but also in our discussions and social times. We were encouraged to return home, living out that charism, being oblates who listen and people who endeavour to be a healing presence to all who we meet in our daily life.

## **FROM THE OBLATEMASTER'S DESK**

“It was wonderful to be in a Benedictine house and to feel at home with the common customs shared by the great Benedictine family.”

---Perhaps this is a primary message of an Oblate Congress that as well as being members of natural families we are members of a supernatural family, cenobitic cousins so to speak. We are part also of the family that is the Church, in Christ, daughters and sons of the Father. In a similar way as we approach Advent and Christmas we remind ourselves that

we are members of the Holy Family and that not just as spectators or outsiders—we are family members by our Baptism. Our Lady and St Joseph see Christ in us and being formed in us. That is our Oblate and Christian honour, privilege and task and mission.

God crossed the infinite gap between His creation and Himself when the Holy Trinity went in search of the lost sheep of humanity by the Son becoming man and by our redemption drawing us back into the heart of the Family of the Holy Trinity. How beautiful, wonderful and exciting – starting now and for all eternity! Happy Christmas!

### **BOOKS AND MEDIA:**

FACEBOOK PAGE:- “Oblates and Friends of Pluscarden Abbey”

26 September

Welcome to the new Oblates and Friends of Pluscarden Abbey Facebook page, an initiative which aims to connect those who find a spiritual home at the Abbey. This page has been set up and will be administered by an oblate volunteer at the request of Fr Martin (Oblatemaster) and with the approval of Fr Abbot. If you would like to suggest that something be posted here, please send the details in a message to the page. Pax. Page address:-

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61551360069366>

**Pluscarden Benedictines** For inclusion on the mailing list please write Br. Cyprian Bampton.

**Pluscarden Live Streaming**



--go to our website and you will find a drop-down list leading you to livestreaming-- click onto that and choose past or present items or click on this link :- <http://pluscardenabbey.org/live> Br. Michael is in charge of the live streaming—All thanks & queries to him, please.

**Pluscarden Oblate ZOOM meetings:-**

1. **Ordinariate Zoom**-- to take part contact Bryan Miller at email:- [bfxmiller33@gmail.com](mailto:bfxmiller33@gmail.com)

2 **Northerly Zoom** I (Jane Coll) organise a monthly zoom meeting for oblates from the north. We are a small group and I wonder if you could add a note about us in the next Oblate letter to try to recruit more members? We are currently working our way through Norvene Vest's commentary on the Rule 'Preferring Christ'. If anyone is interested, please send me an e-mail [jane\\_coll@yahoo.com](mailto:jane_coll@yahoo.com) and I will forward the link.

**RESIDENTIAL BOOKINGS:-** Fr. Giles by letter (suggest SAE)

or email [guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com](mailto:guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com) for bookings or officially [guestmaster@pluscardenabbey.org](mailto:guestmaster@pluscardenabbey.org) or a form through the website [www.pluscardenabbey.org](http://www.pluscardenabbey.org)

**Next Year 2024 there will be ONE Grand Jamboree Retreat(as of yore) next Summer 2024 for the Golden Jubilee of Pluscarden becoming an ABBEY—dates, the four days following the Pilgrimage 2024--30th June:**

namely **1st-4th July 2024**--multiple speakers and meals provided in common in marquee(as of yore)

**PRAYER INTENTIONS** For Father Joseph Carron and for his mother Jacqueline and family. RIP Peter Aitken, coordinator for the St Mungo Glasgow Chapter for decades, &RIP Nick MacRae, Oblate and Mrs Pamela Nelson-Shaw's brother, RIP ClennyDimney.

Health of Oblates: Canon Luke Smith and Canon Bob Halshaw, George Brand's wife Yvonne, Justyna Tymecka, Joe Bagley, Mrs Sheila Barr, Robert Cantafio and his mother Margharita, Ursula Humphrey, Jane Coll's granddaughter Natasha Gunn. Fr. Francis Wilson, Connie Reid, Mary Frances McGregor. Please pray for the health of, Rev. Christopher Mayo. For Siobhan Gilmour's husband, Margaret Johnston's mother, for Gitte Mackay and her granddaughter; for Leonora Duson, Robert Johnstone & his father, for Joe Barrett senior, Maureen Woodhead & her Sister Doreen, Bob Barr, Brian Milne, Fiona Sellar, Martin MaCrae, Jacqui Heath-Anderson and daughter Sally, Poppy Sinclair, Ian Brodie, Fred's Twin, Pamela Nelson Shaw's brother, Pam Woodhead(nursing home),Alison Donald( nursing home), Patricia Robertson, Carolyn Campbell, Carolyn, Marshall & Malcolm Boardman, and also for Eileen Kerr, Elizabeth MacKay, Alistair Macdonald, **and for ALL the housebound and the sick.**

**Our three sponsored seminarians *They are: Seminarian Kisangala Charles.***

He completed his Post Graduate Diploma in Education in September 2023 and is currently doing Pastoral work in Mbarara Parish with the Charismatic Priests while discerning which order or Diocese to continue with his Priesthood

formation. Seminarian **Okongo John** Stephen: He is currently sitting for his S.6 Advanced Level (A Level) final examinations at St. Pius X Minor Seminary, Nagongera in Tororo.

Seminarian **Omanakol Josaphat**: He was supposed to be Ordained Deacon on the 80/July/2023 but the Archbishop was away for treatment in Italy, so all the Ordinations were put off in the Diocese.---- *all are extremely grateful for the financial support we give them and pray for us. Please pray for them and for Sr Catherine OSB, who does so much to keep everything running smoothly & our coordinator of the seminarian programme-- Penelope Coate---* contact details: penelopecoate@yahoo.com 0794 9399592.

## **OBLATE CHAPTERS**

PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW or contact me- details at the head of every letter.

**St. Monica's Chapter for far North** -- Thurso. Contact Jane Coll. "Scaraben", Westside, Dunnet, Thurso, Caithness, KY14 8YD. Phone 01847 851467 & Orkney and Shetland by zoom( open to others!)

**St. Peter's Chapter, Aberdeen:** 7.00-8.00 pm Mondays as below, Cathedral Presbytery, Huntly Street, Aberdeen contact Chairman Mr. Robert Ian Johnston, 31, Tay Road, Mastrick, ABERDEEN AB16 5LA or secretary Mr. George Brand geobra@msn.com:- prayer & discussion & centred around Compline from the Abbey---contact chairman or secretary.

**St Andrew's Chapter. Moray.** Live-streamed Oblates at None followed by tea in the Visitor Centre. Past Oblate None at <http://pluscardenabbey.org/live> Warm regards and prayer Eileen Fitzpatrick Oblate OSB Co-ordinator St Andrew's Chapter—**Winter break now until February 2024**

**Benedictine Prayer Circle**- Oblates may like to join John McKinlay's Benedictine Prayer Circle, see Links on the UKOT website—John McKinlay jgjm07@yahoo.co.uk

PREFACE II OF THE NATIVITY OF THE  
LORD

“ .....

*.....For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery,  
though invisible in His own divine nature,  
He has appeared visibly in ours;  
and begotten before all ages,  
He has begun to exist in time,  
so that, raising up all that was cast down,  
He might restore unity to all  
creation  
and call straying humanity back to  
the heavenly kingdom.....*



.....” Our Holy Father St Benedict Pray for us!  
*Prayers for Peace and Blessings at Christmas and always*

*Fr. Martin PAX*