

## WORLD CONGRESS OF BENEDICTINE OBLATES MEETING WITH ABBOT PRIMATE ON THE FUTURE FOR OBLATES 3 OCTOBER 2009

### Summary:

The Abbot Primate Notker Wolf invited discussion regarding the future for oblates.

He sought the views of the National Co-ordinators at the Second World Congress of Benedictine Oblates in Rome in October 2009.

National Coordinators were asked to discuss and answer a set of questions, listed below. The responses were submitted to the Abbot Primate and will be put together into a report.

The Abbot Primate plans to write to all the Abbots and Abbesses of the Benedictine Monasteries around the world to commence a consultation process.

My Group represented the following countries: Australia, USA, Japan, Nigeria, Canada, UK and Ireland. We were given 45 minutes to discuss pre-set questions and provide a response.

### Questions Asked by the Abbot Primate

**1 & 2 Should there be a strong centralised organisation, or a light, federalised structure to give a more concrete form to the Oblates' Movement?**

(The term "Oblates Movement" in this context is meant more generally. There is no real "Movement" as the British would understand this term to mean. I would suggest it refers more to 'the current situation of oblates today')

*Abbot Notker commented on the need for oblates to be willing to gather and interact; 'we must be virtuous and must not hide our talents'. 'We can die from too much autonomy'.*

*'If we are people of God, other people will experience God through us.... We are a noble people with daily problems, people of hope and love'.*

*He reiterated most strongly that the idea of a possible global 'Confederation for Oblates' would not be a centralised organisation.*

*The idea is to 'streamline the world of oblates in some way and to make us living bridges of spirituality and culture'*

**Group Response:** Overwhelmingly, the response was to have a light, federalised structure inspired by monasteries. No centralisation. This has to be something flexible for people living in the world.

### **3 Should there be national representatives on a rotating basis? How should we invite representatives in countries where there are none?**

*The view on rotating National Coordinators is that it would be enriching for each co-coordinator but also for each country as each coordinator has different gifts to offer.*

**Group Response:** Yes, there should be national representatives (i.e. national co-coordinators) on a rotating basis. In countries where there are none, Oblate Masters and Mistresses should be asked to be a part of the decision making process.

### **4. Designing an oblate formation programme, with special care to articulate a theology of oblation.**

*Abbot Notker felt strongly that formation and education of oblates was of primary importance and that the 'lacuna' 'the gap' must be bridged between oblates and monks/nuns. He talked about having a 'theology of oblation''*

*Formation should be done on a local, regional and national level. Programmes can be put on the internet.*

**Group Response:** It was considered a good idea to have a general formation programme for new oblates, although some felt not so much a programme but a 'process'. It was also suggested to have a deeper development programme for people who have been oblates for a very long time. and a refresher programme for lapsed oblates.

However, it was noted that many monasteries offer various programmes already and are very organized, whereas others do not. It was suggested that some analysis work ought to be conducted to identify what is done in different monasteries.

Many monasteries (Australia, USA & Canada) have set up a 'mentoring' service. This is where either a monk, nun or senior oblate (not so much in age but in years of oblation) is assigned to mentor a new incoming oblate for a period of time, both during the novitiate and for a period of time immediately after oblation.

### **5. How can oblates help monasteries and monasticism?**

*To have **light** federal structures; minorities to be creative; learn from each other.*

*We left his question until last and didn't finish discussing it.*

**Group Response:** Assisting with manual labour, giving our time, assisting financially, working for the monastery voluntarily, praying for the community, building personal friendships with the community. Something new was the suggestion of having a joint shared vision with the monastery.

## 6. How do we keep alive the memory of the two World Congresses?

*'We must study the ways in which not to waste the richness of these two World Oblate Congresses'*

**Group Response:** It was suggested that the talks from the Congress could be used by Oblate Masters/Mistresses as key talks for retreats.

Delegates and National Co-coordinators to give talks to their monasteries or go visit other monasteries in their nation to spread the word and keep the Congress theme active.

Countries to create national oblate websites and have regular features on the website about the 2009 Congress. Articles and talks from the National Co-coordinator and delegates to be placed on the site with links to other national sites, photos. etc, (We already have this in the UK and we have a 'Congress' page – [www.benedictine-oblates.net](http://www.benedictine-oblates.net)) .

*Abbot Notker did say in one of his talks about the times of today, "he who is not on the screen does not exist". He made a very strong statement about websites being the way forward and that each nation should have one for oblates.*

## 7. Should there be a meeting of National Representatives two years before the next Congress?

*'The Organising Committee would like to establish a meeting to be scheduled in two years time before the Third World Oblate Congress'. National coordinators from this Congress should be in attendance with their successors.*

**Group Response:** Overwhelming yes to this. A meeting was held in Germany two years ago.

### Additional Notes

#### Comments from National Coordinators

National Coordinators raised among themselves that they should look at "how to cope with oblates within our own monasteries that are from other Christian denominations" .

I was surprised by this, for there has never been a problem in my own monastery where we have several oblates from different Christian denominations. However, it seems that the *majority* of monasteries in several countries are still new to the idea of having non Catholic oblates among them.

One National Representative reported "not all monasteries have a 'world' view" and giving feedback from this Congress was going to be difficult for him.

Zina Neagle  
UK National Coordinator  
Oblate of Douai Abbey, England  
10 November 2009