

North Central District Community



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MISSIONARY ECUMENISM FOR OBLATES IN THE USA, APRIL, 2013

By Harry Winter OMI

“Minimal progress has been made to find support for the ministry of Fr. Harry Winter” (final sentence, Renewing the Province Mission, Report on Implementation, as of March 20, 2013).

The provincial administration may be a little too hard on itself. It was a great morale booster to be asked to lead an interest group on the topic of Christian Unity, to be included among the sixteen interest groups at our April 15-19 Convocation. The website “Oblate Ecumenism,” on the national Oblate website “useful links” (or directly, www.harrywinter.org) continues to be supported by the province as it is updated and expanded.

How many ever look at it is another question.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has frequently said that Ecumenism is the Siamese twin of Mission. It is evident to me that there is a great deal going on regarding Christian Unity by Oblates, but it is uncoordinated and frequently hidden.

We desperately need the other lung of Christianity, the Eastern lung. But few of us are aware of the strength and riches of the Eastern Churches.

Cardinal Francis George has written about the strength of Protestant Evangelicalism, concluding “Be nice to Evangelicals and even Fundamentalists. Often to our surprise and theirs, we have more in common than we once thought” (Mission/Unity, #30, Oct. 1994, p. 2).

The Anglican Ordinariate has brought many Episcopalian parishes into the Roman Catholic Church. These parishes are already being visited by Salesians as a source of vocations to their religious order. Episcopalians have shown a great missionary sense, especially in the Canadian Arctic, Uganda and India. In West Virginia, in the missionary area of Appalachia where Oblates formerly ministered, we may be succeeded by a member of the Anglican Ordinariate.

The Anglican Ordinariate has opened the door for a Lutheran Ordinariate. With the five hundredth anniversary of Luther’s 1517 posting of his ninety-five theses approaching, we will hear more about the insights Lutheranism has brought to the Catholic Church. We will discover a Church reformed, yet always in need of reformation as She brings Christ’s message to our modern world, and finds Christ already there.

Observers such as the Presbyterian James Hastings Nichols have stated that unless every Christian Church works increasingly with every other Christian Church, we do not have the strength to confront the secularism and hostility which seem to increase every day against Christianity. “Do everything together except that which faith obliges to be done separately” was stated as the Lund Principle back in 1952. Pope Paul VI in his 1964 encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* wrote “Let us stress what we have in common rather than what divides us (#109, preceded by the almost revolutionary sections on “Dialogue”).

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Most Oblates would probably agree that we first try to work as Oblates. Looking first at the resources of other Christian Churches seems to occur only when our efforts as Oblates have failed. What a waste of time, energy and grace!

How can our efforts at Missionary Ecumenism in the USA be better coordinated? Look at what we have expended for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Should not there be a footprint in Washington, DC regarding Missionary Ecumenism, and its brother/sister, Dialogue (MUD)?

The Lilly Foundation Grant for Oblate School of Theology to investigate the need for a Mission Center at OST may be just the opportunity to see what we should be doing as a province for Missionary Ecumenism. May we encourage John Staak OMI to see both the disadvantages and advantages of such a Center as he compiles his report. The fact that Oblate College, Washington, DC was the home of the Oblate Center for Mission Studies from 1995-2000 should encourage us.

Remember, San Antonio, TX is on crossing line of Hispanic Catholicism and Anglo Catholicism. We have strengths in Proclamation on both sides of this border. We have very scattered accomplishments in Missionary Ecumenism on both sides of this border. What an opportunity we now have to organize those efforts, with foci in San Antonio, TX and Washington, DC.

The Paulists, the Society of the Divine Word Fathers and other religious orders have succeeded in establishing a strong record in ecumenical work. It is not impossible to have both a strong JPIC and a strong MUD effort. Let us work for this as Oblates in the USA.

Yes, our numbers diminish. All the more reason to work with other Christians, to maximize our efforts. We are on fire still! May this Pentecost bring us more deeply the fire of the Holy Spirit. May Mary, the Mother of All Christians guide our efforts.

Sources: CCRR, # 6: "Our efforts will be characterized by a genuine desire for unity with all who consider themselves followers of Jesus, so that, according to his prayer, all may believe that the Father has sent him (cf. Jn 17:21).

Missionary Outlook, 1972 Chapter, #16: "We will habitually examine what other Christians are doing in our area before initiating new projects or programs; we will do everything with them which faith does not oblige us to do separately. To accomplish this more effectively we will make ourselves aware of the characteristics of these Churches, their particular problems and ways of thinking. In this way we will attempt to heal old divisions and present a unified witness to the non-Christian world."