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Oblate Missionaries Renew Vows During Mass Celebrated by Bishop Deeley on August 29 in Biddeford

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BIDDEFORD---“Outwardly, our life is like an ordinary person, so if anybody sees us, we do the same things. We live in the same kind of situations, but the intentionality is very different. We have a spirituality that we live,” said Anita Plourde from Lewiston.

Members of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, including Plourde, renewed their vows during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert P. Deeley at the Marie Joseph Spiritual Center in Biddeford on Monday, August 29 (**seven pictures below**).

The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate is a secular institute, a form of consecrated life. Like religious communities, secular institutes each have their own charism, but members are, in most cases, single laypeople who dedicate their lives to Christ while still living and working in the world.

“It is an active way of living out a commitment to God, who is love most of all,” said Bishop Deeley during the Mass. “That phrase is very important because it is what makes consecrated life in an institute different from just the commitment that a Christian makes to do good. That difference is that your relationship with God grounds and founds everything else.”

Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate live out their spirituality in what they call a formula of 5-5-5: five times of prayer each day, five attitudes of life, and five conscious acts of charity each day. The five times of prayer include Mass, meditation, the liturgy of the hours, the rosary, and a review of the day. The five attitudes of life are to be attentive to the presence of God in the present moment, to abstain from destructive criticism, to abstain from useless complaint, to be of service, and to be a peacemaker.

“With the presence of God, and with the absence of destructive criticism and the absence of complaining, and then, we are also people of service and people of peace, so it makes us very positive persons,” said Plourde, who has been a member for 31 years. “People know that with us they are safe. We’re not going to turn around and, behind their backs, gossip or do something like that.”

In addition to renewing their vows, which include the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, four Oblates also celebrated jubilees:

Claudette Cyr, an Oblate for 60 years; Lucile Authier, 55 years; Pauline Labbe, 35 years; and Louise Royer, 30 years.

“To be an Oblate is to be in a state of getting nearer and nearer to my beloved, and my beloved is Jesus. It’s the Lord,” said Authier, who is from Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. “My life is for him. I love to tell him, ‘Fill me with your love so that it will come out of me, even if I don’t feel it.’ Because I’m only the lamp. He is the light inside.”

Monika Okrugic, a member for 49 years, said she joined after emigrating from Croatia to Canada but not finding what she was seeking. Okrugic said she was attracted to the Oblates because they were laypeople, because of the attitudes of life that called for no complaints or criticism, and because of the acts of charity.

“I thought I was coming to Canada to be rich, but then, money did not make me happy. And I said, ‘I want to go to work for the poor,’” said Okrugic, who also served for 20 years in a parish office in Zambia helping mothers and young children.

Although they don’t live in community, the Oblates said they often communicate with one another and they treasure opportunities to get together with other members of the institute. The Mass with the bishop marked the beginning of a weeklong retreat at Marie Joseph, which brought together members from both Maine and Canada.

“It gives us energy and that willingness to keep going on and that bond that we have together,” said Pauline Mathieu, who is from Harpswell. “It just inspires us to see what each one is living through, and what is happening, and all the sharing we do. So, it’s very special.”

The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate is one of more than 200 secular institutes around the world, including 30 in the United States. Secular institutes started to emerge in the late 19th century, but it wasn’t until 1947 that Pope Pius XII officially welcomed them in his apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate were founded five years later by Father Louis-Marie Parent, O.M.I., in Grand Falls, New Brunswick. It was recognized as a secular institute by the Catholic Church in 1962.

Members of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate are single laywomen. Other secular institutes welcome laymen, and some of them also welcome priests, who wish to embrace a particular charism, along with their priestly promises.