



September 6, 2023

Subject: Decision on Retreat Ministry Discernment

Decision

With the Forward Together Process of 2020, Provincial leadership entered a synodal discernment process with the membership of OMI Lacombe Canada. A clear outcome from the process was the need for ongoing discernment of province ministries. In 2023, the Provincial Council focused on our retreat house ministry. With this letter, we offer the conclusions we have come to, followed by the rationale and context of our decision.

After much prayer, deliberation, and reflection, Provincial in Council – with the full support of Council – has decided that retreat ministry will continue to be part of the future ministry of OMI Lacombe Canada, but we will direct our energy and resources towards one centre only. For the reasons given below, Council has chosen Star of the North as OMI Lacombe Canada’s centre for retreat ministry. Queen’s House Retreat and Renewal Centre in Saskatoon, SK and Galilee Mission Centre of Arnprior, ON will close. We believe this decision offers the best opportunity to develop a vital Oblate retreat ministry aligned with our current ministries and capacities.

Rationale

Council has made this decision for the following reasons:

- Located in St. Albert, AB, adjacent to Edmonton, with an estimated population of 1.45 million in the metropolitan area, Star of the North is situated to attract good numbers for programming and hosting.
- It is near an active community of Oblates and Oblate Associates and has growing relationships with the four parishes served by the Oblates in the Edmonton Archdiocese.
- The Archdiocese of Edmonton is a centre of Indigenous ministries for OMI Lacombe Canada, and home to one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada; this work will remain a major focus for the Province going forward.
- The Star has existing programs (such as Aurora Living among others) which incorporate Indigenous spirituality and history; these will be supported and strengthened. Given the relationships with Indigenous Peoples and the proximity to various Indigenous communities in Edmonton and the surrounding area, there is potential for expanding healing and reconciliation efforts.
- The Star has demonstrated the ability to do effective facility maintenance and renovations through fund-raising efforts and by accessing local and provincial grants.
- Star of the North has a strong, committed board, well-developed community connections, and vibrant volunteer relationships.

In making this decision, we recognise that individual elements of the rationale for our decision may apply equally to Queen's House and Galilee Centre.

Provincial Council acknowledges the pain the decision to close Galilee Centre and Queen's House will bring to many people; we feel it ourselves. We are mindful of the many people who have contributed to the ministry of both centres over the past fifty or more years. Their legacies are deeply cherished, and Council is committed to walking alongside the various communities and individuals who form the larger Queen's House and Galilee Centre families as the transition toward closure proceeds. Be assured that OMI Lacombe Canada will treat staff justly in this process, working within the provincial legislative guidelines and emphasizing a fair and equitable outcome at the conclusion of their employment. Further, our intention is to work with both leadership groups to develop rituals and processes that honour and celebrate their contributions.

Looking to the future, Provincial Council will work with the Star of the North to shape a vision for retreat ministry in our province that aligns with the evolving reality of our community and responds to the needs of the people we serve.

Context

Our retreat centres are experiencing significant challenges:

- Diminished regular Oblate presence. This trend will continue as we age.
- Declining financial independence, resulting in a growing dependence on OMI Lacombe Canada, which itself is experiencing a steady reduction in income.
- Increasing operating and maintenance costs for aging facilities.
- Mounting capital/infrastructure costs. The facilities are old and have difficulty meeting clientele's needs for mobility access and the expectation of ensuite.
- Increasing staffing costs
- A change in church culture where the Centers' primary role is hosting rather than in-house programming.

At the request of the three retreat centre directors, and in keeping with our Forward Together plan, the Provincial Council initiated a discernment process that included visiting and consulting with key stakeholders and studying the recently produced reports from each centre, as well as those produced for the 2017 process.

Council considered the reality of OMI Lacombe Canada, especially as articulated in the Forward Together Strategic Plan, the ministerial needs of the Province with our declining membership, aged personnel, and greatly reduced financial resources. We have major commitments for the future, including a growing Kenya mission and the call of the 37th Chapter for an equitable distribution of Oblate finances and personnel to ensure the provision of a balanced formation throughout the congregation. We also anticipate significant ongoing expenditures related to our historical involvement in residential schools, including reconciliation efforts, settlements, and legal fees.

Prudent stewardship demands that difficult decisions be made. We have to let go of some things in order to say yes to others.

The time will come to celebrate the unique contributions of Galilee Centre and Queen's House within our province's history and to thank all who were and continue to be instruments of God's grace in these sacred spaces. For now, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to the directors, staff and board members for their ongoing dedication and generosity.

In the coming weeks, we will give you more information regarding timelines and how we see the process unfolding. In the meantime, we've arranged a Zoom gathering to have a conversation about this news.

Please join us on Wednesday, September 13th at 8 pm (ET), to participate please register by using this link:

[Zoom Registration Link - Province Conversation on Retreat Ministry - September 13, 2023](#)

I extend my gratitude to each of you for your understanding, your prayers, and your dedication to the Oblate mission.

Yours in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,



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