



Breath of the Spirit

The winds of change are blowing through the Oblate world.

Sometimes it's a gentle breeze, other times it is with the force of a hurricane.

As the Oblates and associates prepare to celebrate the 200th anniversary of their founding by St. Eugene de Mazenod in Aix, France in 1816, change has taken a foothold in the aging Canadian community.

This is reflected in the changes in elder care, which has become a priority across the country. It was never more obvious than in Saskatoon when Mazenod residence, the home for aging Oblates, met the wrecking ball. In two days the building was gone, with only memories left to linger. In St. Albert, AB, Foyer Lacombe seniors' residence has been downsized.

Globally, change is also sweeping through Kenya. The mission founded by the Canadian Oblates has taken on a significantly international scope. Although OMI Lacombe remains the main funding source for the mission, there will no longer be a Canadian-born Oblate in the mission by the end of this year. Australian Oblate Mario Azrak has been named the Mission Superior, replacing Canadian Jim Fiori.

The breath of the Spirit, inspiring the winds of change, is evident in Kenya where seven young men have made first vows and the Canadian-inspired priesthood continues to grow. Some of these men will likely eventually be involved in the new parish at Kisaju, the second such undertaking by the Canadian Oblates.

As we all know, the only constant in our lives is change. The Oblates can certainly attest to that.

John and Emily Cherneski Communications Coordinators



A powerful journey by a missionary parish

BY JIM FIORI, OMI

KIONYO, Kenya – Since the foundation of the Kenya Mission back in 1997 MAMI has been involved in helping the Oblates and Kionyo Parish to develop, including assistance for the construction of schools and prayer houses. We helped the women establish a bakery and there was the project that brought clean water from the slopes of Mount Kenya to the homes of the area.

All of these projects were done with the intention of helping the people to help themselves. Funds were given where local funds were raised. At the end of the day the projects were theirs, and the people have always expressed a deep sense of gratitude for the help given.

It was the intention of the Oblates to help you, the members of MAMI, to be missionaries. You have been active players in our efforts to be missionaries. In expressing their gratitude the people of Kionyo have often expressed the desire to be missionaries themselves. In the story I am going to share, this

was manifested in a most wonderful and emotional way. I only wish you could have been here to witness it yourselves.

The Oblates of the Kenya Mission accepted responsibility to establish a new parish in Kisaju in the diocese of Ngong. This new parish had been a part of St. Monica Parish in Kitengela. It is located about 40 minutes south of Nairobi. It is composed of seven outstations. There is little by way of infrastructure. There is but one prayer house (church) in the whole area. The rest use what can best be described as shacks, or they make use of classrooms.

The Parish was only officially erected on Nov. 23 and the Oblates have made a concerted effort to build community. Each home has been visited.

The people of the Kionyo Parish were certainly aware that our focus going forward would be on the new parish and this would certainly affect the availability of funds for them. They pledged to be missionaries because they received so much from MAMI, and they wanted to be part of the giving to help the new parish. So, an excursion was planned to what would become the new parish.

We gathered at Oltoruto where preparations had been made to host the group travelling from Kionyo for breakfast. There was certainly an aura of excitement. The Maasai women were dressed in their colourful attire. The bus arrived and people began to disembark. As they did so the Maasai people



began to dance and sing as they moved to meet the visitors. In turn the people from Kionyo, who are of the Marian tribe, began to sing and dance as they moved towards their hosts.

One has to bear in mind that there is a lot of tension in Kenya when it comes to tribalism. Here were two very different tribes coming together in peace. I found this to be an overwhelming expression of Christian love. They were reaching out to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Tears were my own expression to this marvellous gesture.

This was not something that had been orchestrated; it just spontaneously happened. Breakfast was served and introductions were made. We were no longer strangers and certainly not enemies.

We all journeyed to Kisaju where the tents had been set up because there is no room in the kindergarten classroom, and we celebrated Eucharist. There was plenty of singing and dancing in accord to the many cultures that were present. At the end of the Eucharist the people from Kionyo reiterated their desire to be missionaries and they unloaded a bus full of food, which is the traditional gift, but they also brought a financial contribution.

Trees were planted to memorialize the event and both groups said farewell with a heart-filled thanks to Mario Azrak, OMI.

When the Parish was officially erected in November, the group from Kionyo once again came to celebrate with their

sister parish as friends, not tribes.

(Jim Fiori, OMI, is the superior of the Kenya mission)

Gerry Conlan, OMI, and Gideon Rimberia, OMI, accept gifts from Kionyo Parish



Changes in Kenya

BY KEN FORSTER, OMI

KIONYO, Kenya – Following the discernment that was carried out in Kenya in January, Mario Azrak, OMI, was appointed to his first term as Superior of the Mission of Kenya, replacing Jim Fiori, OMI.

With 13 years of ministry in Kenya, Mario is the longest serving Oblate in the Kenyan mission. His term begins Apr. 5 (Easter Sunday), when he replaces Fr. Fiori.

We thanked Mario, an Australian Oblate, for his willingness to accept this ministry of service to the Oblate community in Kenya and let him know that he has the support and prayers of OMI Lacombe. All Oblates in Kenya were invited to work in close collaboration with him at this particular time of growth in the mission.

We encouraged Fr. Fiori to carry with him many good memories from his ministry in Kenya as he completes his term and returns to Canada.

There are many challenges and many opportunities for us in the church of Kenya.

I met with Bishop Salesius Mugambi and signed a renewed contract for the Méru Diocese, where we have served for 18 years. General contracts are signed to assure that the congregation is in harmony with the pastoral plan of the local church and that the congregation receives the support of the diocese and some financial compensation for its ministry.

As we try to move toward a greater mission self-reliance, it is necessary that the local church provides what it can, even if only a monthly stipend of a couple of hundred dollars.

We also signed, for the first time, a contract with Bishop John Oballa Owaa, the bishop of Ngong Diocese. Our parish in Kisaju, St. Paul Catholic Parish, was erected as the newest parish in the diocese on Nov. 23, 2014, with Gideon Rimberia,

OMI, installed as the first Kenyan-born Oblate to be named pastor.

I had the opportunity to visit the home of my friend Douglas Ikunda and met his wife Mary and their child John Paul. Douglas accompanied me to a neighbour, where I sadly witnessed the cruel cross that was laid on that family. Miriko, now a young mother herself, is caring for her mother Catherine, with help from her father Moses.

Nine months ago Catherine, who is a diabetic, went into insulin shock one morning and fell unconsciously into an open wood fire while cooking breakfast. Her body was seriously burned as she must have remained on the fire for quite some time and she is still in need of operations to cope with the injuries.

With no medical insurance, the help needed is not in reach. Miriko spoke of how this tragedy has affected her life plans. I could not but realistically remind Miriko that sometimes it is not hard to discover God's will. When there are not two paths to take, one must "set ones face like flint toward Jerusalem, to the cross."





From Kionyo, we went to Nairobi for a three-day meeting with all 12 Oblate missionaries serving in Kenya. I also met two new members, Fr. Constant from Congo and Fr. Sam from South Korea. We await the arrival of another young Oblate from Sri Lanka. Topics addressed in the meeting included issues around the Triennium process of renewal, charism of Eugene, community living, policies and procedures, MAMI and projects, formation of candidates, finances, and self-reliance of the mission. These topics stirred a lot of conversation.

I joined the three Oblates assigned to our new parish of Kisaju for the weekend, and arrived at their rented house to discover that they have not been receiving water from the town for the past two weeks. They were still living in this rented house in the former parish 21 kilometres away from the new parish. We have decided that this cannot continue, so plans are in the works to purchase some land and build a house as the parish cannot afford a rectory. They are still worshipping, a year later, in a classroom with a shelter attached for the overflow of parishioners.

The Kenya Mission has many challenges, especially in the area of providing resources for our candidates in formation. We are blessed to have good young men wanting to embrace the charism of Eugene. We have four in theology, 16 in philosophy and seven joined us in March as postulants. Alfred Groleau, OMI, will stay in Kenya as part of the formation team for the group of new postulants before returning to Canada later in the year.

Thank you Lord for the good work done in Kenya. Thank you Lord for the good Oblates who are forming community there. Thank you Lord for the many friends who support our mission financially and with their prayers!

Ken Forster, OMI Lacombe provincial, travelled to Kenya in January and spent two weeks in meetings and touring the missions initiated by the Canadian Oblates in 1995.

Tragedy on Ash Wednesday

BY ALFRED GROLEAU, OMI

Charred timbers and rusted tin sheets scattered over ashes that cover foundations levelled by flames, that devoured homes.

MERU, Kenya – When I returned from distributing ashes that evening to students at the Meru University, I had to take a detour to enter our property because of fire trucks that were still there and a crowd that was gathered.

How many people lived there? There appear to have been about a dozen houses. Families are left with nothing, waiting for the mercy of kind neighbours. Thieves found ways to mingle that night among well wishers coming to support and those who were merely curious.

This has happened before. Only a few months ago our immediate neighbours lost about four houses and we watched the flames for hours, cautious to protect our own property while fire trucks lingered but finally extinguished the flames that had licked the far too vulnerable walls of these castles.

These were homes of renters. They must move on with very little of the little they had.

Children can be both the cause and the victims. Houses cook with gas. Children are careless. And there are no extinguishers.

I did not see so many children today. Winston was there. He is one whose glee delights me. He knows that I am soft to his plea for fruit each time I pass. Today, still he asked: "Maembe!" That means, mangos! But he stayed a moment, just holding my hand.

Care of elder Oblates

BY JIM BLEACKLEY, OMI

OTTAWA – Soon after the new core team for OMI Lacombe Canada was installed, we began to look at alternatives to the way we provide health care for the elder members of the Province.

Clearly, one of the main drivers of this was the steadily growing financial cost associated with private health-care provision. And so conversations were initiated regarding the future of Foyer Lacombe in St. Albert, AB, and Mazenod Residence in Saskatoon, with the goal of finding the best possible cost effective alternatives for the Oblates whose personal and communal lives would be affected by any future decisions.

It was decided that OMI Lacombe could no longer provide private health care and would begin looking at other options. As difficult as this decision was and the tremendous change it would bring about for the community, it was met with understanding, acceptance and an Oblate spirit to continue to witness the values that define our charism.

It didn't take long for years of history to be knocked down as Mazenod
Residence met the wrecking ball



It was officially announced in September 2014 that New Foyer that provided health care to members would close on Dec. 31, and the facility would be separated from First Foyer. During the transition staffing at New Foyer was reduced, administration was shifted and members needing health care were assessed and moved to St. Thomas Health Care Centre in Edmonton, which is near St. Jean College.

Thankfully, this facility was able to accommodate the six Oblates in need of long-term care, giving them the opportunity for Oblate community. I would like to thank the Brother Anthony District, especially those in St. Albert and Edmonton who are supporting and caring for these men in their new home. In addition, we are grateful to the Oblates remaining at First Foyer for the way they are making their own transition, and to all who continue to journey with the Oblates at both places.

The other big news involves the community at Mazenod Residence in Saskatoon. The previous administration, in consultation with the Saskatchewan District, decided to invest in a new seniors' residence that was under construction called Trinity Manor, by purchasing seven assisted-living units and three independent units. When Trinity Manor opened its doors in October 2014 the community at Mazenod, with help from family and friends, began the move into this wonderful facility. At the moment there are 13 Oblates in this community who are finding new ways to witness and serve as Oblates in this new situation. The move has meant saying "good bye" to Mazenod Residence, a home for many Oblates and diocesan priests, and a central place of Oblate hospitality in St. Mary's Province, and more recently the Saskatchewan District.

As we continue to renew our life and mission in OMI Lacombe, we will seek new and creative ways to honour the legacy of these places and the Oblate communities that have called them home.

(Jim Bleackley, OMI, is a member of the core team of OMI Lacombe.)



Saying goodbye to a building

BY GAETANE PAUL

The demolition of Mazenod Residence began in the afternoon of Monday, March 2nd and by 10:00am on Tuesday, March 3rd it was down! On Monday, after work, I went over to take some pictures and while sitting in the adjoining parking lot I was struck with the reality... it really was coming down! Why was I feeling so strange? There had been months of preparation for this event so I should be relieved that the day was finally here. At first I couldn't even identify what I was feeling because I was so caught off guard. It's a building I kept telling myself; you can't feel sad about a building! As I was leaving the parking lot I saw Br. Walter De Mong with Fr. Syl Lewans and Fr. John Zunti drive by and I realized that it wasn't going to be the building! Mazenod Residence was known

as a place of hospitality and that will be missed. On Tuesday morning as I sat in the Prairie Lounge watching the last of the building come down I thought of all the wonderful people I had worked for and worked with in that building. The building might be gone but the memories will go on for a long time. As I write this I'm reminded of the quote "In order to rise from its own ashes a phoenix first must burn"; although the building is gone the energy that was inside the building is alive and well in a new building. Trinity Manor doesn't look or feel the same as Mazenod but there's new life there and new memories are being made with the charism of St. Eugene being witnessed by different people. Every Thursday afternoon a few employees (past and present) meet for coffee at Trinity Manor. We pull some tables together, bring a few treats and enjoy each other's company and last week we were entertained by Fr. Richard Doll's band that was performing in the main dining room. The more I go over to Trinity, the more I get used to doing things differently, the more I let go of what was and embrace what is, moving forward becomes easier. The building is gone but the Oblate legacy lives on!

> (Gaetane, the Saskatchewan district community secretary, has worked with the Oblates for several years.)

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Preparing for a family anniversary

BY GLENN ZIMMER, OMI

Winds of change are blowing through and within the Oblates of Mary Immaculate world-wide as we anticipate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Oblates next year. This breath of the Spirit, blowing wherever it will, is marked by a deepened desire for conversion rooted in healing.

It is usual to think of healing as that which can happen in a variety of ways to an individual, something very personal. And so often that is what it is – a needed healing of a person's body, or memories, or inner pain received perhaps many years ago, a wrong committed to or by another, a hurt that is deep within one's very soul, an anger, even hatred, a loss that might have been a hole in the soul for years.

All of one's being can call out for restoration to former well-being. Recently a friend of mine needed to have her heart 'shocked,' its abnormal rhythm reset. The cardiology staff



Superior General Louis Lougen, OMI

called it reconverting her heart. Good expression. And that also happens in other ways as our spiritual hearts are reconverted so that healing can happen again.

And from

time to time, this conversion is for a family, a community, even a large organization.

Since he has become pope, Francis has often spoken of conversion that leads to healing for the Church itself, including different parts of it. The conversion and healing of leadership, for example, were the focus of his remarks to the cardinals and other Curia leadership just before Christmas, as if to say: "Merry Christmas. Now, if we want to make it a Holy Christmas, you and I are going to have to make some big changes." Or in the actual words of Francis: "The Curia is called upon to improve itself ... to grow in communion, holiness and wisdom to realize its mission fully. However, it, like every body, like every human body, is also exposed to sicknesses, to malfunctioning and to infirmity ... They are sicknesses and temptations that weaken our service to the Lord."

After pointedly elaborating some 15 examples, the Pope concluded: "Healing is the fruit of the awareness of the sickness, and the personal and communal decision to be cured, enduring the cure patiently and with perseverance" (Address of Pope Francis to the Cardinals and Superiors of the Roman Curia, Dec. 23, 2014).

In much the same spirit, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and associates have begun preparing for the 200th anniversary of the first beginnings of the congregation. First named the Missionaries of Provence in October, 1815, Fr. de Mazenod and two others initially came to live together in the meager quarters of an abandoned Carmelite monastery on Jan. 25, 1816.

Next year we will celebrate that event worldwide, followed by the general chapter, a gathering held every six years that brings Oblates and associates from around the world together for several weeks.

The Oblates are in the midst of three years of preparation for this anniversary with heart-to-heart faith sharing in hundreds of smaller communities, often involving both vowed and associated Oblates. Gatherings take place throughout the three years in a common process of selected Oblate writings, scripture, prayer and respectful listening to one another. These conversations are solely for conversion – both individual and

Oblates John Malazdrewich, Louis Lougen, and Terrance McNamara at Convocation 2011



communal. And conversion is for the sake of healing where most needed.

Like any other family, there are hurts, memories and sins against one another that call each to change and to healing – above all, reconversion to Christ at the very heart of our existence.

During these three years, there is both challenge and opportunity for a new heart, a new spirit and a new missionary audacity in leaving nothing undared in order to be sent to the poor and the most abandoned. Nothing less than a shocked or reconverted heart from time to time will do if we are to express a tender love, if we are to be impelled by the shared conviction that the poor, at times those sometimes forgotten by the Church's ministers, have immense dignity as daughters and sons of God.

Increasingly we long to live as men and women who have little or nothing to lose, so that nothing is held back from those most in need.

At the beginning of our three-year preparation for this milestone, our Superior General, Louis Lougen, OMI, stated: "Our beginnings were humble and passionate. Celebrating the 200th jubilee of our roots cannot be about nostalgic sentimentalism, triumphalistic celebrations and dinner parties.

"It is our hope that this period of preparation will revitalize us to be missionaries close to the poor and available without reserve for difficult missions.

"I ask you not to approach our bicentennial with just a little bit of hope, wondering if God will revitalize us or thinking maybe God will renew us ... The spirit of immense hope fills our beings as we recall Paul's exultation that God's power working within us can do immeasurably more than we can even ask or imagine (Eph 3:17-21). Let us welcome this time of blessing."

Let us together walk this pilgrimage of grace to our bicentennial anniversary.

The Founder's chapel

BY DICK DE JONG

AIX-EN-PROVENCE, FRANCE – St. Eugene de Mazenod would not recognize the Aix-en-Provence of his youth and early ministry in the vibrant and colourful city that Aix is today. But there, in the city's centre at the east end of *le Cours Mirabeau*, still stands *la chapelle des Oblats*. It is a simple church compared to the many ornate gothic churches with towering steeples commonly seen in Aix and throughout France.

The Oblate founder purchased the former Carmelite choir chapel and adjoining convent in 1816 for his small band of priests, then known as *les Missionaires de Provence*. The structure, originally built in 1625, had become quite run-down after the Revolution. But it was perfect for the new society's purposes.

Though situated in the heart of Aix's busy tourism sector, the chapel is an oasis of tranquility. It is surrounded by outdoor cafes, high-end shops, and the comings-and-goings of tourists,





St. Eugene preached in this church in Aix

students and local traffic. Its bright interior draws visitors to an uncluttered sanctuary and simple altar. The chapel holds statues of Mary Immaculate, Charles Borromeo and St. John of the Cross, as well as one of St. Eugene. In a wing to the left of the sanctuary stands a tall replica of the missionary cross that all Oblates receive at their final pro-

fession. The chapel's pews consist of rows of attached plain wooden chairs.

St. Eugene was born in Aix-en-Provence in 1782. A poster at the rear of the chapel states that he was born just a few doors away at what is now 53 Cours Mirabeau (the chapel is at 60 Cours Mirabeau). What a surprise that it would later become the "mission church" for his young society. Little could *l'Abbé de Mazenod* – filled with missionary zeal – have imagined that members of the Oblate congregation that he founded someday would spread the Gospel to the poor in countries around the world.

(Dick de Jong, and his wife Barbara, had the opportunity to visit Aix-en-Provence on a trip to France. Dick grew up in an Oblate parish in Lethbridge, AB, and spent a few years with the Oblates at the former Holy Rosary Scholasticate in Ottawa in the early 1970s.)



Jim Dukowski, OMI, with Mary-Anne, Nancy and Pat

A trip to Peru

Mary-Anne Neal, Nancy Stuart and Pat Mochrie recently visited the Oblates in Peru. Following are some of their observations. Fearless. Heroic. Joyous. Skilled. Kind. Industrious.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, working with the poorest of the poor in Peru, embody these characteristics and more.

During our two weeks with Fr. Jim Dukowski, Fr. Victor Santoyo and other Oblates, we explored the mountains, coast and high jungle of South America. In all of these places, the OMI priests and brothers work tirelessly to meet the needs of the people for the basic necessities that we so often take for granted here in Canada.

Not only do these missionaries provide food, shelter,

education and access to medical facilities, even better, they build capacity in the community to manage the projects themselves. For example, rather than simply doling out food to the needy, the priests in Comas set up a soup kitchen that also serves as a training ground for young people to learn food preparation skills.

Upon arriving at the Lima suburb of Comas, which served as our home base, and after only a couple of hours of sleep, we attended mass at Our Lady of Peace, where no fewer than 90 young people were baptized in an hour. No mean feat!

On our trip to the coast, we were uplifted and inspired to see adobe houses being built under the watchful eye of Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI. Many Peruvian families live in shacks made from woven palm fronds, which provide little protection from wind and rain. Brother Blaise has taught the men to make adobe and concrete bricks that are then used to build solid homes. They also operate a gravel pit that supplies the raw materials for the bricks.

Everywhere we went we were thanked, merely because we were in the presence of the courageous and hard-working Oblate missionaries. We were privileged to see their work first-hand, and we left hoping that some adventurous spirits will carry on the Oblate legacy.



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JPIC paves a new path

BY LEONARD REGO, OMI

OTTAWA – As we enter the year of Consecrated Life, we are all called to give witness to this marvelous gift that we all share - our vocations. Pope Francis tells us that we must accompany the poor and be in solidarity with them. Early in his papacy, when addressing the crowds in Buenos Aires, he said "I want to ask a favor. I want to ask you to walk together, and take care of one another..."

Again in his address to the Archbishop of Canterbury, he said "Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor."

Preach the Good News is not just a spoken word, it is also a lived word.

Our Oblate Convocation in Cornwall this April invites each of us to be a "Giving Heart." Civil society is busy struggling to find ways to give new hope for justice. As we move into a federal election year, we must urge our politicians to heed Pope Francis's words as they set out their election platforms.

"A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being." (Pope Francis, Address to the Food and Agricultural Organization, 6/20/13)

This is going to be a busy year for the JPIC (Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation) OMI Lacombe office as we advance our work. How can we go about helping restore compassion to a society rife with individualism and with an unwillingness to assume the challenges that make us all agents for positive change? The constant challenge for reconciliation

in our society will demand all of our creativity and energy. The JPIC office will also be involved in the final Truth and Reconciliation event in Ottawa from May 30 – June 3.

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) will meet in Toronto the first week of June focused on JPIC issues, 'Weaving a Single Cloth for Justice.' I will be joined by OMI Lacombe Provincial Ken Forster as participants in this event because we feel that CRC should have a stronger voice for justice.

In accord with the suggestions offered by participants in the November mining symposium at St. Paul University in Ottawa, we will follow up with further opportunities for education and dialogue. The theme of our next symposium will be Mining Ethics and Politics. The first will be held in Ottawa in May and it is hoped a similar one will be held in Saskatoon in September. We are also planning to have events in Edmonton

and Vancouver to provide further opportunities for education and dialogue over such issues as human trafficking, abuse, the lack of respect for the lives of

Barbara Dumont, Algonquin Elder, and Michelle Miller (left) of St. Joseph Parish in Ottawa led a beautiful opening prayer for the symposium in Ottawa in November native women and widespread fetal alcohol syndrome disease.

At JPIC OMI Lacombe, we are pleased to be working on a draft agreement with Chantal Beauvais, rector at St. Paul University, to develop further education programs allowing opportunities for dialogue. We hope to explore issues such as bioethics, palliative care and end-of-life concerns.

We would also like to initiate a local initiative at Canadian Martyrs and St. Joseph parishes in Ottawa. With the cynicism and resulting indifference particularly of young voters, we would like to sponsor an evening debate on the issue of mandatory voting. Another initiative at the parish level might be a Muslim-Christian dialogue.

We are excited to be developing our JPIC OMI Lacombe website and hope to soon have it up and running.

We pray that we may all engage ourselves in these important issues so that a better world becomes possible.

(Leonard Rego, OMI, is the Director of the JPIC office of OMI Lacombe Canada)

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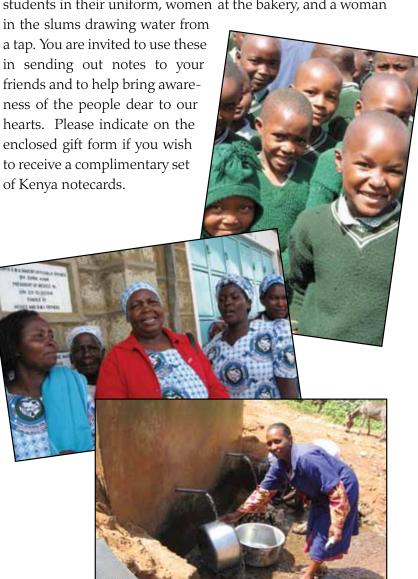
encouraged you?

What are some of your best memories of Oblates and their missionary work?

Send your stories (and photos) to: lacombemami@sasktel.net

Kenya notecards

As a thank you for your ongoing support, we would like to share with you notecards featuring everyday life in Kenya... students in their uniform, women at the bakery, and a woman



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