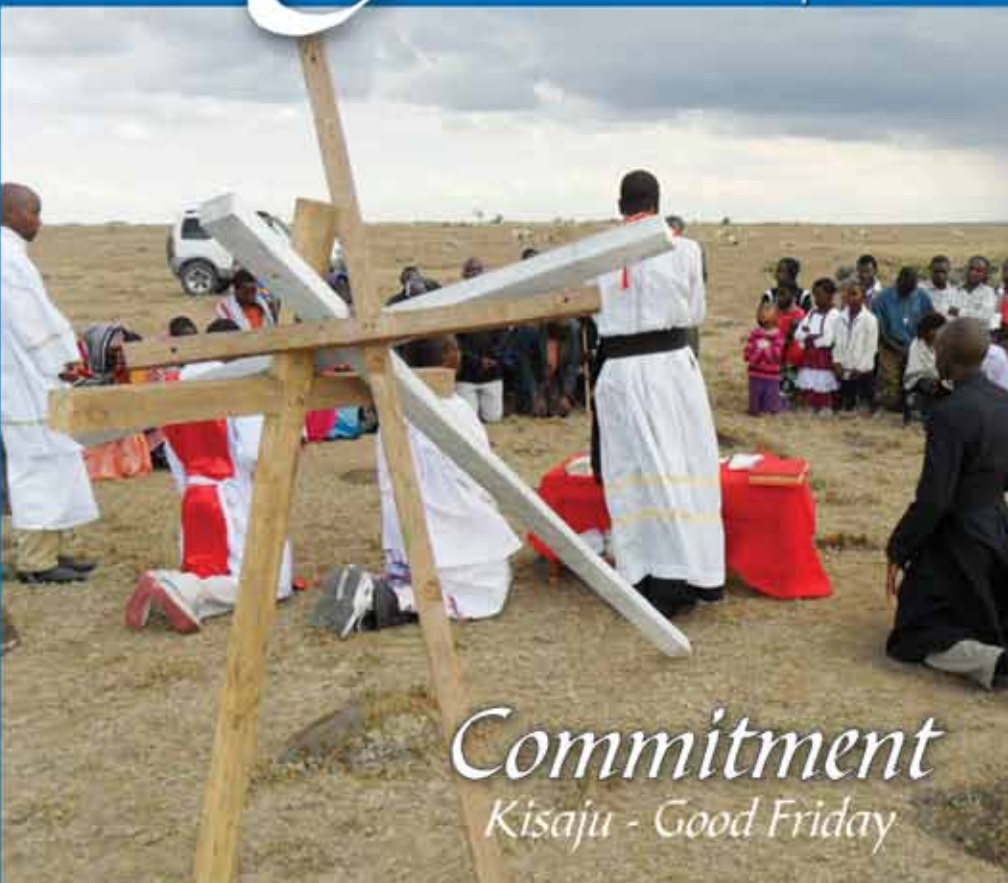


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit

April 2016



Commitment
Kisaju - Good Friday

A mission in need

BY DIANE LEPAGE AND GLENN ZIMMER, OMI, MAMI COORDINATION TEAM

For the past few years, the Province of OMI Lacombe Canada has entrusted MAMI to fund the operating costs of the Kenya Mission that includes the care of 12 Oblates living in Kionyo, Méru, Kisaju and Karen-Nairobi, as well as the formation costs associated with 20 young men in various stages of educational studies. The budget has typically been between \$300,000 and \$350,000 per year and does not include funds being sent for various projects with the schools, parishes, orphans, etc.



In 2015 MAMI sent the following monies to Kenya:

Care of the Mission and Formation	\$ 272,000
Kisaju ~ Oblate Land Purchase	\$ 175,000
<i>(Funds for the land purchase were provided by the Province of OMI Lacombe)</i>	
Kisaju ~ Oblate Residence	\$ 123,000
Kisaju ~ Water Supply	\$ 61,000
Kisaju ~ Security Wall	\$ 25,000
Kionyo Parish ~ Parking Project	\$ 3,250
Assistance for Catechists	\$ 7,000
Kisaju Parish ~ Leadership Training	\$ 2,600
Isiolo ~ JMJ Rehabilitation Centre	\$ 800
Widows and Orphans	\$ 2,000
Embuyangat Primary School ~ Desks and Chairs	\$ 1,300
Kepiro Primary School ~ Lunch Program	\$ 1,300
Lenchani Secondary School ~ Desks and Chairs	\$ 1,950
Olturoto Secondary Boarding School ~ Bunk Beds	\$ 1,950
	<hr/>
	\$ 678,150

The mission is growing therefore increasing costs are foreseen. The Oblate team in Kenya and the leadership of OMI Lacombe Canada continue to discuss possible ways for self-sustainability. At the present time, MAMI is faced with the mounting pressure of raising funds for the sustenance of this mission and your financial support is needed more than ever.

Help us create a climate of change

BY KEN FORSTER, OMI

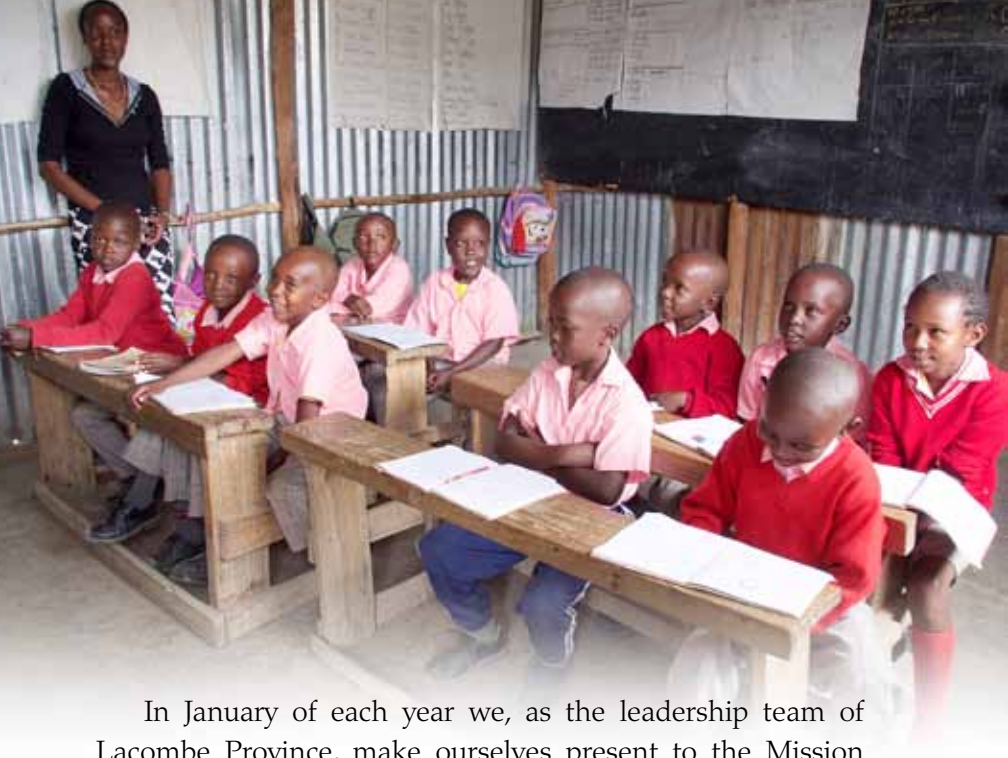
FIRST SUPERIOR OF THE KENYA MISSION

OTTAWA – Creating a climate of change is this year's theme for the Share Lent Campaign by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. I have found this to be a catchy slogan that carries not just an allusion to a problem but offers a solution as well, the investment of ourselves.

That is what each of us must be about. It is not enough to state and clearly recognize a need. We must create a climate of change. Often we are the ones who must be exposed to an "in-your-face reality" before being moved to change.

Oblates Sam Hong, Jim Bleackley
and Ken Thorson at one of the
prayer houses near Kisaju





In January of each year we, as the leadership team of Lacombe Province, make ourselves present to the Mission of Kenya for at least some weeks, to assist in the direction of our pastoral ministry. This year I decided, as Provincial, to stay home, and instead Ken Thorson, OMI, and Jim Bleackley, OMI, the two vicar-provincials, went for the first time to experience Kenya and the dedicated and generous young Oblates who minister there.

They came back after those three weeks very excited about the good work that our young men are accomplishing. They experienced the joy and appreciation of the Kenyan people. They saw the gratitude and respect they held toward those of us who have spent some years of our lives among them. I warmed to hear of how they clapped when my greetings were expressed through these ambassadors from Canada.

The mission is growing substantially. The number of parishioners is increasing as well as the number of our Oblate seminarians. They saw the cramped space available for our formation candidates and came back advocating expansion of our facilities. They came to appreciate the dedication and the



energy expended by our young men as they put flesh on the words “good news to the poor.”

Lacombe plans to construct a House of Welcome in Nairobi for Oblates and visitors. This House would also serve as residence for Oblates from other countries studying at Tangaza College, which offers a fine formation program.

We are in the last stages of completion of a residence at Kisaju that will enable the Oblates serving in the parish to reside in their parish. Until now they have been commuting 21 kilometres daily from a rental house in another town.

As our numbers expand, now 12 fully professed Oblates in mission, and some 20 young men in formation, we work in parishes, prison chaplaincy, university chaplaincy, justice and peace advocacy, formation houses, counselling, and work with children and orphans, of which sadly we heard about three more.

Just recently after Ken and Jim returned, we heard of a tragedy in Kisaju Parish where the car of chairman Njoroge and his wife Rosemary was swept off a concrete bridge in a flash flood, killing them both. This was a very painful loss for the Oblates who were very close to this beautiful family. Three children were left orphaned.

Oblates Jim Bleackley and Gerry Conlan at the new Oblate residence being constructed in Kisaju





Projects to assist the local people continue with your donations as members of MAMI and friends of the Oblates. St. Augustine's Primary School in Vancouver raised funds through their Advent concert to assist St. Paul's school in Njogune (Kionyo Parish).

The Franciscan Claritian Sisters will move into the Kionyo Parish Convent and operate the Kionyo clinic as well as provide pastoral and educational assistance to the parish. This clinic has been on the drawing books for many years and the convent has been empty apart from guests. It is great to see their purpose realized. It is hoped three sisters will be appointed mid-year.

This is the Year of Mercy. We count on your prayers and we promise to pray for you. On March 16th, we the Board of Directors for MAMI, offered our mass that day for each of you in whatever needs you have for personal healing, in your families or for those in your intentions.

This year also represents the 200th Anniversary of the foundation of the small band of missionaries gathered by St. Eugene de Mazenod in 1816. He had a vision to draw together

specifically hand-picked young men with zeal to “bring good news to the poor” of southern France after the French Revolution. To begin the project he needed a building to house his small community. Finances necessary to purchase an old Carmelite convent were realized and that gave a place from which to work and eventually reach the world.

Will you assist us as we celebrate this milestone in our congregation? Perhaps you could assist us with 2,000 or 200 or 20 dollars to mark this celebration. Make it a celebration not just of the past but for the future. Help build the facilities we need for our mission today. Surprise us, but more importantly surprise God. I say that because I have through my work in Kenya been blown away by generosity. I once spoke to a couple about the proposed Mt. Kenya East Water Project. I said we would be trying to raise \$200,000 from Canadian friends in order to lever \$400,000 from CIDA. The response came without much thought as the decision to lay down their lives had already been made.

I heard these words without hesitation: “I think we can do that!”

They have since died and have further supported us with a bequest.

They are constantly in my prayers!

(Ken Forster, OMI, is the Provincial of OMI Lacombe Canada)



Gift Payment Option



We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed, visit our website at www.oblatemissionassociates.ca to give on-line, or call our office toll free: 1-866-432-6264 and we will be pleased to assist you in facilitating your donation to the Oblate missions.



Gideon Rimberia, OMI

Seeds of Kisaju Parish planted years ago

BY GEORGE MUTHUI GICHUKI

KISAJU, Kenya – The new Catholic parish in Kisaju became a reality in November 2014, but the seeds were planted many years ago.

It all started in the mid 1980s when two Catholic faithful, Anastasia Wambui and Mrs. Otieno, the wife of the then head-teacher of Olturoto primary school, met at the seasonal spring to wash clothes.

As they talked they realized they were both Catholics. Because there was no Catholic prayer house nearby, the two families agreed to meet in their houses to pray the rosary and share the word of God. After several months, other Catholics heard about this new ‘well’ from which they could quench the thirst of their faith. Among the early pioneers were Mary Sirikwa and Asunta Kisina.

This congregation grew in numbers, and they longed to celebrate a Holy Mass. Mr. Otieno, who was always ready to help, asked Fr. Oscar, a missionary priest from Ngóng Parish, to celebrate mass for the growing community. This first Eucharistic celebration in the area was held under a tree because the school administration could not allow them to use a classroom.

Though with some difficulties, the Word of God and the Catholic faith spread like wildfire, as evidenced by the new members who joined the celebrations. The missionary priests also became regular visitors to the area. The community donated pieces of land, as the church acquired some. As a result of this vibrancy and enthusiasm a temporary iron-sheet church was built. This has since then become the church hall as a new permanent one was constructed. From this community six other prayer houses, which comprise the new Kisaju Parish, were put up.

The assigned Oblates, Fr. Gideon and Fr. Samuel, and the parish pastoral council have an uphill missionary task. Armoured with the Holy Spirit, passion, systematic pastoral programs and the visionary leadership of Fr. Gideon, the parish priest, they are all geared to conquer the hostile terrain which is expansive, hot and often drought stricken. The parish priest and his team are always sympathetic towards the Christians who often move away in search of pastures for their livestock. The financial resource is scarce, and this is a great hindrance to church development.

Still, St. Paul's Catholic Church, Kisaju Parish, looks to the future with hope and courage. Our dear pope visited Kenya in November, and it coincided with our first anniversary as a church. It was another small step in building our parish.

(George Muthui Gichuki is the chairman of St. Bernard Olturoto)

Kisaju Parish

BY GEORGE MUTHUI GICHUKI

KISAJU, Kenya – Kisaju Catholic Parish covers a vast area and, as described by many, is an area of desperation. The area is populated by the locals, who are the Maasai, and the immigrants from several parts of Kenya.

These people live a life of hand to mouth. The Maasai are semi-pastoralists while the immigrants are people from poor backgrounds who have sought refuge here from their ancestral homes that are crowded and poor.

The Maasai mainly live in demarcated lands that have been subdivided and sold to people who are in search of places to put up some sort of dwelling structures. Some of the immigrants live in rented ramshackles constructed of iron sheets and lumped in one area as a kind of a town. They largely depend on menial work that is sporadic.

The pastoralists who now own small plots of land in a dry area could minimize their movements if a few things could be done for them, the financing notwithstanding.

- Providing water for drinking and some for small-scale irrigation that would help to provide food for the households and some income.

Gideon Rimberia, OMI,
Palm Sunday celebration





The choir arrives

- Being encouraged and introduced to zero grazing for cows and goats, and to drought-resistant shrubs to feed the animals.
- Encouraging the parents and their children to invest in education. This is because learners drop out of school at a low level of learning, for example after the first national examination that is performed poorly due to non exposure, poverty and traditional customs.

Listening to James Fiori, OMI, during the inauguration of Kisaju Parish, many of us realized the Oblates were in Kisaju to stay and do everything possible with the people to better their lives. Fr. Fiori said the mission of the Oblates is 'staying with, walking with and dying with the people. As the old adage says 'you cannot not preach to people with empty stomachs.'

It is our humble request that MAMI Lacombe Canada and other people of goodwill come to the assistance of Kisaju people to help them become better people and Christians.

The Oblate spirit has invaded Kenya, especially Kisaju Parish in a special and meaningful way. Before the Oblates came here in 2013, the prayer houses/outstations were almost

deserted with few Christians turning up for prayers and liturgies.

Since the arrival of the Oblates things have slowly changed for the better. The consistency of the Holy Mass, seminars and workshops for the newly-formed church groups and leaders has helped a great deal. The Christians have also been inspired greatly by the selflessness of our priests, brothers and catechists.

To keep this good work moving the gains achieved need to be guarded and the momentum maintained with all the available resources. This will ensure that a firm foundation of our Catholic faith is laid here and in the entire region.

Alongside the family visits, consistent Eucharistic celebrations in the outstations, mission outreaches in the outstations, seminars and Catechesis could be used to ensure that the gains are enlivened. One such means would be to introduce a news bulletin that would carry articles written in English, Kiswahili and some in Kimaasai. This newsletter would help to expound on the happenings in our parish, diocese and Oblate world. This would also encourage interest in reading and learning, hence boosting education in the area.

With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit may our parish flourish to greater heights.

(George Muthui Gichuki is the chairman of St. Bernard Olturoto)

Good Friday service





The Beginning

BY GEORGE MUTHUI GICHUKI

KISAJU, Kenya – In June, 2015, the marriage register of the new St. Paul’s Kisaju parish was opened by the celebration of the first marriage in St. Bernard Olturoto.

At age 75, Anastasia Wambui, who pioneered the Catholic faith in this area, became the first to receive the sacrament of marriage in the new parish. This occurred because of her 57-year effort to persuade her husband Daniel Gitau Kanja, 84, to join the Catholic Church. Daniel was baptized during the Easter vigil last year.

The most joyful moment of this wedding was when Anastasia placed the wedding ring onto her husband’s finger, and embraced him to the extent of shedding tears. Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gitau Kanja left the church a happy newlywed couple amid song and dance. Just as Anastasia led the way for the other Catholics in the area, she and her husband have opened the way for marriages in the parish.



On Aug. 22, another couple, Meshack and Mary, were wed in the same church. More couples are preparing for marriage elsewhere in the parish, and many more have expressed an interest in doing the same. We hope the trend continues.

(George Muthui Gichuki is the chairman of St. Bernard Olturoto)

DONATING SECURITIES

*to Oblate
missionary
works*



Do you have publicly traded securities that you would like to donate to the benefit of the Oblate missions? With the tax law introduced in 2006, you can directly donate your publicly traded securities (shares) to **AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI** and receive an official income tax receipt while avoiding the payment of capital gains tax.

To take advantage of this tax-saving offer, please call Diane Lepage (1-866-432-6264) at our office for further information. A minimum market value of \$5,000 is suggested. We would be happy to facilitate this exchange that benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions.

Overcoming Challenges

BY SUSAN GITAU

KISAJU, Kenya – Kenya is considered the hub of Africa due to its connectivity to the world and position. It's a good place to be and we thank God.

The Kisaju area is growing and expanding (as is the growth of Christians and Catholics) because the land on the first row touching Namanga Road has been earmarked as industrial. Learning institutions and estates are also sprouting at a fast rate and this development is coupled with a mix of good and bad elements.

The objective of the Catholic Church is to mould a person wholesomely (spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally). The Oblate missionaries have a great opportunity to impact the Kisaju Catholics and also influence the Christians

Prayer house of Kisaju



who are at a crossroads. As a young person the Maryknoll Fathers, Loreto Sisters and later Opus Dei mentored me. In today's world, this is lacking and I usually feel/see the gaps even for my own children.

The Christians at Kisaju are at different levels in the balanced wheel of life, and this is one of the challenges for Fr. Gideon and team. However, I strongly believe it can be overcome because we now have resident priests who are able to give service. The team does a great job despite the challenges of terrain, language barrier and faith understanding.

(Susan Gitau is a MAMI contact and a parishioner in Kisaju parish)

WANTED

YOUR STORIES!

There are many charities and good causes that solicit your support. Yet for some reason you have chosen to offer the Oblates your prayers, friendship and assistance.

We are curious:

Why did you choose us?

How did you hear about the Oblate missionary work?

How have the Oblates supported, inspired and encouraged you?

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

Send your stories (and photos) to: lacombemissions@yahoo.ca





Kenya Mission profiles

The adjoining map indicates where the Oblates of the Kenya Mission are located. We want you, our MAMI supporters of the mission, to become better acquainted with the Oblates serving in Kenya so we will be running profiles of the individuals, starting with four in this issue and continuing throughout this year. We asked the Oblates to respond to a series of questions including their inspirational influence, the obstacles they face, their background and a description of their daily lives.

Mario Azrak, OMI

I was born in 1966 in Darfur Province, Sudan, spent my childhood in England and moved to Australia as a teen. I have two younger brothers.

I grew up in an Oblate parish and Oblates were constantly visiting our home. The Oblates were a missionary congregation with strong communal/fraternal bonds and my vocation was stirred during the Ethiopian famine in the late 1980s.

I was inspired by my parents, their faith, their resilience and dedication to their family.

Some of the obstacles facing our community in Kenya include the busy-ness of ministry, a strong reliance on pastoral ministers by the laity, demands and expectations of family members for Kenyan Oblates, and poor communication skills.

I am nourished/fulfilled by personality differences in our community, harmonious communities, plans that work/successful strategies, and Oblates who are at peace with themselves, their ministry and in their community.

Most difficult to deal with on a daily basis are sudden and urgent commitments, traffic jams, lengthy meetings that do not start on time, and poverty (discerning genuine needs).

A typical week in my life includes participation in community activities such as prayers, meals and celebrations; celebration of masses for religious communities within the locality; participation in formal meetings (Oblate and non-Oblate); appointments with various Oblates and non-Oblates; visits to Oblate communities; correspondence via email and phone; caught in traffic, and entertaining guests that include friends from former places of ministry, religious and priests.

(Mario Azrak, OMI, is the Kenya Mission superior)



KENYA MISSION PROFILE

Faustin Litanda, OMI



I was born in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 1975 and have four sisters and a brother.

I was drawn to the Oblates because of their courage and commitment to the mission. It was a difficult time in Congo when Christians demonstrated against the regime. It was a time of oppression. Some Oblates were on the streets of Kinshasa and one of them now is the novice master. That courage and togetherness with the poor people of Kinshasa led me to join them.

The most inspirational people in my life are my parents and family members. They have showed great love and always support me. Also, the late Giovanni Santolini, OMI, was a good example as an Oblate priest.

One of the biggest obstacles facing Oblates in Kenya is a serious financial problem. As a mission we need to work hard on our sustainability (self reliance). Up to now we don't have sources of income generation.

I work in formation (postulancy) and prison ministry. I am so happy with the two ministries. Formation reminds me of my own formation and my identity as an Oblate. Prison ministry reminds me that I am a human being like anybody else. I am also a prisoner, maybe of sins, and need the freedom Jesus provides.

(Faustin Litanda, OMI, is a Kenya Mission postulancy formator based in Méru)

Constant Ilombun, OMI



I was born in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 1971 in a big family of eight children and was drawn to the Oblates by their lifestyle, their spirituality, simplicity of life, community life and the sense of belonging to the congregation.

I was a seminarian when I met two Oblates, both cousins with whom I spent the holiday. Their lifestyle was very much inspiring.

The Kenya mission is still young and community life is developing. But it will be better to offer seminars and training about intercultural life, then the members will accept the difference and divergence. This is a chance for the community and mission to grow.

I work in a parish where I encounter both youths and adults. The experience is good, but there are a few challenges with the youth who don't attend the small Christian community. On top of this, there is also a need for education and formation of Christians to become self-reliant.

In the parish, one of the dangers is the risk of having to do everything. The priest is expected to know everything and should be everywhere at the same time. In our parish there is a need to form and train Christians to run the parish by themselves.

(Constant Ilombun, OMI, is one of the pastors in Kionyo parish)

Vincent Otieno, OMI



I was born in western Kenya in 1987 into a Catholic family of six boys and three girls. My mother died in 2011.

I was drawn to the Oblates when I visited their community after my form four examination and I accompanied them to the slums for pastoral work. The experience was more touching than anything else. Their charisma moved me.

I was inspired by my late grandmother. I stayed with her when she lost her eyesight and died blind. The experience I had during staying with her reminded me of someone who has been abandoned by her close friends and relatives. When I came to know about the Oblates, this experience came to the forefront.

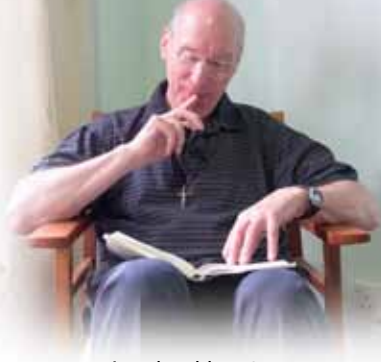
Obstacles facing Oblates in Kenya include the dropping out of the candidates after their first years of seminary studies, and finding ways for each Oblate community to sustain itself financially.

I am working with both youth and elderly people, which is in some way a special ministry for me as it demands more of my presence and listening to them. I also work with youth in the parishes and in schools.

In every ministry, on a daily basis, all the faithful want me to reach them. It is not easy to attend to every group in various ministries at the same time on the same day when they are gathering.

(Vincent Otieno, OMI, is an Oblate scholastic)

An eye-opening visit to Kenya



Jim Bleackley, OMI

BY JIM BLEACKLEY, OMI

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Oblates Ken Thorson and Jim Bleackley, the two vicar-provincials, went for the first time to experience Kenya and the dedicated and generous young Oblates who minister there. Following are notes from Fr. Jim's diary during their visit in January.)

In the early morning of Jan. 9 our plane touches down at the international airport in Nairobi, and Ken Thorson and I begin our first visit to the Kenya Mission.

After the passport and visa checkpoint, we collect our bags and proceed to customs for the usual inspection. The officer, who opened Ken's suitcase filled with religious books and a picture of Pope Francis, smiled and asked if we were Catholic priests. Upon hearing our affirming answer, he told us he was a Catholic, then without further ado, closed the case and welcomed us to Kenya. When dealing with officials, having the right connections makes everything easier.

We connected with Fr. Sam (a member of the Oblate team in Kenya, who is originally from South Korea) who would be our driver and guide as we began our visitation to Kisaju Parish. At the moment the team is renting a house in Kitengela until the new Oblate residence is completed and they are able to move closer to St. Paul's Parish, which is the parish centre. Settling in and resting for a few hours was a welcome respite, before climbing back in the van to journey out to several mission centres Sam and Gideon serve. Once off the main highway, it was on a rough and barely visible path that would take us to Stony Athil, Embuyangat and Olturoto to meet the leaders, listening to their plans and concerns for the faith com-

munities in their area. Over and over again we heard about the people's need for a water source and the financial funds to carry out the basic projects of the missions.

Visiting the school at Embuyangat was an eye-opener for me; small windowless classrooms with pitted blackboards and no desks could create many difficulties for both teachers and students. Also the housing conditions for the boarding students were very basic; a windowless tin hut on a cement foundation full of bunk beds and trunks. Yet the students, who were doing the Saturday chores, were happy and cheerful.

The long busy day ended with a mass at the Bethsaida Centre, run by a congregation of sisters from India who cares for mentally challenged women. The sisters are grateful for the support of the Oblate Team in Kisaju.

JAN. 10

On Sunday, I drove with Sam to St. Bernado Parish in Olturoto to celebrate Mass. This well-established mission centre with many leaders, catechists and youth ministers celebrated a moving liturgy; the singing, dancing and the participation of the young and the elderly would be in stark contrast to those celebrated in North American. Then it was off to St. Mary's in Lenchani, which is a small temporary church built 50

Oblates Jim Bleackley and Ken Thorson with students



years ago. Even though the mission has only plastic chairs and a desk for an altar, the people still dream of a proper church for the community. After communion I was welcomed with a traditional Maasai welcoming song and dance. During refreshments, the leaders spoke about their challenges; the need for a permanent church, a boarding school, a residence for a catechist. I'm amazed at the resilience of this small faith community that continues to gather and share the gospel message with joyful hearts.

As Sam and I return to Kisaju for a meeting at St. Paul's parish on the back roads that criss-cross the countryside and with no signs, we lose our way in the wilderness. Missionaries need a keen sense of direction and the ability to travel by the lay of the land in order to navigate the backcountry of Kisaju.

The meeting at St. Paul's parish with most of the leaders of the parish, the mission centres and the prayer homes talked about the tremendous growth expected in the near future. As people in Nairobi begin to move out to the rural areas it is expected that the population of the parish will grow from 800 to 8,000. The council is planning a new church to accommodate this expansion and last year raised 2 million KES (Kenyan Shillings) from the faith community. The council is looking for other sources of funding for this project.

JAN. 11

We had an opportunity to speak with Sam and Gideon about the history of the parish, the life of the Oblate community and future hopes. This is a very busy mission and we encouraged both Oblates to be faithful to a day off a week, days of recollection and holidays. Overall impression is that this is a very hard working Oblate community living deeply the values and charism of the congregation, ministering and partnering with the laity.

The rest of the day was spent visiting the different projects sponsored by MAMI. We drove out near St. Bernado



Oblates Jim and Ken receive gifts of traditional Maasai blankets

parish to visit Olturoto Secondary School where we met the principal who guided us around the property and showed us the new bunk beds purchased with funds from MAMI. Next, we dropped in to see the small Lofina Primary School that is sponsored by St. Bernado Parish. The school, in an enclosed compound, has six small classrooms with hardly any teaching aids, filled with young children eager to learn and happy to welcome the strangers from Canada.

The people who sold us the land for the Kisaju Oblate residence project invited us to their new home for lunch and since there were five visiting Oblate priests our gracious hosts arranged to have Gideon bless their new home. It was a relaxing and enjoyable moment in a rather hectic day.

After lunch Gerry Conlan, OMI, who is the project manager, took us to see the property and the construction of the new house. The place was a beehive of activity; men raising part of the security wall, construction workers busy on the second floor with plumbers and electricians finishing different projects. Touring the house with Gerry and listening to the many ideas he has for the water tower, the septic system and

many other projects, shows his forward thinking and planning for future growth and investment. The property could easily be sub-divided and when Gideon and Sam eventually move to the new St. Paul's Parish and rectory in Kisaju, the property could be used for other needs of the Kenyan Mission.

The next project we visited was the Kepiro School to see how MAMI funds helped the school committee build extra classrooms for the students. This is not a Catholic school but the joint endeavor has helped improve the relationship between the school and St. Paul's parish.

Walking back to the parish after the school visit, we met with parish leadership who shared with us their concerns and challenges; the need to secure title for the land where they plan to build the new church, and to continue to build up the faith life of the community. Even though the concerns and challenges at times appear overwhelming the leadership is very enthusiastic and positive about their vision and plans for the future.

On our way to Jamil Bora, we stopped to visit St. Ann, a private Catholic school where we were welcomed by some of the children with a song and a gift of a traditional Maasai blanket. The education system in Kenya is a mixture of public and private schools that appear to create a double standard and a quality of education based on a family's income. I'm glad to see that many of our projects are assisting struggling schools to enhance the quality of education for their students. When we visited these schools the principals and head teachers profoundly thanked us for the financial assistance they have received.

The meeting with the next parish council was on a wooden deck situated on the property the community had set aside for a Catholic church. At the moment, the faith community celebrates mass in a school classroom. The leaders spoke about times the space was not always available and noted that the classroom environment is not a proper setting for celebrating

the Eucharist. This makes it difficult for some people to join the church. The leadership continues to struggle on with the present setup, but long to replace the deck with a proper church structure.

As we return to Kisaju, we stop to celebrate mass with the Flower Farm workers at St. Peter's, a small Christian community of St. Paul's Parish. In a small dimly lit corrugated iron building, we find 100 people preparing to celebrate the liturgy after a long hard day in the fields. The lively liturgy full of songs and movement appears to refresh the hearts and souls of these people who work hard for little wages to provide for their children. I was told that there were more than 200 children in the settlement, a number I believe for there were 50 children at mass sitting on the floor in front of the altar, showing great interest in the celebration. After mass, they carefully guided us back to the car because the darkness made it difficult to see the path in front of us. The dedication of the Oblates to this outstation is very much appreciated by the whole community.

JAN. 12

In the morning we had an opportunity to meet individually with Sam and Gideon, before leaving for Karen with Mario. What a beautiful setting. After lunch, Fidele takes us to some of the many institutions and universities around Karen where our candidates study; the numerous institutions so close to our house in Karen makes it an ideal place for formation.



Children at the flower farm

JAN. 13

Mario drove us to Lake Naivasha to see the area where the Kenya Mission purchased some property for future investment and until that

time a place that could be used for youth gatherings and holiday outings for candidates in formation. After touring the area, we headed for Longono National Park in order to climb the mountain, which after a 90-minute walk offered us a spectacular view of the Rift Valley and the surrounding countryside. The walk down the hill was easier but the rain and hail we encountered made the trail slippery and treacherous; we were wet and muddy when we reached the car for the return trip to Karen.

JAN. 14

Ken and I met with the formation team at Karen. Stephen and Fidele shared their stories and insights on the formation program. Especially they shared their idea to separate the formation community from administration because of the need for extra space for candidates joining the community, and the conflicting needs of those in administration and student priests.

In the evening, Ken and I met with the students and shared with them the history of OMI Lacombe Canada, the mandate we received from the superior general as we began our term, the ROLM (Renewal of Oblate Life and Ministry, a multi-



year process underway within Lacombe province intended to renew community life and mission and ministry) process and the importance of the Kenya Mission for our province. It was good to share with these young men who are discerning a call to religious life.

JAN. 15

The next day, we travel to Méru with Mario and Martin. It was a pleasant four-hour drive through the picturesque landscape of Kenya, a land of many plantations of tea and rice.

In Méru the three members of the formation team who are responsible for the postulants welcomed us. Faustin, Joseph and Praveen were preparing to begin the program when the candidates return in February. After lunch, Ken and I had an opportunity to visit the farm and see the efforts being made to provide income for the Kenya Mission. The community has planted 1,200 trees around the perimeter and hope in seven years to begin to cut and sell the lumber for a considerable profit; one of the ways the community is trying to become self-reliant.

While in Méru, we found that Mario had arranged for us to meet Bishop John. I found him to be a down-to-earth, easy-going person who praised the Oblates and their pastoral approach in the missions. He would love to have more Oblates in the diocese.

Oblates Phelix Johya
(novitiate), Patrick
Musiomi (prenovitiate)
and Daquin Iyo



JAN. 16

We visited the men's and women's prison in Méru, where Faustin celebrates mass on Sunday, and met with the parish leaders whose church is inside the prison compound. Once inside the prison we met some of the 1,200 people incarcerated in this very simple jail. Later, we met the youth group at the University of Science and Technology where Praveen will minister as chaplain this coming year. This is an ideal place to journey with many young people whose faith and church is a positive reality in their lives. It is hoped that Praveen will be able to share his JPIC (Justice and Peace) ministry with them; especially to the 900 street kids who live in Fr. Francis's orphanage that is near the university.

In the evening, we continue to Kionyo to meet with Constant, Dionisius and Vincent. It was another opportunity to meet the Oblates, see the places where they serve and view the projects supported by MAMI. St. Stephen's Parish is preparing to build a larger new church over the present structure. The idea and design was Gerry's when he was the pastor, but it will take several years before the project is finished.

JAN. 17

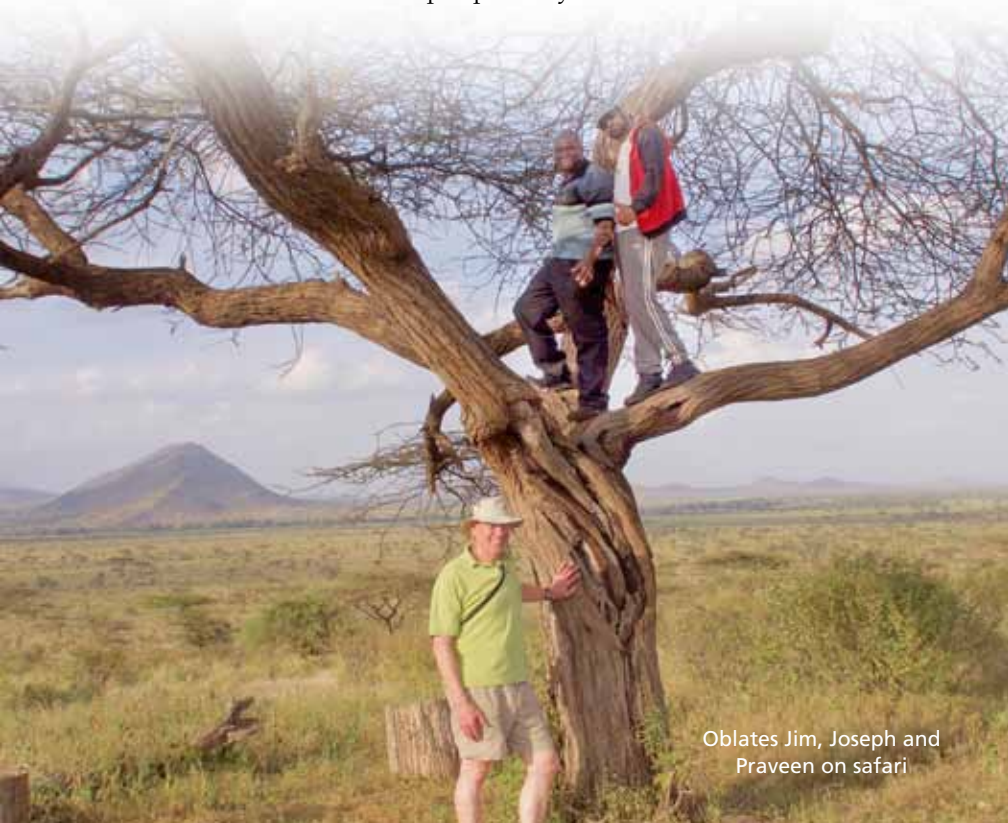
On Sunday, after we celebrated mass with Constant at St. Stephen, it was off to Chigora, one of the mission centres where 30 people gather in a small hut, while waiting for their new stone church to be completed. It should be noted that the funding for this new church comes from Mission In Need. The leadership of the church indicates the funding from this society is insufficient and is hoping that MAMI will help them finish the project.

JAN. 18

We visit several schools in the area that have been helped by MAMI funds. Ucima Primary School has received two grants, one for constructing new toilets and another for con-

structing two classrooms. The school needs 4 million KES to finish constructing five classrooms and asks us to continue to sponsor them through MAMI. While walking back up the hill I wonder how the Kenyan Mission decides what projects to support when the needs are so great. The next school was St. Martin Secondary school where we met the principal who showed us the new science lab and equipment that MAMI has sponsored. The final visit was to St. Eugene School close to the parish. The young teacher in charge showed us around, but it was raining so hard on the tin roof that it was difficult to hear what he was saying. How do teachers and students manage under these conditions? I did learn that parish-sponsored schools charge less for fees than the public schools.

The rest of the day was spent meeting with the individual Oblates, hearing their stories and listening to their concerns for the mission. I'm impressed with their community life and their dedication to the people they serve.



Oblates Jim, Joseph and
Praveen on safari

JAN. 19-21

The next few days were pure relaxation as Ken, Joseph, Praveen and I spent time touring the Samburu National Park. We saw many animals and the following day, many more animals. You feel like a zoo has exploded, and you are astonished to realize that only the spectacular Kenyan scenery separates these amazing animals and you. And as obvious as it sounds, you realize that this was how it used to be. Kenya is magical.

JAN. 22-25

It was good to rest and to be a tourist for a while, but then it was back to Karen to join the Kenyan Mission in their all-mission gathering where the group discussed their concerns and discerned the future goals for the mission. There was



Oblates Vincent, Joseph and Zachary
renew their vows



The Kenya mission community

much discussion about financial self-reliance and the unique connection with MAMI and OMI Lacombe Canada. The Kenyan Mission is growing quickly; building and planning for the future is a big concern.

JAN. 26

We celebrated the opening of the Triennium celebration with a special Mass where Vincent, Joseph and Zachary renewed their vows in front of the whole community. I must say, I am very proud of these dedicated Oblates and enjoyed being with them these last three weeks.

JAN. 27

On the last day of our visit, we met with Mario to share with him our impressions of the men and to hear his positive report as superior of the Kenyan Mission. His main concern is the well being of the Oblates for whom he is responsible. I feel his approach and style of leadership contributes to the growth of the Kenyan Mission.



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