

AMMI *Lacombe* MAMI
Canada

Oblate Spirit



February 2016



Healing Hands

Saving grace



There are times in our lives when we reach out for a helping hand from family and friends, and there are times when we are beyond earthly help and are so desperate that we are willing to barter with God. "Please God, if You do this for me, I promise to ..."

Does God listen to our entreaties? Does God hear the desperation in our voices? Does God favour one person over another, or one race over another? Those are perplexing questions that might best be answered by our great theologians.

People are healed in many ways, and some are healed in ways that go beyond reasonable explanation. One such person is Walter Demong, an Oblate brother who has spent his life with his arms and heart open to the world, helping others in any way he possibly could.

By all accounts, thanks to an unfriendly bull, Brother Walter should never have seen the advent of colour television, let alone the Internet and cell phones. (His preference, by the way, is the Fax machine.) Today, he is also a cancer survivor.

Those who know Walter (that could be half of Saskatoon) see that his inner spirit hasn't changed. The hair may have lost its youthful colour, and his legs might not move as fast as he would like, but the heart and soul of the person remain the same. He continues to reach out to those around him, to lend a hand when he can.

And there might be the lesson. In the same way that God reached out and touched Walter years ago, Walter has reached out and touched others with so many acts of kindness. Our world is a better place for his presence.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

'God wants me here'

BY BRIAN ZIMMER

SASKATOON – God made people because He likes a good story. When Walter Demong, OMI, was created, God certainly had a good story in mind.

On Monday, Dec. 1, 1958, Brother Walter and dairy herd manager Ted Jerome, OMI, were finishing the afternoon milking when Walter went to get the bull to breed a cow. As he had recently seen done during a course at the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Agriculture, he took the bull by the nose ring to lead it to the designated stall.

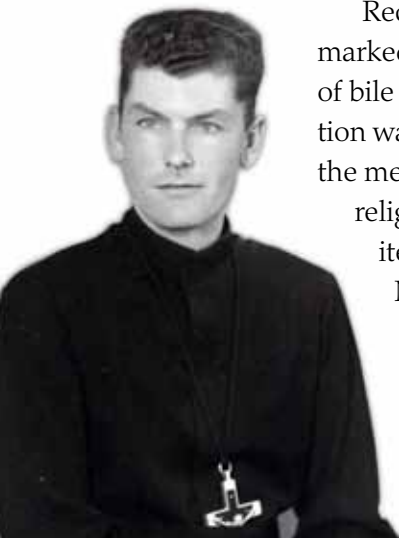
Unaccustomed to this, the bull wrenched itself free from Brother Walter's grasp. Walter stepped back against a fence, taking the full force of the bull's head butt to the abdomen. He was able to climb over the fence to safety, but he was severely injured.

And so began a long journey of healing. Walter lost consciousness soon after he arrived at the hospital. He would not regain consciousness for nearly a month. Walter had suffered massive blood loss. The right lobe of his liver had been split; there was a tear in his diaphragm and pericardium; his hepatic artery had to be tied off to stem the bleeding.

Recovery from his surgery was long, and was marked with complications including seepage of bile and infections. For two months his situation was, in the words of his doctor, "perilous." In the meantime, his community, family, and many religious sisters prayed. His community visited him regularly as his health allowed. No one thought he would live, but neither would anyone give up on him.

On March 19, 1959, the feast of

Walter Demong, OMI, 1957

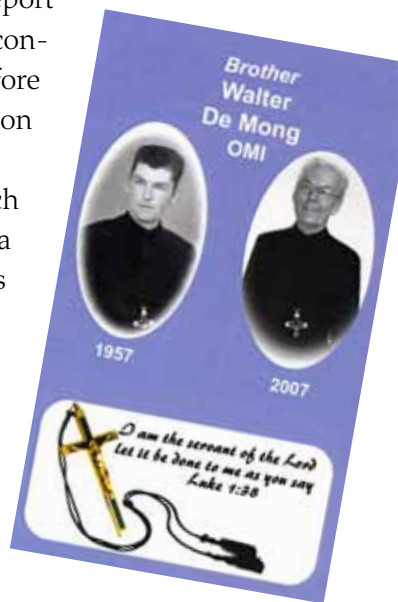


St. Joseph, Walter was granted a two-hour pass to go home to renew his religious vows. On April 30, he went home, after five months of recovery. Walter weighed 106 pounds. He would not return to full activity until March 1960. How does such an active person survive so many months of inability to be active? Walter just cannot remember.

Brother Walter is often referred to as the “miracle boy” in his Oblate community. All three doctors who were involved in Walter’s recovery agreed that his survival was not completely understood in surgical and medical circles. Walter’s mother and dad, along with many others, always referred to Walter’s recovery as a miracle. In fact about 20 years later the Oblate Congregation sent a delegate from Rome to organize an inquiry tribunal on behalf of the late Bishop Vital Grandin, OMI, through whom many Oblates and friends prayed for Walter’s recovery. After that inquiry, the information was sent to Rome to be studied. The final report said that Walter’s healing was not considered a first class miracle and therefore could not be used for the beatification and canonization of Bishop Grandin.

In the eyes of the official church this remarkable recovery was not a miracle, but Walter, many Oblates, his family and friends still like to call the extraordinary case a miracle.

Brother Walter sits daily in prayer and meditation. Even after so many years of doing so, he admits that to this day it is not easy for him. Nonetheless, day after day, even though God so often seems absent during silent prayer, his faith is steadfast that the God who often feels so absent is one and the same God so present during his miraculous healing so long ago.





Oblates Walter DeMong, Louis Hoffart and Tony Schmidt

In 2011 Walter had a second significant health problem, Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer. At first he feared God wanted to take him home, but after only three of his chemotherapy treatments were completed, all signs of the cancerous tumor were gone.

Walter feels he has a third health story to tell. He is amazed he remained cold- and flu-free during the six months of the closing of Mazenod Residence, (a former home for Oblates in Saskatoon where Walter had served as guest-master for 24 years) despite stretching himself to the limits of service for the community. The closing of this very special place took its severe personal toll on Walter and many others. And yet, the miracle of healing is in the letting go and surrendering to a new life often where least expected.

Healing, of course, is not just physical. Walter names two significant psycho-spiritual benefits that he's received through these experiences. The first is gratitude – for being here, for being alive, for life, for so many things. The second is a sense of meaning and purpose. "I am supposed to be here,"

he says. "God wants me here."

These two gifts are so much "who Walter is." Perhaps they are the explanation of why Walter never lost hope in the midst of a health crisis and of every other challenge life presented to him. Maybe they help explain why he gives it all and spends it all for others.

Brother Walter has always had a special preference for the poor with their many faces. Partly that is just the way he is, and more so, it is his intentional spirituality. Through the miracles of healing which he has experienced, he came to not only further love the poor, he came to know in a deep personal way that he too is one of the poor with their many faces.

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Lourdes: A Place of Healing

BY JOSEPH HATTIE, OMI

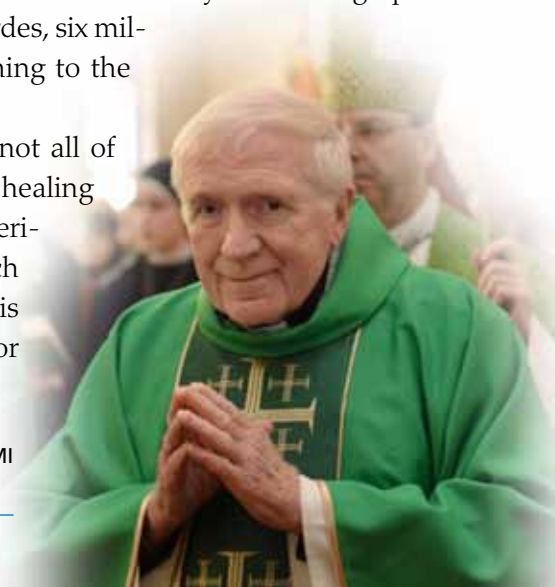
BARRY'S BAY, ON – As an Oblate priest for more than 51 years I can recall many blessings that have come from my vow of obedience, including the obedience I received from my Oblate provincial in 1999 that brought me a blessing for which I am particularly grateful. It sent me to the Marian Shrine at Lourdes and enabled me to work there for the first five months of the year 2000 with the 10-member Oblate international team serving Mary Immaculate at her Shrine. It was an obedience that filled my heart with joy. While there, I was truly convinced that Lourdes is a place of healing.

If one is looking for evidence of physical healings one can visit the medical office at the Shrine. It has records of some 7,000 healings that cannot be explained medically, and that have met the strict medical criteria that enable the local bishop to declare a healing as a miracle.

Many come to Lourdes seeking physical healings through the intercession of Mary Immaculate. In the years leading up to my privileged time at Lourdes, six million people a year were coming to the shrine.

It should be noted that not all of those who receive a physical healing go to the medical office for verification of their healings. Each healed person would have his or her own personal reason for the decision they made.

Joseph Hattie, OMI





Oblates at Lourdes

I and another Oblate were blessed with an opportunity early in 2000 to meet one such person. She had been brought to Lourdes from the east coast of the United States by one of her daughters because she was full of cancer and her doctors had told her that, medically, they could do no more for her. Her daughter thought of Lourdes and with hope in her heart made the arrangements to bring her mother.

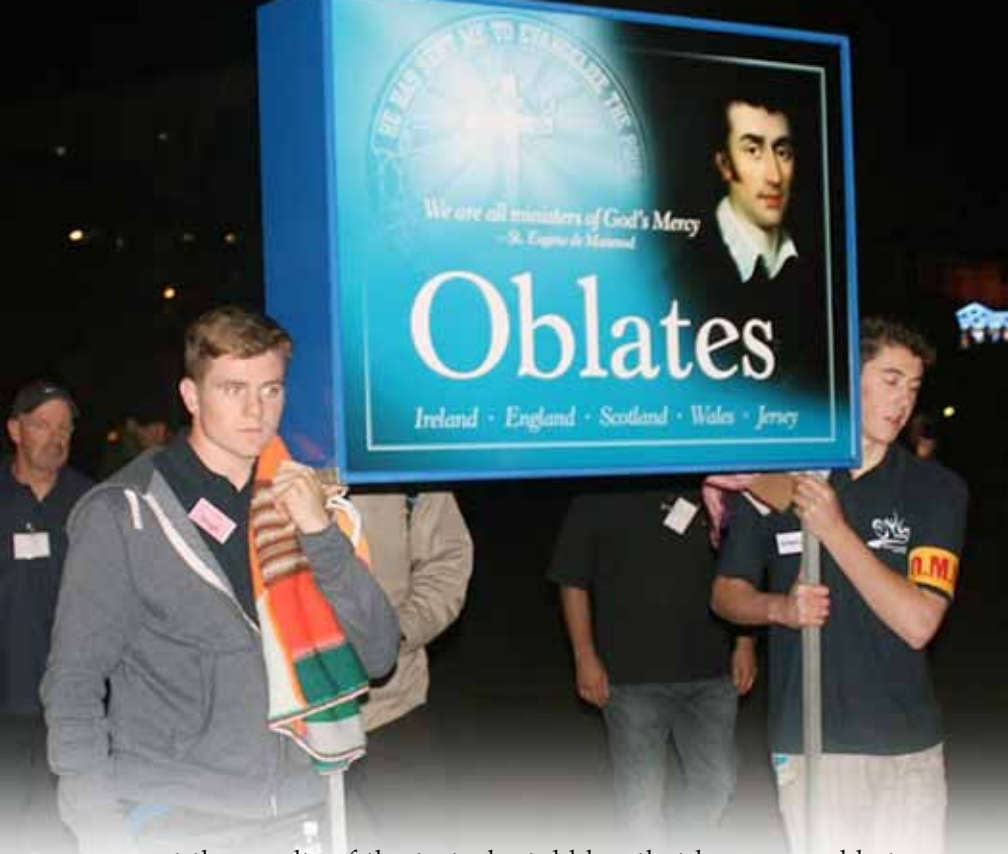
After their arrival at the shrine they prayed at the Grotto to Mary Immaculate, the mother went to the sacrament of reconciliation, bathed in the water from the spring that the Blessed Mother had given to St. Bernadette. She attended mass daily and, strengthened by the Holy Eucharist, continued her prayers of petition to Mary Immaculate.

They were able to stay for a week.

At the end of that time her daughter was able to take her back home.

Some time later we received a letter from the mother. The good news was that after her return home she was able to go to an appointment with her Muslim doctor. He had a series of tests performed. Later, when she met with him, in order to





get the results of the tests, he told her that he was unable to explain why, but that she was free of her cancer. Medically he could not explain why she was free of it, but she knew why, and was so full of gratitude to Mary Immaculate that she was bursting with joy. Because of the expense she did not return to the Shrine and the medical office for their verification of her healing.

I continue to pray that her physical healing at Lourdes has born much spiritual fruit both in her life and in the lives of her family members.

On the spiritual level, many received a healing in their soul that allows them to discover the Christian meaning of their human suffering. This in turn allows them to unite their sufferings with Christ's and in turn makes Lourdes a great fountain of redemptive love and healing for the world.

This grace of meaning gives an inner healing that enables

those who receive it to return home with peace in their hearts. Occasionally, one had the privilege of seeing this peace in the faces of parents as they wheeled their sick child to the afternoon Eucharistic blessing of the sick.

As a priest, one frequently saw spiritual healings take place in the confessional. It was not uncommon for this to happen to a person who had come to Lourdes with no intention of going to confession, but who, while there, had received the grace, through Mary Immaculate, to go to the confessional and there to make a good and much needed confession of their sins. The Shrine provides a great service to pilgrims and Our Lady by providing a special building for confessions, and daily to have priests available to hear confessions in a number of languages.

Lourdes is also a place of healing because Christ has chosen to honour his Blessed Mother by making Lourdes a place where she can, as our spiritual mother, do what natural mothers do so readily ... they go to their sick and suffering children to help them. Lourdes is special place where Mary, our





spiritual mother, can and does come to us when we are in need of her healing help. In doing this she clearly shows us the Father's healing love and mercy.

Lourdes can also have an impact on health-care workers.





Many health-care workers accompany, as volunteers, the sick and suffering on their pilgrimage to Lourdes. In their generosity they often come to realize that they benefit more from serving the sick and suffering, than those they are serving. The benefit often comes from a grace that softens their hearts in such a way that they are able to see more clearly the great dignity of the sick and suffering body/person they are serving. When they are serving a body that is dying, that inner grace helps them to recognize that they are helping a person on their way to heaven. It is a grace much needed in our day.

Lourdes is a place that stands against the world's desire to euthanize the sick and the suffering, it can bring the grace of meaning to those who cannot see or do not want to understand the "Christian meaning of human suffering."

May those who are called to serve Mary Immaculate at Lourdes discover how great a place of healing it is.

*(Fr. Hattie, OMI, is Associate Chaplain at
Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy in Barry's Bay, ON)*

Oblates conduct tours to Lourdes

The Oblates in Ireland and England conduct an annual pilgrimage to Lourdes consisting of groups of able-bodied pilgrims, as well as many people who wouldn't be able to make the trip without extra, or specialised, assistance.

Committed to providing the highest level of care to those pilgrims who do require assistance, their specialised team of volunteers, made up of doctors, nurses, care assistants, and the Oblate Youth Service, ensure that the Lourdes Pilgrimage remains accessible to people of all abilities. All pilgrimage activities are centred on the sick.





At all services, assisted pilgrims are invited to sit at the front and participate fully in all liturgies. During the pilgrimage, as well as daily mass, pilgrims participate in:

- Visit to the grotto, and mass at the grotto
- Sacrament of reconciliation
- Blessed Sacrament procession
- Torchlight Marian procession
- Mass of anointing of the sick
- Stations of the Cross
- Opportunities to bathe in the waters of Lourdes, and to light candles

Various travel and accommodation packages are available from both the UK and Ireland, with a range of travel dates and a choice of hotels.

For more information you can consult the Oblate offices listed below or <http://www.oblatelourdespilgrimage.com/>

IRELAND:

Oblates Lourdes Pilgrimage,
Mission Office,
House of Retreat,
Tyrconnell Road,
Inchicore, Dublin 8.
Tel: (01) 454 2888
E-mail: mamioblate@eircom.net

BRITAIN:

Oblate Partners in Mission Office,
Denis Hurley House,
14 Quex Road,
London, NW6 4PL
Tel: (020) 7624 7296
Email: oblate_partners@btinternet.com

Transformation in jail

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – One sunny afternoon I was in my room, seated on the rocking chair and doing some reading when I had this inspiration. Go to the jail. Actually it was more of a spiritual flash and for the rest of the day the thought stayed in my head.

A new jail was built in October, 2014. It is a 15-minute drive from our house.

The very next day I spoke with my great friend Marcos Guerra about this inspiration and asked him to come with me. Marcos is in charge of all that we do here and I have known him for more than 30 years.

The jail is at the foothills of the Andes. The area is bleak and there are no signs of life, not even a bird. The 15-minute drive is not pleasant and if you happen to have false teeth then they should be well anchored because the dirt road is a





washboard. Before we set out, I prayed to the Holy Spirit to open doors for us ... doors to hearts!

As we approached the gate of this huge jail, I kept asking myself “what in the name of God am I to do here and what am I to say if anything at all?” We were met by five guards at the main gate. To the left was a door for visitors and personnel. We had to explain the reason for our visit, hand over our identity cards, cell phones and camera. This took some time.

When asked for the purpose of our visit I said, “I would like to meet with the social worker.” The gate guard called the prison director. Soon there was a response and we could hear, very clearly, the voice of the director saying “give him the green light and leave him with his camera.” One of the guards opened a huge steel gate that a Sherman tank would have difficulty breaking through.

After about 15 minutes we were introduced to Elena, the social worker, a woman in her late 40s. She came across as a fine woman and as time went on with our future visits to the jail we saw in her a person of charm and one loved by the prisoners, almost like a mother and a great blessing for the jail.

My first question to her was “what are the immediate needs of the inmates?”

“Blankets,” she replied. She told us the inmates came to the jail with only the clothes on their backs.

We were then taken to the kitchen and I was allowed to take pictures and chat with the 12 inmates working there. They all wore uniforms of the same colour and had rubber boots up to their knees.

There were 12 drums of water. The kitchen staff had to use buckets to draw water from the drums for preparing meals for more than 1,200 inmates. Now, you can imagine what the kitchen floor looked like and why the need for rubber boots.

The man in charge of the kitchen crew said they needed two plastic water tanks to install on the kitchen concrete roof. It would mean the drums could be eliminated and the floor kept dry.

Upon leaving the prison, Marcos and I went to a hardware store and bought two large water tanks, each with a capacity of about 250 gallons, and upon returning to the prison we were again searched by the guards.

The gate was opened and we drove right up to the kitchen area. When the kitchen staff saw the tanks they gave out a loud cheer.



Next, and with the negotiating help of Teresa, the wife of Marcos, we were able to purchase a load of beautiful blankets from a factory in Lima.

Soon we were again on our way to the jail, this time with blankets.

Elena, the social worker, sat at a white, plastic table and, when all was ready, the prisoners were escorted to us in single file, 10 at a time. Elena recorded their names. The aged and the sick were the first to receive blankets.

Now we have delivered more than 1,300 blankets.

I also noticed that Elena greeted each inmate by name. She has the tenderness of a mother and she is also a spiritual soul. She is our link during our visits. And because of our visits, something else is taking hold ... spiritual growth based on hope.

We saw reasons to continue this new mission, converting a jail into a spiritual retreat house. When we talk about Christ we also need to keep in mind His Mother Mary. With that in mind I got 42 large framed pictures of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Divine Mercy. The prison officials agreed to put these beautiful pictures in all of the important offices, the kitchen, pavilions, shops and the control gate.

On the third visit we had an uplifting experience. A group of 100 prisoners, standing in rows like disciplined soldiers, wanted and accepted a rosary along with a sheet of instructions on how to use and pray the rosary with faith.

I met old men who will never get out of this jail alive, and so many young men who should still be still studying or working. In one group was an elderly man who approached me with tears in his eyes. He thanked me for building his family a house 35 years ago.

Our presence has ignited a longing for the Word of God and in our humble way we will do what is humanly possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. We have in the making a most beautiful mission, so please pray for us.

New hubs of Oblate life

BY KEN THORSON, OMI

OTTAWA – In early September 2010, our former superior general, now Bishop Wilhelm Steckling OMI, spoke these words to the delegates of the general chapter (a gathering every six years of Oblate delegates from around the world) in Rome:

“...in the congregation, there appears to be an emerging consensus about our identity as missionary Oblates.”

Bishop Steckling went on to say that though the basic principles have been agreed upon *“...the one missing element was a change of heart. We realized that our whole life style as missionaries had to change so that we could live together more harmoniously, be more consistent in prayer and reflection, and then cross the borders to witness to Jesus Christ to the poorest and most abandoned in more creative ways.”*

Living together in harmony; consistency in prayer; crossing borders! Bishop Steckling’s appeal for a change of heart would become the motivation to declare that all Oblates *“... are in need of a profound personal and communal conversion...”*

This call is nothing new. As Christians, and as sons and daughters of St. Eugene, we are always called to conversion in our ministry and community life. But just a year later, at the Vancouver Convocation in 2011, our present Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, would speak to a certain urgency in this call, and to the possibilities it holds: *“The*

Ken Thorson, OMI





Francois Paradis, OMI, a member of the St. Kateri Tekakwitha Mission Centre in Winnipeg, chats with his brother Edmond Paradis, OMI

call to conversion is the dynamic process by which we strive to participate in God's mission... and makes

it possible for OMI Lacombe Canada to discern new directions in ministry, participating as a community of consecrated men and associates in God's mission."

Our response to this call to discern new directions for our ministry and community life was an 18-month process of meetings, prayer and consultation. From this process five major criteria emerged that would guide our decision-making:

- *Preference for ministry with the poor and marginalized* (with a renewed commitment to ministry with First Nations, in the inner cities, and to prisoners)
- *Young adult ministry and new membership*
- *Renewed emphasis on Apostolic community* (with a preference to community life under one roof)
- *Working in collaboration with associates*
- *Financial sustainability*

Final decisions came in February 2015, and we celebrated the way forward at our convocation in Cornwall, ON, in April. Then last summer Oblates across the country said goodbye to familiar faces and ministries, and new communities took shape in every district. Four of the new communities had the particular designation of *Mission Centre*.

Mission Centre is a relatively new concept, but already in place in the Anglo Irish and U.S. provinces.

In OMI Lacombe a *Mission Centre* is defined as "an apos-



Oblates Nestor Silva, Mark Blom, Mike Dechant and Nestor Gregoire,
members of the St. Joseph's Parish Mission Centre in Saskatoon

tolic community of Oblates responsible for a particular institution: a parish, a retreat centre, or an Oblate residence. Its communal life is “a prophetic sign” that gives witness to God’s reign and draws on the spirituality and charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod. It is an *evangelizing community*, a place of animation and education for the province in specific ministries, which collaborates, through discernment and consensus, in the evangelization process of the local churches of Canada. As members of the prophetic church, they go beyond the institutional boundaries by serving the people of God in a variety of ministries on the periphery of our society.”

There are presently four mission centres in OMI Lacombe Canada, each with a particular focus:

- In Ottawa, St. Joseph Parish – Young Adult
- In Hamilton, St. Patrick and St. Laurence Parish – Inner City and Young Adult
- In Winnipeg, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish – First Nations
- In Saskatoon, St Joseph Parish – Young Adult and Youth

Each centre has at least three Oblates, and each could grow over time. It’s important to note that while each mission

centre is based out of, or connected, to a parish, the parish will not be the only ministry of a mission centre team; some members will work outside and beyond the parish – in chaplaincies, outreach, education, etc. By definition, a mission centre is characterized by an abundance of complementary gifts and ministries. We also envision in each place a close collaboration with laity, and in particular, with Oblate associates.

While they do not have greater value than any other ministry in the province, we see mission centres as hubs of ministry and community life, where vocational and associate efforts will be focused. In *Evangelium Gaudium*, Pope Francis said: *“A parish is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach (no. 28).”*

Our hope is that each of these new communities can be centres of best practice and learning where people (laity, scholastics, inquirers, diocesan priests and religious) join in the life and ministry of the mission centre. Over time, our ambition is that through these centres the Oblates might make a significant contribution to local churches and neighbourhoods, and beyond.

In conclusion I ask for your prayers, for these are still early days in the history of these new ministries and communities. Pray that the mission centres will continue to become hopeful (if humble) signs of the Kingdom of God, and witnesses

to the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod being lived in new and creative ways in Canada today.

*(Fr. Thorson is a member of the
Core Leadership Team for the
Province of OMI Lacombe Canada)*

**Nicanor Sarmiento, OMI, Pastor of
St. Katerie Tekakwitha Parish and
member of the St. Kateri Tekakwitha
Mission Centre in Winnipeg**



Oblate Mission travelnews

Since 2004, Oblate Mission Travel has been leading small group volunteer experiences to Oblate missions around the world. Participants are able to experience daily life with the Oblate missionaries who have answered God's call to work with the poor.

You are invited to join us in May 2016 for a visit to the Kenya mission founded in 1997. The Oblates have established roots and witnessed spiritual and economic growth in three communities – Kionyo, Igandene and Méru. For the first time, participants will experience the Oblate's newest parish in Kisaju in the Ngong Diocese south of Nairobi. By visiting this new mission, participants will not only get to see a stark contrast geographically in this semi-desert region, they will also get to share the experience of starting a new mission with the Oblates.

In addition to joining the Oblates in their daily work, participants will be invited to volunteer their time and energies to an orphanage in Méru, Oblate supported secondary schools and local primary schools. Participants will be encouraged to connect with a school in their home community that will be twinned with a school in Kenya and help to create a direct link between Canada and Kenya. We will celebrate the impact MAMI supporters have made on the people of Kionyo as we visit the Women's Co-operative Bakery and the water project.

There will be daily mass and group prayer and the experience will include a spiritual director and a tour director.

For more information, please contact Oblate Mission Travel at 604-736-3972 or by e-mail at omimissiontrip@gmail.com.





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To enhance your prayer life, we are pleased to offer a complementary Lourdes Rosary Bracelet as a gift to

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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

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*A publication of the
Oblate Mission office.*

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On-line donations
can be given through:
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Printed in Canada by:

St. Peter's Press
Muenster, SK

AMMI Lacombe MAMI
Canada