

AMMI *Lacombe* MAMI
Canada

Oblate Spirit



February 2010

Our
Canada



Closer to home



The word “diminishment” often surfaces in discussions about the Oblates and in fact many religious organizations.

While it is true that aging is taking its toll, it is also surprising to learn of the many ways the Oblates have reached out, have expanded their vision.

Most often, especially in this publication, we read of the missions to Kenya and South America. However, we have dedicated this issue to the Canadian missions of OMI Lacombe Canada, of which we learned there is no shortage. From the beautiful north, to the impoverished downtown eastside in Vancouver, there are many stories to be told.

We have captured just some of them in these pages. In fact, there was so much to share, we decided to “do Canada” in two parts, with the rest of the Canadian mission story reserved for the June *Oblate Spirit*.

An undertaking of this magnitude could not be accomplished without the assistance of so many who provided information and outstanding photographs. One person we would like to single out is Harley Mapes, OMI, of Ottawa. Harley, who produces the Info Lacombe newsletter on the OMI Lacombe Canada website (www.omilacombe.ca) has been a storehouse of knowledge and a great source of photographs, both of which he so openly shares with us.

Thank you to all who have helped in this journey we call *Oblate Spirit*. The spirit of the Oblates is alive and well.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

The true North

"My life, my journey, my dreams ... but God's plan"



BY TONY KROTKI, OMI

It all started in 1988 when Fr. Jacques Johnson visited the Oblate Province in Odra, Poland, sharing stories about the missions in the McKenzie Delta in Canada's Northwest Territories. The last words of his presentation were "The far Canadian north needs two missionaries in the Hudson Bay region."

That was it. My dream was taking shape. A few months later the superior of the Hudson Bay delegation visited the scholasticate to offer encouragement and to tell us more about the Arctic. My heartbeat was rising again. I was ordained in June of 1990, and three months later I was on the plane to Toronto. Farewell Poland, hello Canada!

God's way was to accept the challenges ahead of me with grace ... new cultures, new languages, new traditions all so beautiful, and yet so unknown. I was determined to appreciate it all and to be open to everything.



During my four months of intensive English training in Winnipeg, I had a memorable encounter with three visitors – Fr. Robert, Fr. Jusipi and Fr. Van de Velde with a long white beard that I will never forget. The three were wise, yet so powerful in their appearance, and came with a humility I had never experienced. Their eyes penetrated so deeply that you felt the existence of the other world, the world of God's grace and love. Their eyes were loving, touching the inside of my being. I was unable to say a word. I actually could not because I did not speak English just yet, and no French was coming to my head either. I was speechless.

What an honor, what a gift. Three wonderful men who gave their entire life to the Gospel, to preach the truth of the Resurrection to the ends of the earth, were sitting next to me. I am even today in shock just thinking about it. This is how it all began for me.

My destination was Igloolik on Baffin Island. Two months of preparation for the Arctic included shopping for warm parkas, boots, mitts and other necessities. I flew to Churchill, MB, on May 12. Through the little window of the plane I could see the tree line was changing, the trees becoming so little, so





fragile. After a brief visit with the bishop, it was off to Arviat, where Fr. Joannes Rivoire was the residing missionary and our delegation superior.

What a reunion! It was almost three years since his visit to Poland. I was overwhelmed with joy. It was all true and real. Fr. Joannes had already seeded lettuce, tomatoes, carrots and onion. I thought this is what I would be doing; this was too great to be true. Everything, totally everything, was wonderful. Homes were covered by snow; the road was like a tunnel with deep snowbanks on each side. Could anything be better? This was going to be my life. I was happy.

Next week our journey continued to Baker Lake for one week with Fr. Louis Legare, OMI. The community was friendly, yet very different. I was feeling good there and I was ready for this one as well.

Five days later I landed in Chesterfield, where I was met by two people driving a little Elan snowmobile, very primitive but working. They were happy with it, but I just could not see how it could work. Three days later I was speeding on this vehicle, taking shortcuts toward the fishing lake. I thought I was flying yet it was only 20 kilometres per hour. Wow! How happy I was, wanting to stay there forever. I did not know the Arctic just yet, the true Arctic with all its beauty and tragedy, joy and

sadness at the same time. But I was happy, I was finally home and I had what I asked God for so many years ago. I believed nothing could stop my love for the people here. And I caught two fish!

Then it was back to Winnipeg for a month before going North for good. Upon arrival at the Rankin Inlet Airport, I could see Polish flags behind the fences of the airport facility. People were waving at me, holding little flags of my home country. I was puzzled. Were there Polish people in the Arctic? No, but soon I realized these were my first friends of the Inuit land.

But this joy soon turned into the reality of the hardness of life in the Arctic. Only two days later we received devastating news about eight people from Igloodlik drowning in the Arctic Ocean. Anthony and Leonie Qunnut lost their children and grandchildren. The news was met with painful screaming, shouting, anger expressed in uncontrollable rage, people falling from their seats, and tears everywhere. Yet, 20 minutes later, I found amazing compassion, love, courage, faith, generosity, hope and most of all God's presence among the suffering and devastating hearts of many. The emotion that personally touched me the most at that very moment was deep and penetrating compassion. I understood so little of what was going on yet. I did not know how traumatic that was. Oh how little I knew. The bodies were never recovered.

I finally arrived at





Igloolik, just days after a memorial service for the eight dead. We landed at 3 a.m. I did not know that there was no nighttime in summer. I lost track of time and was quite confused. Every community was on a different time. I

had no clue why. It seemed too much for one night.

Life in the mission had begun. People were so kind, but I was frustrated and humiliated by not being able to communicate. Everyone spoke to me in Inuktitut. I discovered that if I said “Ii” while gently lifting my eyebrows I should be okay. Whenever I did that, people laughed at me. I believed they were impressed with my understanding of what they said. Only later I was told that it was usually the wrong answer given by me that made them so happy.

My mentor said to me, “I can teach you language grammar but the way of life and the knowledge of culture, tradition, mentality, skills and life in the Arctic you must learn from people themselves.” I seriously took it to heart. I decided to travel with people – hunting, fishing, and observing their way of life, way of being, way of communicating, and way of survival. I began to make my own sled, hunting and fishing tools. I learned how to make an igloo, and make it good and fast. I learned how to hunt without asking questions, but imitating those who were willing to become the greatest teachers of my life in the Frozen Arctic. I found myself committed and eager to know all the secrets of the North.

I imagined what it was like for the greatest missionaries who had come before. I admired their ability, gifts, conviction, love, compassion and humility. Humility gave me the most trouble in my missionary life, yet I had to accept it with no exception.

Finally, I had to face the true missionary life on my own. I was transferred to Gjoa Haven with two other missions, Pelly Bay and Taloyoak. I was inexperienced, young, and very much alive. I soon made it known to local people that I was not to sit on my chair, but that the land was where my eyes were fixed. I learned how to hunt, how to live on the land.

I loved it so much that I mastered the hunting skills and knowledge of the land. A few trips of lost direction taught me to be more trusting of Inuit ways of life. God gave me wonderful Inuit friends, companions, brothers and teachers. Along with the land experience, God was showing me the way to peoples' hearts. God would reveal to me the true nature of His people, the beauty of their hearts, and the hunger for love.

In the people, I found unity and compassion in time of suffering, dedication when someone's life is in danger, sacrifices for one another, respect and a friendship I never had before.

Life for the last 19 years in the Inuit land has been wonderful. My last eight years of ministry have been beautiful, but very hard as well. So much happened in these eight years, including wonderful visits to Arctic Bay, the smallest flock in the furthest North Catholic mission, and Pond Inlet. The peo-



ple are very loving and open, yet struggling to survive as Catholics because of the disdain shown by others. Beautiful land surrounding their town is probably helping them forget about pain and rejection.



At Pond Inlet, a place of dreams, people again struggle for survival as Catholics, to keep Christ alive in their hearts, in their families and in the workplace. They want to be witnesses, but how difficult it is when your own family is fighting against you because you love Christ. How do you survive? How do you keep your faith? How do you live as children of God while others hate you by word and by action? This is a kind of martyrdom that is happening today in Nunavut. The Church is going through much testing. Can we survive?

My experience has included weeks of journeying by land and sea with so many people, hard work with them out in the camp, surviving storms and so many accidents, being searched for, and falling through the ice. God obviously has a plan for me. I am here, I am alive, and I am on the journey with God's people through the known and the unknown.

People of the north learn fast. They fight for their rights but they also fight for survival. It is not survival of the past, but a new kind of struggle. They fight to stop drugs coming in to destroy the families, marriages, love and trust. The general sickness of our communities is not the physical one, but moral. The number of people addicted to drugs and alcohol are destroying themselves and the Inuit culture. Addictions destroy the body, mind and the spirit and it will destroy the true Inuit Nation. The joyful life can turn into bitterness and

greed. This is one of the most painful things I am finding after so many years of living in the Great Far North.

I have seen people in need and no one asks what they need. The death of youths taking their own lives has been among the hardest moments in my journey with them and their families. Excruciatingly difficult for me is still the fact that children have no food and no care, but parents have drugs and alcohol.

There is hope though. The youth have given me hope and I have hope in them. I pray every day that love and hope in their lives will not be destroyed by the negligence of their parents and the addictions, by demoralized activities in our homes and towns. I pray that they will choose the right paths, the way of Christ in their lives.

Throughout 19 years of my ministry, Loving Father had given me opportunity to do the best I could in my Oblate life. The love of the people and amazing friendships changed my life forever, and the patience in their lives taught me to be humble. The deep compassion to human tragedy shaped my heart and made it even more sensitive. The love of children made me forget the struggles. The conviction and dedication of youth make the life worth living. All this has made my life blessed. Their life is my life, their suffering becomes my suffering, their struggle becomes my struggle, their loss becomes my loss, their joy becomes my joy, and their happiness becomes my happiness.

We are all God's children. I love and am loved by people of the warmest hearts at the coldest end of the Earth.





Warmth, from heart to hearth

Greg Oszust, OMI, who serves the community of Chesterfield Inlet in the diocese of Churchill Hudson-Bay, has learned that frugality can have its rewards ... like heating fuel on a cold day. In Northern Canada, there are some cold days.

Chesterfield Inlet, a small community of about 300 on the shore of Western Hudson Bay, was the first funded mission (1912) among Inuit people, but missionaries were visiting much before that. The first mission was established because it was a gathering place with good hunting, so missionaries found it easy to reach as many as they could with their message about God.

Oszust has been in the diocese since 1998, spending two years at Chesterfield Inlet, three years at Arviat, and then a stint at Iqaluit before moving back to Chesterfield Inlet a year ago.

According to Oszust, the Chesterfield Inlet community is slowly diminishing because of economics. Rankin Inlet, just 80 miles south, is rapidly growing as young people concerned about their future (education and jobs) prefer to move there to better the opportunities for themselves and their children. Baker Lake, a mining community northwest of Chesterfield, also draws some people.

But there is a benefit to being small, says Oszust. "We have some families coming from bigger communities because of social problems associated with drugs and alcohol. Because Chesterfield is smaller and more isolated, some people can find refuge from their addictions and get on their feet again. Everyone knows everybody's business, and that can have its positives."

Oszust is enjoying his time back in Chesterfield. "I find work rewarding and fulfilling. You get to know people and become a part of their life."

Last spring the parish hosted regional meetings for 45 lay presiders in the Kivalliq region (Churchill, Arviat, Whale Cove, Rankin Inlet, Baker Lake, Repulse Bay and Coral Harbor). During that meeting 14 young people were confirmed. Later in the year, 32 children participated in First Communion preparation. "We had two funerals during the summer but we also had nine baptisms this year. Sunday service participation is about 30 per cent of the population," explained Oszust, who spends a significant amount of time counselling parish members.

Oszust welcomed the warmth of summer. "It was busy for me, not so much with pastoral work, but with fixing what you can before winter comes. I did some roofing, built the porch so handicapped people could access the church, installed a new furnace, replaced two doors with frames and painted the front of the mission building.

"I had some help from the community as well. But most of the time you have to hire someone so I prefer to do it myself to save money. I prefer to put that money towards heating fuel. Cold winter surely will be coming."



A lifetime of service

Bertrand Mathieu, OMI, was the 2009 recipient of the St. Joseph Award by Catholic Missions in Canada. The award is given to a missionary priest, sister, brother or layperson who



has carried out a noteworthy missionary type of ministry over a long period of time.

Fr. Bertrand has been with the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas since 1950. He was born in Drummondville, Que., in 1923, and was ordained a priest in 1949 after attending the novitiate at Lebreton, SK. He has lived and served in Saskatchewan ever since.

His first obedience was in La Loche, SK, where he ministered for 37 years and spent 21 years as hospital administrator. His biggest challenge was to learn the language of the Dene people. The last 15 years have been spent at Patuanak, SK, and he still ministers to the people in their language.

At one time, he lived in community with other priests, brothers and sisters, but now he is alone in the rectory at Patuanak.

Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie, OMI, best summed up the life of Fr. Bertrand. "He has been a very dedicated missionary. (People) value his presence and he does everything wholeheartedly. He has given his whole life to the Dene people and is willing to die for his people."

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A Message from My Desk

BY ROBERTA EDWORTHY, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Time has passed quickly. I have worked in the AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI office in Saskatoon for three years. I am overwhelmed by the generosity of our supporters. People all over Canada support our many Oblate missions in Canada and around the world. Not only the donations we receive, but the prayers and kind words of support leave me in awe.



The opportunity to meet some of the Oblates serving in Kenya, Guatemala, Peru, Brazil and Canada has been great. These Oblates serve the needy with great enthusiasm and with the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod. I aspire to being like these missionaries in their unselfishness and dedication to support those in need.

My work of receipting donations, communicating with the donors and the Oblates is an honour. I feel as though we are all necessary in this process to make the world a better place for all people to live. In 2010 I hope you will all be a part of this great organization and support our Oblate missions.

At The Helm

BY JOHN AND EMILY CHERNESKI

John Malazdrewich, OMI, was recently named Provincial (the leader of the administration team) of OMI Lacombe Canada. Lacombe is one of more than 60 provinces in the worldwide congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. By way of introduction, he graciously agreed to respond to a series of questions.

Tell us about your background.

I was born in Biggar, Saskatchewan, the sixth in a family of eight – four boys and four girls. Dad was an engineer with CN and VIA Rail, my mother worked tirelessly in the home. I am 51 years old and attended Catholic schools in Biggar.

What inspired you to join the Oblates?

I was raised in a Diocesan parish. I had fleeting thoughts about the priesthood at a young age. When I was in Grade 12, I was reading *The Columbian* magazine (my father was a member of the Knights of Columbus) and saw all the different communities advertising, and that is where I first learned of the concept of being a “brother.” I also discovered there was a congregation of Oblates nearby in North Battleford.

I entered the novitiate, studied at Newman Theological College in Edmonton and then worked as a hospital chaplain for a couple of years.

One night as I was leaving my academic advisor’s office, he asked why I had become a brother instead of a priest. I responded, but realized when I got back to my room that I didn’t believe my answer. That initiated an 18-month discernment process, and as the door started to close on being a brother, the door to the priesthood began to open.

My spiritual director asked me to converse with 10 different

people who knew me from 10 different aspects of my life, to share my discernment process with them. None of them were surprised to think that I might become a priest. I was the only one surprised. There was no one 'aha!' moment, it developed over time. But it was because of the discernment with these 10 people that I felt I was "called by the people" to the priesthood.

Because of that, every time I say mass and the words "May the Lord accept this sacrifice at your hands," I believe this is a moment of being ordained again as the people call upon me to offer the sacrifice on their behalf.

Who was the most influential Oblate in your life?

It was Fr. Bill Walker, an Oblate who was the assistant novice master and later the provincial of St. Paul's province (he died of a heart attack six years ago). He mentored my journey of discernment and was a role model of community life.

Your favorite book?

I don't have one favorite, but I recently enjoyed reading *The Shack*. The theology in this book really stretched my thinking.

If there was one person you could spend an afternoon with, past or present, who would it be?

At this point in my life I would love to sit with Fr. Albert Lacombe. I've been reading about Lacombe and realize what a unique Oblate he was. He brought the Oblate charism to Western Canada and lived it out in the context of people's lives and struggles. He was instrumental in negotiations between the First Nation people and the railroad. The vision/charism/mission of de Mazenod was enfolded by Lacombe in Western Canada.

Looking ahead to your three-year term, what challenges do you see for the Oblates of Canada?

How do we take the mission and enfold it in this time and

place? The mission hasn't changed. How do we enfold it in today's world?

While we are facing diminishment in numbers and dollars, we need to remember that there is a difference between diminishment and death. Diminishment is not the same as death or status quo. We can be called and sent in new ways as we embrace diminishment.

Older people can be diminished in health, mobility, etc. Some give up, become angry and frustrated. If you embrace and befriend diminishment, it can lead to creativity in life. For

example, a community of nuns in the United States was dying out. So they opened their mother house to palliative care for people in the community, and that led to people joining their order.

We are called into mission and service out of who we are. We must embrace who we are, where we are and see where we are being called. Rather than resisting and bemoaning dimin-

ishment, we have to accept and embrace it, which can lead to new life and new expression.

The three major themes for administration for the next three years will centre on mission, Oblate associates and elder care.

We can still do missionary work at home and abroad. We were asked to start a mission in Kenya during a time of diminishment, and in many ways this has helped open new ways of being. We can't forget that de Mazenod only had six men in his community, but sent some to Canada where they shaped the Canadian church.

The danger of diminishment is wanting to hold on to what you know and not venture out. In Canada we need to see



where we need to be and make choices from the basis of mission and community life.

In the more recent past, many Oblates who worked in First Nation communities felt they were no longer wel-

come. But that is changing. Native people have been affirming Oblates and their ministry by writing letters of support for in-kind ministry as part of the settlement agreement between the federal government, First Nations and Catholic entities.

Growth of Oblate associates could be a factor in providing both mission and ministry. In some ministries, take retreat houses for example, there are very few Oblates. But there are many committed lay people who give time, energy and talent to make our retreat houses sustainable because they believe in the mission. This leads to a different understanding of mission. The web (of Oblates) is growing, not only with lay associates but with people who are associated with Oblate missions and believe in the mission. We need to empower and work with these people – they need to be part of the decision-making process.

We need to find ways to come together that respect the unique vocations of both the clergy and lay people.



What message would you like to give Oblate supporters?

They make a tremendous difference and are integral to the mission. Our supporters understand and believe in the charism and our works. Their financial support allows us to do so much, and we very much appreciate and need their prayers.

Reaching out in Manitoba

BY NESTOR GREGOIRE, OMI

Just outside the city of Winnipeg, Thomas Novak, OMI, has been involved with migrant workers toiling in central Manitoba. This involvement began 10 years ago and is a monthly ministry during the summer and autumn.

The focus is on a monthly Sunday mass with fellowship and community building following the Eucharist. When Albert Lafrenière, OMI, was pastor at St. Eustache, (which is near two farms that employ Mexican workers) the parish invited the workers to hold a Spanish mass in their church. The parish welcomes the workers and provides beverages and snacks for a convivio (informal gathering) after the Eucharist. One of the nearby farms that employs about 150 workers provides a bus to take the workers to the Sunday mass, a distance of 15 kilometres.

Thomas has worked hard to involve members of Winnipeg's Hispanic community in the ministry, hoping they will eventually make it their own. He is delighted to see them sharing in the Oblate spirit, bringing "good news" to these lonely and marginalized men. Many of those who have joined in the ministry are themselves newly-arrived immigrants or refugees.



In addition to the monthly Eucharist, Thomas and his companions try to help improve conditions for the workers in other ways: by mediating when they have difficulties with local merchants, writing articles and organizing public events to educate Canadians about the harsh realities faced by these “strangers in our midst” and by lobbying governments to change the laws so as to lessen the hardships faced by the workers.

“Last year I made a presentation to the Manitoba Workers Standards Commission. They adopted some of my recommendations, especially with regard to having rest time and not working seven days a week, every week.”

Each year members of the Hispanic community organize a little fiesta around Mexican Independence Day (Sept. 15). The fiesta means a lot to the workers who are in a foreign country, far away from their families.

The migrant worker sits in a vulnerable position. He can work every year in Canada for eight months under a special permit but cannot apply for permanent residency even if he has worked here for many, many summers.

The farm or orchard may not rehire them again next season if they suspect workers of “making trouble” by talking to a union or otherwise advocating for better working conditions. The poor man in Mexico or Central America cannot take such a risk to his income. The migrant worker lives between a rock and a very hard place.

“This is our way to be involved with some of the most marginalized people in Canadian society,” said Thomas about his ministry. “Their lives are so constricted; they live almost like they are in jail. Yet they are just trying to help their families back home. This is one of the important ways I live out my Oblate vocation.”



Serving the migrant workers

BY NESTOR GREGOIRE, OMI

Otto Rollheiser, OMI, has a new theme: "Have language, will travel!"

One of the founding members of the Peru mission, Otto spent 20 years in South America, and feels indebted to that community.

"I want to give back to the South Americans what they have given to me," said Otto, who shifted his base to St. Theresa's Parish on the north end of Kelowna, a base from which to make contact with migrant workers.

The Okanagan Valley is the fruit growing centre of Western Canada. The excellent climate supports orchards of pear, cherry, apple and plum trees, along with many berry and vegetable crops that require harvesting each summer and fall. Within the Valley are approximately 1,000 migrant Mexican workers who come to pick the fruit and work in the orchards, arriving in March and working until October.

It is difficult to contact these workers because they are living on the farms and orchards and have no method of reliable transportation. These workers are seasonal and live on the periphery of the life of the city. The major determinant of their time in Canada is the weather: when the weather is good they must work!

It is difficult for Otto to go out to meet them because the work schedule is entirely dependent on the weather. This also makes it



Otto Rollheiser, OMI



difficult for the Mexican workers to come to the Spanish mass that is celebrated on the fourth Sunday every month in St. Theresa's Parish. "I find it (mass once a month) is not enough and if possible and the stars are aligned, we may be able to have a mass each Sunday ... God willing."

The core of this Spanish speaking congregation is the South Americans who make permanent residence in the Valley; some of whom have been in Canada for up to 20 years.

"I have a listing of about 75 families living in the community who have migrated from different countries in Latin America," he explained.

Always ready with a smile, Otto meets the workers informally on the street and in the restaurants. "I approach them, speak with them and give them my card." They are always invited to share in the Spanish mass.

If the influx of migrant workers continues there will be a future for this ministry. "Our founder went out to the fishermen, he didn't wait for them to come to him," Otto explained. "If they are here, this is the place for our Oblates, especially those who have worked with the Latin Americans. In Southern Ontario there are quite a few migrant workers. The Church should not be forgetting about them."

Oblate associates

BY DAVID SAX

REGINA – Four years ago when I was on retreat at Qu'Appelle House of Prayer, I read a biography of St. Eugene de Mazenod. I was moved by the story of his childhood antics in the marketplace while his nurse purchased food and his later devotion as a priest to bring "Good News" to these salt-of-the-earth people. I strongly identified with the sense of friendship, loyalty and care he shared with these ordinary folk and how they reciprocated in kind. This felt familiar and spoke of my experience of how God has been leading Karen and me in our marriage over these past 33 years. This led to some interesting discussions together.

When we reflected on our journey as a couple we saw a pattern: the gifts of friendship building, care, hospitality, prayer and service to others. We felt a connection to the charism of St. Eugene. We felt a call to discern whether we were being called to be "Oblate associates" of the community. During our period of discernment we met with the members of the Potter's House community in Saskatoon and grew in our understanding of the community, how the charism is lived among them and the opportunities to participate. During our period of discernment, Karen and I realized that our marriage vows had contained in them a declaration to live not just for each other but to live for Christ by service to others. From the beginning of our marriage we have been experiencing the charism of St. Eugene.

Our way to live out the Gospels has been as ordinary folk, through initiating and supporting various intentional communities, raising our children to be people of kindness, compassion, justice and service, taking the responsibility to seek out opportunities to grow in faith, hope and love and to let the light of Christ shine out in our marriage to all we meet. We



Karen and David Sax

have participated in several movements to build up the body of Christ and to care for others struggling in their lives. Many of these intentional communities and movements have cycled through the natural processes of birth, fruition, diminishment and death. Yet the life of Christ is ever reborn in us as we seek to be faithful to the call and gift we have received.

Being Oblate associates has given us a home in which to strengthen and exercise this call and gift. We need the support, wisdom and friendship of our fellow Oblates to meet the challenge of living the Gospel in our workplaces, our activities with our parish, the various volunteerisms we have and the strangers we meet. Our lives haven't changed outwardly, yet we feel grace released in us by the embrace of the Saskatchewan District Community of vowed Oblates and associates. We desire to renew our commitment to the Oblate community this February and allow the Holy Spirit to renew in us the joy of living the Gospels in daily life and to be Good News in the marketplace.

Returning to Spirit:

Reconciliation for Creating New Possibilities

BY LUCIE LEDUC

What does it mean to create the space where reconciliation happens? Marc Pizandawatc is co-founder of “Returning to Spirit”, a three-part workshop designed to bring together Aboriginal peoples and church people to heal and be reconciled over the legacy of residential schools.

Pizandawatc will tell you that this series of workshops – Part I for First Nations only, Part II with exactly the same content as Part I, for Church only, and then Part III for Reconciliation of both First Nations and Church – is more than a workshop. For him this reconciliation is a passion and a way of life. The Creator has called him to this work, he says, and he along with his team of trainers, direct all of their energies to making reconciliation happen.

In October, at Queen’s House Retreat and Renewal Centre in Saskatoon, 19 church people gathered from six Christian denominations for two days to prepare to meet face-to-face and one-on-one with First Nations people. The following two days, 15 First Nations people gathered to do exactly the same thing. The groups prepare separately but are offered the same listening and communication tools to ensure an open and safe space is created whereby reconciliation can take place. The final three days both groups met in a large circle of 45 persons,

including church and First Nations trainers, and chose to meet with whomever they felt necessary to complete their healing and to be reconciled with each other.





The day began with prayers from both First Nations and Church. The atmosphere was one of some anxiety and fear. As the morning progressed and people left in pairs to meet at various stations throughout the house, the atmosphere was transformed into one of growing peace, joy and lightness. The next day, after another full day of one-to-one meetings, the air changed completely from one of anxiety, fear and separateness to one of completeness and wholeness.

Reconciliation creates union and community, and this was fully expressed near the end of the second day when everyone played together freely, without inhibitions and without any residual sense of separateness. This was a family healed and freed to laugh, play and love together, and reconciled to create new possibilities for future generations together.

Among those who came for reconciliation was Fr. Lawrence DeMong, OSB, from the Benedictine Abbey at Muenster, and currently the pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in Saskatoon. On the experience of Returning to Spirit, he says:

"I have worked in various places and parishes in the Keewatin-The Pas RC Diocese over the past 10 years, yet this experience took me deeper into our First Nations brothers and

sisters than all of those 10 years. I have never shared so much pain and communed with so much injustice in my entire life. And, I have never experienced such profound healing either in myself or in others as I have during these three days of reconciliation. This workshop has profoundly changed my life. I have entered the experience of First Nations as never before, both in their pain and in their possibilities.



“Unquestionably, after the five-day session I told people it was the most profound and effective of any workshop I have ever done. This last experience surpasses them all.”

This work of reconciliation will continue to address the residential school legacy for Church, non-Aboriginal peoples and First Nations. Queen’s House Retreat and Renewal Centre will continue to host the workshops in an effort to further reconciliation in our communities.

(Leduc is the program co-ordinator at Queen’s House Retreat and Renewal Centre.)



Christmas at its best

Students at St. Augustine's School in Vancouver take Advent seriously. They have extra prayer assemblies, support the local food bank, and go home to ask their parents for one less gift under the tree so that money could be sent to support the Oblate Missions in Kenya.

For the last seven years, the students have incorporated this giving into their Advent concert collection. With the colourful stories of Ken Forster, OMI, to inspire them, they have 'bought' a jeep, a motorcycle, pipes for the water project, and this year supported the orphans' project.

St. Augustine's, which is home to 225 students from kindergarten to Grade 7, raised about \$5,000 for the Kenya missions this Christmas. As a school begun by the Oblates and Sisters of St. Ann, they know the Oblate charism well.

St. Augustine's parish and school were founded by the Oblates in 1911. The original building housed the school and church before the current church was constructed in 1937. After a fire, that original building was condemned and a new building, with an expected lifespan of 30-40 years, was constructed in 1951.

Since 2000, the parish has been fund-raising for a new school/multi-use facility, with the goal of having it completed by

the century mark in 2011. Because building costs soared, it was decided in 2009 to attempt to build the school in phases. The parish has raised about \$2.6 million, and the cost for the total project is currently set at approximately \$9.5 million.



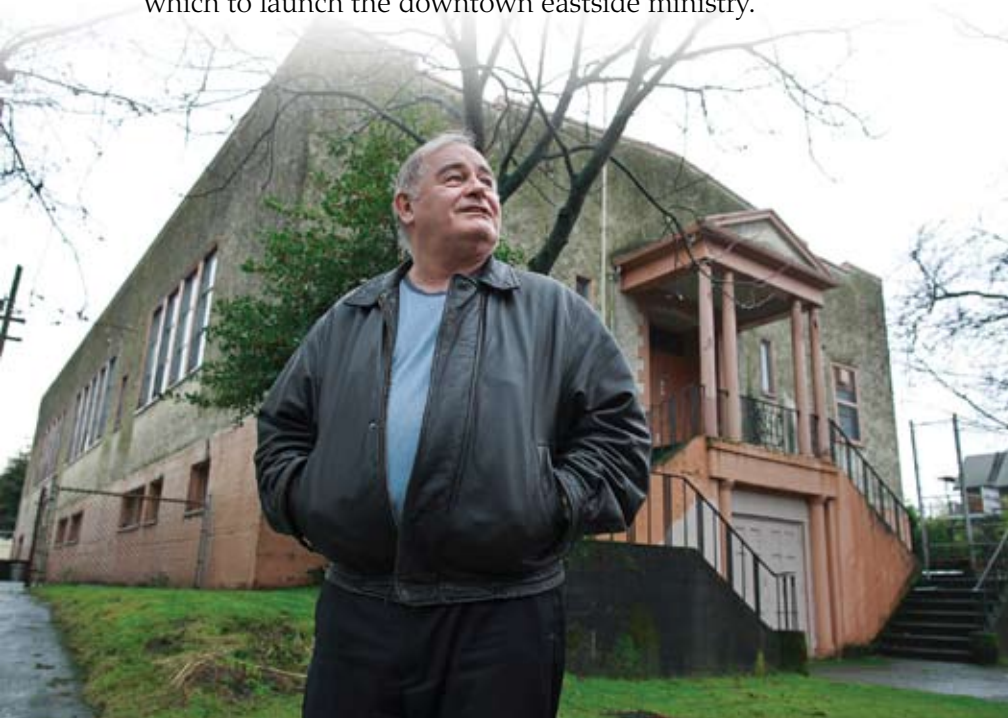
Hope for the future

An old school that is being used as a warehouse could be a valuable storehouse of hope for residents of Vancouver's downtown eastside, considered by some to be one of the poorest urban centres in Canada.

Ken Forster, OMI, has a vision of a "family life centre" that would be housed in the school/warehouse.

"We want to miraculously renovate the old school that has served only as an unheated warehouse these past eight years," wrote Forster in a recent message to his supporters. "This will be done but the how has evaded us. It could become a great space for parish functions as well as a facility to support 'family life' in an area that includes a significant social housing component, to create even more welcoming spaces for new people."

The building is just around the corner from the Campbell Rectory in the Sacred Heart Parish, a convenient location from which to launch the downtown eastside ministry.



"It is easy to let a feeling of depression engulf me in this ministry, as I am both blessed and burdened with a strong drive to make a difference," wrote Forster. "I hope I can learn to rejoice in smaller blessings. That has been happening the last few months. I rejoice that we have been making some progress in building a small community of disciples here who are wanting to work together to 'imagine Catholic ministry' in the heart of the city. We are community building."

One need only drive down the streets to see the magnitude of the problems encountered in this neighborhood. Poverty and drug use go hand in hand.

"A small team is working hard to outreach to the neighbors, to strengthen bonds within our parishes," said Forster.

"Some of us are involved with promoting Metro Vancouver Alliance, a broad-based alliance encompassing all faiths, unions and non-profit organizations. This alliance will exercise a power to move our society to respond to the needs of the marginalized. All these things are slow ... but they are moving."

WANTED: YOUR STORIES!

There are many charities and good causes which 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: lacombemami@sasktel.net

Oblate Mission travelnews

Longtime friends of the Oblates will know about the role of the Canadian Oblates in establishing the Oblates in Peru. For more than 50 years, the Peru/Canada Oblate relationship has flourished.

Oblate Mission Travel has organized a journey to Peru this summer, where participants will meet and work side by side with the legendary Moe Schroeder, OMI, Joe Devlin, OMI, and Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI. This mission will take us from the busy, inner city parishes in Lima along the coast to Chinchá Alta, heavily damaged by the 2007 earthquake. Blaise has worked tirelessly in the rebuilding process. The Oblates may be the only order to own and operate a gravel pit!

We will travel to the high Andes and the missions of Orcotuna and Aucayacu. Finally, we will travel by boat to Sta. Clotilde deep in the jungle along the Napo River where Fr. Moe's hospital was founded almost 30 years ago.

Our spiritual director will be Mario Azrak, OMI, a Sudan-born Australian who is part of our Kenya Mission team in

Karen. It has the potential to be the experience of a lifetime. There are two options for the expedition: July 2-13 (Lima, Chinchá Alta, Orcotuna and Aucayacu) or July 2-20 (also includes Sta. Clotilde and Machu Picchu). Contact Neysa Finnie nmfinnie@yahoo.com or call (604) 736-3972 for additional information. The trip is limited to 16 people.



Vocations ministry

BY KEN THORSON, OMI

A vocation to the religious life or priesthood, or any vocation for that matter, is first of all the work of God. Out of love God initiates and calls, and in an attempt to imitate that love, we respond. But this is not the end of vocations ministry, as coming to know God's will in our lives is never a solitary pursuit. Vocations ministry, especially as it concerns young people, should be understood as a pastoral ministry that belongs to the whole of the Body of Christ. This idea is captured well by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC), whose slogan is *Called By One Invited By Many*. This has become a mantra for me, and in meetings with Oblates and associates across the country my primary message is that each of us, in our lives and ministries, has to do something concrete in the area of vocations ministry.



The state of vocations ministry in any religious community or diocese is one of the chief indicators of the overall health of the particular group, and is a sign of the group's faith that their charism is still valid. It demonstrates the belief (or lack thereof) that God has a purpose for them beyond past glories or even present ministries.

Aware of the limitations posed by an aging membership, the myriad choices open to young people today, and the struggles, both cultural and ecclesial, faced by young people who do consider a vocation to religious life or priesthood, I go about my ministry with real hope for the future. In response to the obvious question, 'where does this hope come from?' I point to a number of things: two candidates living at the new Formation House in Ottawa; 19 inquirers attending five discernment weekends held across the country in the past year, and the

openness of Oblates and associates across OMI Lacombe to concrete involvement in vocations ministry.

Finally, I find my greatest hope in the generosity of the young people I've encountered in this ministry. Talented and thoughtful young people, in larger numbers than I believed just one year ago, are open to the possibility of religious life. Significantly though, in a shift from the past, they need to be asked to join us; and if asked many of them will give it serious thought. If we don't ask them, however, the idea will slip from the radar, an opportunity missed.

This brings me to you, the readers of *Oblate Spirit*. I want to challenge you to become involved in vocations ministry. Talk to the young people in your life about their vocation. In addition to discussions about marriage and career, ask them if they've ever thought of priesthood and religious life. And when you talk to them about this, share with them the good qualities you see in them that make you think they might have something to offer as a religious or priest. If they consider it and decide that their calling is in another direction, that is good. At least they will have considered it.

God continues to call people as religious, married, single and as priests. God also calls people to develop new and different forms of life. Common to each person's story though is that one's vocation becomes clear over time and through relationships with God and other people. Vocations ministry then truly is the work of the whole Body of Christ; it is a communal effort. My hope is that in time all of us bound together by the

charism of St. Eugene will make vocations promotion, through prayer and invitation, a part of our life.

(Thorson, based in Ottawa, is
OMI Lacombe Canada
vocation director)



Oblate killed in Haiti quake

BY RAYMOND MARQUIS, OMI

Brother Weedy Alexis, a 28-year-old Oblate scholastic, was among the thousands who died as a result of the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti. He was found under the rubble of the Centre of Studies for Religious.

Other Oblates and scholastics in the ruined city have survived.

The Oblate presence in Haiti took root in 1943 when four Canadian and American Oblates were invited to Haiti to replace priests blocked in France during World War II. Other Oblates came to staff abandoned parishes pointedly using Haitian Creole, and to begin a high-school seminary in southern Haiti as a sign of confidence in the leadership potential of the local population. Administrative offices were set up in Port-au-Prince in 1950, and Oblates began serving in other dioceses shortly after that.

There are 137 missionaries in the Oblate Haitian province (including two bishops) and 40 Oblates in Port-au-Prince.

Donations for Haiti earthquake relief can be sent to AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI, 601 Taylor St. West, Saskatoon, SK S7M 0C9.

Any help will be used to meet real and urgent needs in this devastated area. I enjoyed the privilege of serving the Haitian people as a missionary for 28 years. Their simple faith through

all kinds of adversity mirrors the complex confidence of Job in a loving God. Many thanks for being the instrument of God's heart and sharing His concern for them.



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