

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit



February 2013



*On a mission*

# The missionary spirit



What does it mean to be missionary?

That is the theme we chose for this issue of *Oblate Spirit*. It is not an easy question to answer, because there are so many possible answers. We hope the stories we selected offer a sampling of answers and examples to follow.

We all have the ability (means) to be missionary. Some choose to be present to the poor at home or abroad, offering physical and emotional aid, or by assisting with and providing desperately needed infrastructure. Something as simple as fresh water, or a cement floor in a classroom, or a mattress are amenities we take for granted. Not so in impoverished parts of our world.

As young Blair Bysouth showed us, it doesn't mean you have to be in Africa, or Peru, or in some destitute third world country to possess the missionary spirit.

It might be just as simple as listening to your heart, and allowing the "God-ness" in your soul to shine through.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

*P.S. It is with great joy that we can say the Barcaza has been rescued from dry-dock. The Barcaza is a boat used in Peru to ferry the sick up the Napo River to the Oblate hospital in Santa Clotilde. It was in desperate need of repair, and our Canadian Oblate friends came through in spades. Thank you!*

# Walking with those in need

BY GERARD CONLAN, OMI

What does it mean to be a missionary in a foreign country? Some say it is to be with the people. Some say it is to help the people. I came to Kenya in 2010 with a lot of enthusiasm to put my practical engineering and administration skills to good use. Doing things is useful, helpful and necessary, but I do not think it is being missionary. I think to be a missionary in any country is to walk with people, sharing their joys and sorrows. Our gifts, talents and skills simply form a framework within which to walk with people in a meaningful way.

That is why it is wrong to compare missionaries based on what they 'achieve'. Most of the 'successes' of the individual missionary go unseen by the world, but are deeply felt by the people they have touched through their presence. But, being



Gerry Conlan, OMI



a missionary is a two-way relationship, where we need God to touch us through the 'poor' so that our lives are meaningful and joyful. I say 'poor' in inverted commas because, often, they are richer than the missionary in areas of courage, generosity and patience.

Psychologists tell us that we can achieve our way to happiness for a limited time ... beyond the age of 30, people need something deeper ... contentment with oneself. The same applies to people starting a new job. Being a practically skilled person, it was easy for me to settle into the Kenya mission by being busy 'doing' things. However, in order to be happy, one needs to be touched beyond the achievements.

I would like to share one experience that has shocked, frustrated and yet, touched me. In the western world child abuse is a very serious issue addressed loudly and rightly. In Kenya, the abuse of the girl child, in particular, is like a terrible disease. It has been so common that there is a special clause in the new constitution demanding it be prosecuted vigorously. Of course, every adult – especially those in authority – say all the right things. But too many have excuses why they cannot progress, at their level, to investigate and prosecute such incidents. Orphans are particularly at risk because it is hard work pushing for justice against people with money to bribe those in authority.





I have been touched by the situation of an orphan girl, 13 to 14 years old, allegedly raped by someone close to her. I cannot speak about the issue in detail, but the lack of action and slow response by various authorities has shocked me, and frustrated us as a community.

The girl has touched us all because of her courage to report it and her ongoing courage to face it. She recently ran away – no one knew where she was. I was afraid she had been silenced. But, thankfully, she returned and confided to the counsellor (arranged by the parish) that she was afraid and is not treated well by some people at her school. There is a great emphasis in Kenyan culture to avoid embarrassment, so for example, while a wife may be very angry with her husband, generally she will publicly try to cover it up.

This situation reminds me of the 'frustration' God endures as we limp along the journey to Heaven. It also parallels the pain of parents walking with their children as they suffer and grow through life. In persona Christi, we too endure with the girl: she told the counsellor she needed new shoes ... we can do that. We also pressured the authorities, step by step. But



she has to do everything else. She has promised to stick it out until the end of this year when she will graduate from primary school. Although completely frustrated by this state of affairs, the girl's courage strengthens my commitment to the mission and my vocation. Buildings and computer colleges can't do that! Our gifts and talents are the tools that make possible the personal presence, listening and caring that makes a missionary effective.

*[Postscript: The young girl in question successfully completed her Primary Education (Year 8). She came to see us about two months after school resumed looking for assistance for secondary school. We asked her to return with some other information but she has not returned (more than 6 months ago). In the meantime I am becoming more aware of other students being abused in various ways, including alcoholics, abandonment, and being pressured for sexual favours for continued "support". Our Youth Seminar, this year, focused on dealing with issues at home, and breaking the silence. **Thank you** for your support in Canada... it encourages us to continue, and assists with practical interventions.]*

*(Conlan is an Australian member of the Kenyan mission team)*



# Oblate Mission travel news

## Next stop – Kenya

Amidst the lush tea and coffee plantations of the Meru people, on the slopes of Mount Kenya, you will find the first Oblate mission in Kenya established in 1997 under the jurisdiction of the OMI Lacombe Canada province.

The Oblates have taken root, witnessing spiritual and economic growth in the communities of Kionyo, Igandene and Méru.

Twelve lay Oblate missionaries from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario are with our Oblates in Kenya from Feb. 22 to March 9. Please keep them all in your prayers as they work to help God's people in Kionyo and Méru. Our youngest lay missionary for this trip is an 11-year-old from Vancouver who is traveling with his mother. We will look forward to sharing stories and pictures of their mission experiences in future newsletters.

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, local primary schools, and the dispensary. 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 a daily mass and group prayer.



Please keep us in your prayers as we look to take Oblate Mission Travel to a new location in South America in the fall of 2013.



# A gift that keeps giving

A chance encounter between Gerard Conlan, OMI, and the Uys family of Vancouver has led to new life and inspired hope for the students and parents of Bubwi Elementary School in Kionyo, Kenya.

Through a series of events, the Uys and Fr. Conlan met in Vancouver, a significant meeting that led to a donation from the Uys to help repair a run-down school, specifically to provide concrete flooring to replace the dirt floors.

The funding “has kindled a fire that is spreading beyond the classrooms and into the garden,” wrote Fr. Conlan. “We







had a few hundred dollars left from the flooring so we are making a veranda roof and floor to assist teachers and students during the rainy seasons.

“It has given the teachers, students and whole community a real boost in enthusiasm. I am working with the parents to do some landscaping to make the school more attractive and friendly for celebrations that might raise some income.

“People are now looking to the future with more confidence and excitement to see what else we can do.”

This was a gift that just keeps on giving!

## **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: [lcombemami@sasktel.net](mailto:lcombemami@sasktel.net)**



# Spirit in action

BURNS LAKE, BC – The missionary spirit can find its way into souls of all ages, but it is especially rewarding when we see it active in the younger generation.

Trina Bysouth shared a story that involved her son Blair and his friends, and a donation of \$315 for Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI, to be used in Chincha Alta, Peru for “the good work he does building homes for the less fortunate.”

Blair recently celebrated his 10th birthday and asked seven of his friends to his ‘street hockey birthday party’. He wanted no gifts, but asked for donations for the less fortunate in Peru. They brought \$235.

Trina Bysouth, Blair’s mother, described the conversation.

“While we were having cake one of Blair’s friends said they were helping Blair build a home in Peru ... another said ‘Blair is building a home in Peru?’ ‘No, Blair is not building the home; we’re sending money to help build a home’, the friend exclaimed. It was quite cute how this conversation went.”

Blair, third from left, and friends



The extra \$80 came from Blair. In June he found money in a parking lot near a school. He turned it into the office hoping the owner would claim it. In September, when the money wasn't claimed, Blair received the money back and he donated it towards Brother Blaise's project as well.

His reasoning? "It was not his money to spend, so he would not miss it and it would help someone who needs it more than he does," explained Trina.

"I am very pleased how generous Blair and his friends have been."

But the story didn't end there. One of Blair's friends became aware the Oblates helped build beds for the people who slept on dirt floors; he now wants to help out (when his birthday comes around). "It is just incredible that such young kids pick up on how much they can make a difference is someone else's life," said Trina.

## 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 now 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.

# The next mission

After spending a year in Kenya, David MacPhee, OMI, has returned to Canada and was ordained to the diaconate on Jan. 25 (founding day of the Oblate congregation) at the Canadian Martyrs Parish in Ottawa.

“Leaving Kenya was one of the hardest things I have ever done. Although there were moments of intense struggle for me there, both interiorly and in encountering the reality of the people, I am happy to say that I loved my experience,” he wrote.

Following is a poem he wrote prior to moving on to the next stage of his life.

## What I Vow

Not for some pious thing.  
Not for the life of a bachelor.  
Not for apathy and ignorance.  
Not for some far off heaven.  
Not to lie down or rest.  
Not for an easier way.  
Not for an easier life.  
Not to control.  
Not to have power or prestige.  
Not to put myself above, ahead, or further.  
Not for some future that will never happen.  
Not for security.  
Not for comfort.

I vow to misbehave.

I vow to not take myself too seriously.

**I vow to find joy.**

**I vow to experience joy with  
those who are joyful and  
cry with those who cry.**

**I vow to love.**

**I vow to stand beside  
the oppressed.**

**I vow to never give up,  
even if I desire nothing  
else but to do  
exactly that.**

**I vow not to become the  
monster that I hate.**

**I vow to slay the monster  
that dwells in me or  
rather dissolve it with  
Love and Peace, which  
are the things that the  
devil is most scared of,**

**Also these gifts of Love and  
Peace dwell in me with  
such abundance that I feel  
I will never exhaust its  
depths within myself.**

**I vow to be David MacPhee**

**I vow to be Daudi Mwenda**

**I vow to be Oblate.**

# Young missionaries

BY DOUG KRAMER

ST. ALBERT, AB – The term “missionary” in secular North American culture is largely relegated to the history books or reserved for those who would travel to far-off, jungle-choked continents. Yet, there is a clear sense of what a missionary *should* be and the role they *could* play.

We asked high school students, young adults, teachers and parents to react to the word “missionary” and share their first thoughts. I was encouraged, not a little bit surprised and deeply moved.

One of the more poignant replies came from Johnny, a tall, strapping, laughing young man with his last name tattooed down the length of his torso. Johnny joined us on a short-term mission trip to New Orleans, La., where he connected with an elderly couple whose home we helped fix.

When I asked him about being a missionary to Mr. and Mrs. Aldridge, Johnny shared:

“Meeting them impacted me deeply. It gave me a whole new view of how I see my life. We are so fortunate and we lose sight of that. Helping them helped me regain my sight. Being able to install a window for him really made me happy. It gave him something to look at other than a television and walls.



“Overall we came to help them, but really they helped us discover ourselves.”

Johnny is a missionary.

As I rolled through the various responses

received from people across our communities, I was blessed by the three distinct themes that surfaced.

Go in faith.

Go as you are.

Go with the purpose of serving others.

This month (February) we return to New Orleans with 32 high school students from Ecole Secondaire Marguerite d’Youville in St. Albert, AB, to continue our service and to allow God to continue to help us “regain our sight”.

*(Doug Kramer is an Oblate youth ministry team member. This will be the group’s fourth mission trip to New Orleans.)*





# Faith behind bars: pastoral in Méru Prison

BY FAUSTIN LITANDA, OMI

MÉRU, KENYA – Nothing prepared me for my first visit to Méru Prison. A massive wooden gate reinforced with steel marks the entrance to the prison. The gate is intimidating. As I am ushered in, I notice another metallic gate some metres from the main gate. Armed prison warders mill around with unbelievably huge keys hanging around their necks.

Once inside the prison, the inmates stare at us. Most are idling their morning away. Elsewhere, some inmates joyfully sing, praising God. How do you celebrate mass in the prison? I quickly realized that inmates are human beings and should not be treated differently.







Faustin Litanda, OMI

Many activities are ongoing in the prison: carpentry, mechanics, tailoring, leather work, art and masonry. There is a volleyball field where the inmates entertain themselves. I visited their crowded dormitories, where only the trustees, inmates rewarded for outstanding performance, have the privilege of sleeping in beds. The rest hit the floor when the sun goes down.

The inmates proved to be great folks, polite and cordial. I can say they are more spiritual than people outside the prison. I have been working with prisoners for 18 months, and slowly many of them came back to the church. On a recent Sunday we had 50 people in the church. Two received the sacrament of initiation: baptism, Eucharist and confirmation.

Being a prison chaplain is a challenging but satisfying ministry, part of the Oblate charism that calls for “*evangelization of the poor in various faces.*” Many who come to the prison are aggressive and bitter, but the rehabilitation programs help many offenders learn to relate well with their communities.

Every time I finish my ministry inside the prison, I understand what disappeared when I entered through that massive gate. Freedom! It is a truly precious gift.

*(Litanda is a member of OMI Lacombe Canada serving in the Kenya mission.)*

# A piece of cake

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

PERU – It was a wet and gloomy Monday morning when I left the house to see a woman who has a small restaurant about preparing a good meal for my men, the workers.

She gave me a cup of coffee and a huge piece of chocolate cake because it was her birthday. I drank the coffee but did not eat the cake. I thought about giving it to a poor person in the street. When I left the restaurant, cake in hand, I encountered an old lady walking slowly and using a stick for a cane. She was so bent it was as if she was picking something off the ground.

I followed her to her 'house' and knocked on the slanted plywood door hanging from one hinge. Looking like she was dug from a grave, she invited me into her 'patio'. Her 'house' was made from pieces of tin, plywood, old boards, feed bags and cardboard. To enter she had to crouch because the doorway was so small.

I immediately knew what had to be done. Within three weeks we were able to build her a new home.

And it all started with a piece of cake!





Coletta in wheelchair

# Touched by the angels

*Roger Bergkamp, OMI, encouraged Jacklynne and Gerard Guimond of Fort Frances, ON to accompany him on a trip to Brazil, where he served in the Oblate missions in and around Recife for more than 20 years. Following is their account of one memorable day on that journey.*

JUSSARAL, Brazil – Jussaral (Jerusalem) is a quaint little town nestled in the hills about 65 kilometres from the Atlantic.

Roger had two special people that he wanted us to meet, both female. The first was Dona Rosa. We had to literally climb a hill to get to her house ... and this was no paved sidewalk! It may actually have qualified as a legitimate stress test.

Dona looked so happy to see us. She looks far older than her 75 years, but her agility would have matched a 50-year-old. She was bare-foot and had painted toenails; I found that so amazing. There was a woman of about 45 with her and a young man, perhaps in his late teens. Dona gave us each a plastic bag and then led us out into her yard where there was every kind of tree you could imagine.

Dona and the younger woman used machetes to break open coconuts and pour each of us a drink. Although far from cold, it was refreshing in the heat of the day.

We left with arms laden with gifts, a bottle of wine and some cans of serveja for the padre ... she knows that the padre likes serveja (beer)!

In the car, Roger shared a bit about this woman that he so admired.

The younger woman with her apparently had been gang-raped several years ago and never spoke a word for five years. Dona took her into her home, where she remains; and while she didn't speak to us, she does indeed have her voice back.

The young boy also has a connection to Dona.

While Roger was working in Brazil 25 years ago, Dona had taken in a young man who was considered to be mentally challenged. Lalu was not dangerous but for whatever reason had no place to live.

One day while the women of the village were washing

Dona Rosa & Roger Bergkamp, OMI



clothes in the river, one young lady lost her wristwatch. She had laid it on a rock and it disappeared. She went to the police and accused Lalu of stealing it. The police went to get him but Roger found Lalu first and brought him to his house, refusing the police entry to take him. (He would likely have been beaten to death and left in the sugarcane field.) Instead he told the police that he would bring Lalu to the station later himself, which he did.

Lalu denied the accusations but was locked up anyway. Dona tried to intercede on his behalf to no avail.

So she took it upon herself to search for the watch, and find it she did. It had slipped into the river. She brought it to the station, hoping to get Lalu released but was told he would have to wait until morning.

She went home, cooked up a plate of rice, beans and chicken and brought it to Lalu in jail. And, she brought a second plate as well – for the guard.

Lalu was released the next day.

He eventually married and had four children. We don't know where he is now but the young boy living with Dona is one of his sons.

Roger said these were only two stories; she has raised two grandsons and many other kids who have needed a place to live. We were in awe of this generous lady.

We proceeded to another part of the village, where we met Colletta, the other woman Roger wanted to introduce us to.

Colletta is in her 90s and had just had a stroke two weeks before we arrived. The doctor was there as well as other people attending to her. She needed help to get into her wheelchair. She looked like she might weigh 75 pounds soaking wet, but had a sweet smile when she saw Roger.

Colletta came from France as a young nun to serve as a nurse in Rio de Janeiro. She became aware that so many of the patients were people from the favellas in the north and felt a need to minister to them to work at preventing so much ill-

ness. She approached her order to be transferred to the Recife area but was denied.

So she left the order, recruited a couple of women to go with her and re-located in what is now Jussara. Over the years she worked to build the schools and provided refuge to many girls and street children. She encouraged and helped them to become teachers and nurses, and built a pottery house where people could make wares to sell. She also became very involved in women's justice issues.

A very attractive nurse was trying to comfort Colletta at one point; she seemed a bit agitated. The nurse somehow made me understand that because Colletta remembered Roger as *Padre*, she wanted *Eucharista*. For some reason, I took her face in my hands and said, in French: "Colletta, Vous Etes Eucharist!" (You ARE Eucharist!) She smiled widely and gave me a kiss and a hug ... what a God-moment.

Meanwhile, the beautiful nurse had just shared with Roger that it was Colletta who saved her from a life on the streets and convinced her to become a nurse. She is now Colletta's nurse. More tears in another God moment.

There is a little chapel behind Colletta's house that Roger helped build. We went out for a few moments to sit, enjoy the view through the large windows, and reflect on the great opportunity it was to have met two living saints that Rome knows nothing about!

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*Oblate Spirit*

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*A publication of the Oblate Mission office.*

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**Printed in Canada by:**

St. Peter's Press  
Muenster, SK

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Canada