


AMMI *Lacombe* CANADA MAMI

# Oblate Spirit



February 2015

*Healing*



# A taste of death, a touch of hope



Is there healing in death? We have two poignant stories of a death experience that left a lasting impression. Was there healing that took place in the process? Was the person who died the one who was healed? Or was healing reserved for somebody left on this side of heaven?

When someone we love passes, we can experience many emotions ... among them sorrow, sadness, maybe guilt. But looked at through the veil of time, the time that is said to heal many wounds, we can only try to understand God's hands at play in our lives.

The philosophical answers will be left for those with a much broader experience of life. For today, this issue will focus on healing, a healing as seen through the eyes of two people who have shared their experiences of death and what it has meant in their lives.

With healing as the theme, it seems appropriate to introduce Leonardo Rego, OMI, to our pages for what is hoped will become a regular offering in Oblate Spirit. Leonardo spearheads the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) office of OMI Lacombe Canada in Ottawa.

We include a report on what is hoped to be one of several JPIC events across the country, a symposium on mining extraction and justice held in Ottawa. It is becoming so obvious that we, the human race, have not been kind to Mother Earth. Earth and its inhabitants are also in need of healing in so many different ways. That seed has been planted in Leonardo Rego, an Oblate from whom we will surely hear more as time passes.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

# Just you, me and our Father

BY CORRINE PAMBRUN

SASKATOON – My bond with Fr. Fix, OMI, began in 1960 with my baptism and physically ended Nov. 27 in the most amazing and grace-filled moment I was ever blessed to be a part of.

The day began like any other day. I headed to Mazenod Residence, got my work done, then went to Trinity and Samaritan Place, the new Oblate retirement home, to see the fellows.

Fr. Fix's room was my first stop. It was about 1:50 p.m. when I got to his room. "Hey Fr. Fix, how are you? Do you remember me?"

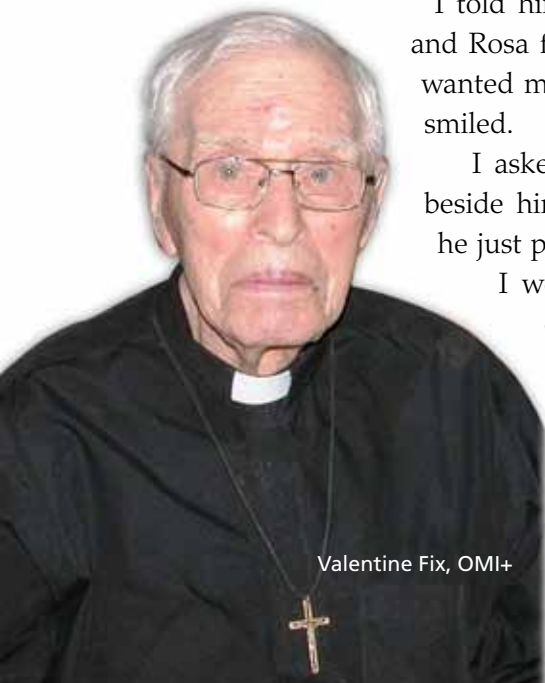
He nodded, waved me over and began to sit up. I said to him, "I have your mail." When he saw the new Living with Christ book, he pointed to his Altar.

I told him I had a letter from Mario and Rosa for him, and asked him if he wanted me to read it. He said yes and smiled.

I asked him if he minded if I sat beside him on his bed to read it and he just patted with his hand to sit. As

I went to sit, he pointed to an orange peel on the floor. I picked it up and put it in the garbage. He smiled.

As I sat beside him, I was going to begin reading when he tapped my arm and pointed to the



Valentine Fix, OMI+



banana on his side table. I gave it to him; he took it and said “peel it.”

Sitting together on his bed with him eating his banana, I began to read the letter from his lovely friends Rosa and Mario from Penticton.

As I would read a sentence I would turn and look at him and you could just tell he was listening so attentively. He patted my arm and handed me his partly eaten banana. I put the banana down and continued to read.

When we finished reading the letter, he showed me where he wanted me to put the letter. Then I thought, “I should take a picture of Fr. Fix and me.” He then asked me to pass his little glass of water. So I handed him the glass, turned to get my phone to get our picture and as I turned back to him, Fr. Fix had finished his drink and was proceeding to lie down. I could see he couldn’t lift his legs onto the bed, so I took his bare feet in my hands. I felt so filled with love. I truly felt like I was lifting the feet of Jesus.

As I lay his feet on the bed I heard a gurgle kind of noise. I saw a little water come out the side of his mouth and I said “are you okay Fr. Fix?” I pressed the call button. I thought maybe the water went down the wrong way. He just pointed to me like he wanted me to sit back down.

A woman entered, then left and came back with a doctor who introduced himself as Dr. Michael.

The doctor put a stethoscope on Fr Fix’s heart.

I asked if he had choked. The doctor just looked at me and smiled, and said in such a gentle voice, “No, not at all. He must have been waiting for you. He is still with us you know, and I

bet he can still hear you. If you want you can say something to him if you like.”

I was so emotional by this time, my only words were “Fr. Fix I love you.”

At that moment I saw his colour go from the colour of life to the grey colour of death. I was there for his last breath. There was no panic, no noise, just a quiet like no other quiet, and he looked so peaceful, so calm.

In the hall I began to hear music from a birthday party, the sound of a guitar and someone singing the song “I want to dance with you, twirl you all around the floor. That’s what they invented dancing for, I just want to dance with you ...”

I didn’t realize it then but I think now, how fitting and beautiful was that!

I began to tell the nurse and doctor about how good our visit had been; how he sat up and ate a banana as I read the letter. The nurse was surprised. “He ate! That’s so odd, he never touched his breakfast and he never touched his lunch at all today.”

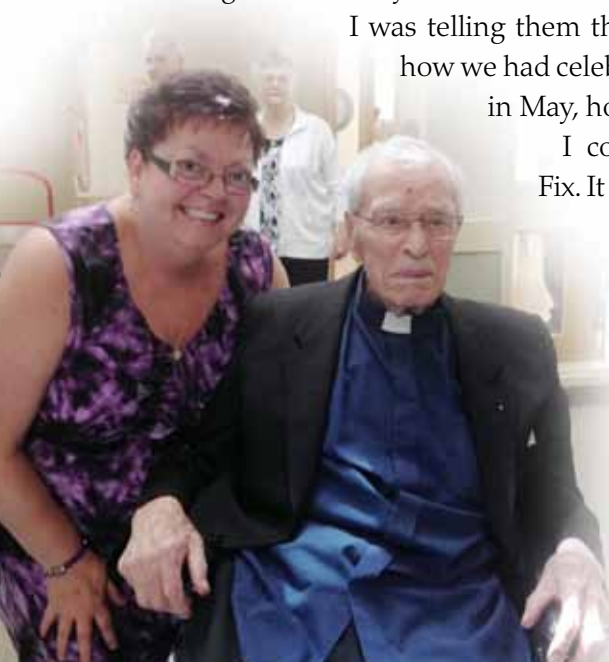
Again, Dr. Michael said so gently, “he must have been waiting to eat with you.” Emotion overtook me. I was crying.

I was telling them that he had baptized me, how we had celebrated his 100th birthday in May, how he still played bridge.

I continued to sit with Fr. Fix. It was like I couldn’t move.

I go back to those moments of Nov. 27 every day. Each time I am even more grateful than the time before. What a gift I was given.

Corrine Pembrum and Fr. Fix



He was there for me when I entered my life's faith journey in baptism and I was there for him when he and God knew it was time to go to our heavenly kingdom.

I believe with every part of me that God chose me so Fr. Fix could show me how to prepare for death as my journey with my mother continues. Since that day my fear is gone and a feeling of something I can't explain fills me. It's a sadness, contentment, wonder and grace all wrapped up together.

I would like to end by telling you one of Fr. Fix's favorite sayings. Whenever I would see him, I would end our visit together by saying "have a good day, Fr. Fix," and he would point to me and say, "You have a better one."

How could I not, after sharing our beautiful last visit together? Thank you, God, for giving me such a wonderful gift.

*(Corrine is a MAMI member and has worked closely with the Oblates of OMI Lacombe Canada for more than 15 years)*



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# In His hands

**BY PAM VAN DE MOSSELAER**

CALGARY – Can healing begin before the pain takes place? With God all things are possible!

Lourdes for our family was a three-day respite in the midst of 10 weeks of travel through London, France and Spain. During our travels we explored, rested, walked, drove, and canoed. We laughed. We cried. We prayed and played. We ate a picnic on the lawn in front of the Eiffel Tower and canoed down the Dordogne River. We made great memories, but one that stands out most dearly is from our time spent in Lourdes on one special night and one phone call home.

Outside the Sanctuaries of Lourdes is chaos - complete with hoards of people, flashing neon signs of tacky souvenir shops selling everything from Madonna statues, rosaries and snow globes, to perfume and jewelry. But enter the gates of the Sanctuaries and you are enveloped in a peace and tranquility that brings silence to your lips and joy in your heart. It is a place of awe and beauty!

I was overwhelmed with the compassion of those pulling carts and pushing wheelchairs, carrying the sick from the



Stefan Van De Mosselaer

nearby hospital, to the healing spring waters. I was infused with strength by the hope and faith in the miracles of healing about to happen to those being carried.

To sit in front of the grotto and know that Mary appeared, there in that spot, to a little girl and has since brought healing to so many through the spring waters was like peering into an opening to heaven.

Watching my sons, Stefan and Lucas, drink from the waters of the spring was a reminder that I could give them no better gift

then to drink of "the living water." Hearing them recite the prayers as we walked the Stations of the Cross was gladness to this mother's heart.

Attending Mass at St. Pius X Basilica, with hundreds of God's Pastors presiding, and in what appeared to be a sea of the colors of humanity, and the sound of languages of every nation, was to feel part of a community that surpassed all boundaries of land. To meditate while looking upon the exquisite pictorial mosaics, bringing to life the mysteries of the rosary, in the Rosary Basilica, was to see God's hand in the work of the artists.

Every evening a vigil rosary procession starts at twilight and ends with the chanting of the decades in darkness that has washed over everyone except for the lit candles providing a halo of light around each person. It is a slow walk to the rhythm of the voices of every language praying in unison the ritual prayers of the rosary. This was to see God's kingdom come down to earth.

This magnificent experience stirred my heart to call home





to my mother whose dream it was to come to Lourdes to walk these steps and pray along in this ritual prayer. One evening while the procession was taking place I stepped just outside the Sanctuary to make that call home. My mother answered the phone and we talked about what I was experiencing, what was happening at home and I had her listen to the rosary being prayed by the masses of people all joined together. I could tell she was moved by it and with tears and much emo-

tion I said I had to go - my calling card was running out. She said it was not enough time she wanted to talk more she didn't want to let me go. So I quickly ran and bought another calling card and went back and called her again. We were so used to calling each other every day and it had been so long since we had heard each other's voice that we couldn't seem to get enough. But the time



was up. We ended the call expressing our love for each other and said goodbye.

This was the last time I spoke with my mother - the last time I heard her voice. She had a brain aneurysm burst and she went into a coma just a couple weeks following this phone call. We rushed home. My mother passed away shortly after we got to see her and we buried her a few days later. God was holding us in His hands. He knew what was to come and He gave us a gift – my Mother’s voice – a sweet, loving embrace from my Mom that I could hold onto until we meet again. He gave her an experience of Lourdes and a quick death for which she had prayed so fervently.

God’s healing comes in so many ways, from so many places. From Lourdes’ healing spring waters; from the touch of a person He has used as His instrument; from the Word He has spoken for His disciples to write on a page to be read through

the ages; or from His voice within spurring me on to make a phone call.

*“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.... he who keeps you will not slumber.... will neither slumber nor sleep.”*

*(Psalm 121:1-4  
ESV)*



# A changing Kenya

BY JIM FIORI, OMI

KAREN, Kenya – Kenya remains under the siege of terrorism. Security or the lack of it is a pre-occupation. Al Shabbat continues to operate seemingly with impunity. We can't go to the shopping centres without some fear. Security is high.

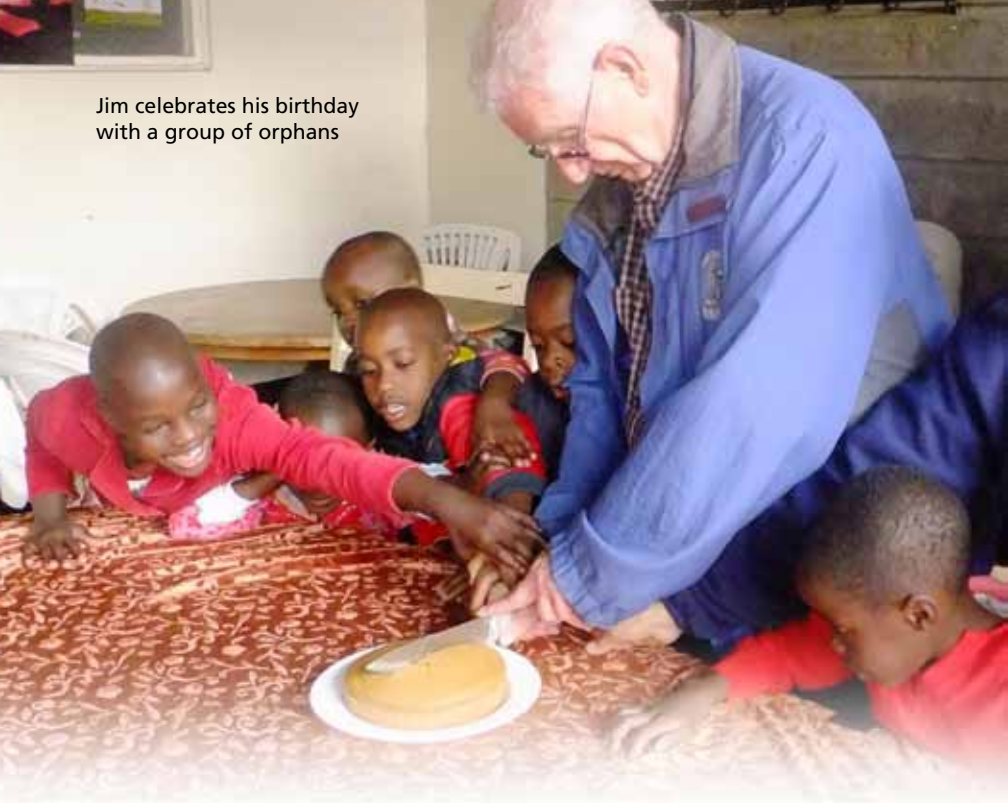
Your vehicle has to be searched, as does your person, before entering the centres. Armed police are at every shopping centre and more. Recently, in returning from Méru – a four-hour drive north of here – we passed through four police checks. Of course this insecurity has destroyed tourism, which is one of the main economies of the country.

The Mombasa area is the principal tourism centre because it is situated on the Indian Ocean. The whole coastal region is unsafe. There have been many massacres in this area. The last weeks have seen some significant incidents of barbarism.

Just before Christmas our community went through a stressful, frightening experience. Fr. Samuel Hong was kidnapped and robbed at gunpoint. I had taken him to Nairobi and we had lunch together before I left him to visit a Quebec



Jim celebrates his birthday  
with a group of orphans



missionary with whom he attended language school. He took a matatu (public transportation) to Karen, which is where we reside. He was walking home when he was abducted. (*See Samuel's story on page 16.*)

I received calls for money, which I did not give. First I don't have the kind of money they are looking for, and in any case we would need a second person to authorize such a transaction. It is not recommended that we pay ransoms. I asked Samuel "Are you in trouble?" and he said yes.

He called a few minutes later with the same request. I went to the police at this point. One becomes aware of how powerless we are. Where do you begin to look?

At around 2 a.m. he returned home shaken but unhurt. They took everything he had and emptied his bank account.

This was an incredible experience of community. I sent out an urgent message to the congregation and since then we have received messages from all over the Oblate world. I do



believe that it was the power of prayer that brought this to a good conclusion. Most of the time the victims are killed.

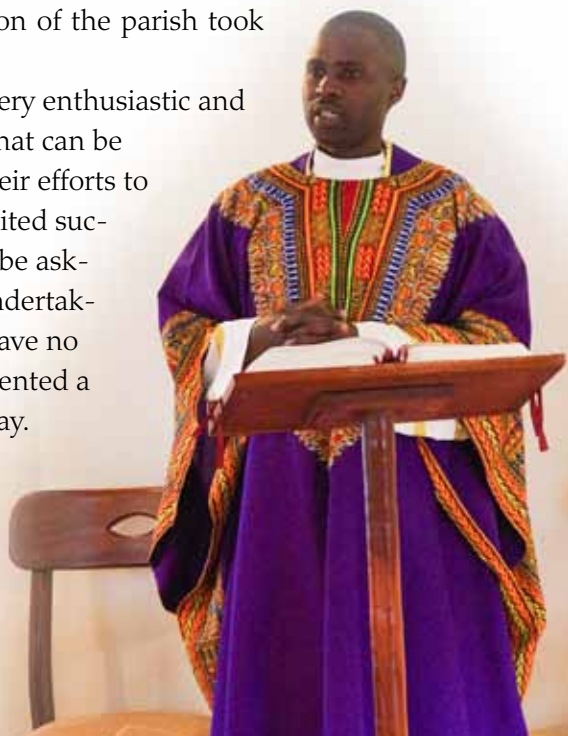
Perhaps one of the most significant positive happenings last year was the ordination of Dionisius Ananua, OMI. He is our third Kenyan Oblate to be ordained. We also have Bro. Joseph Magambo, so we now have four Kenyan Oblates. We had invited Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI, to lead our community retreat. While he was with us we asked him to preside at the ordination of Dionisius. With the dearth of vocations in Canada this was Bishop Sylvain's first ordination to the priesthood.

In 2014 we accepted the responsibility of a new parish in Kisaju. It was formally erected as a parish on Nov. 23. This is truly a parish of the poor. The majority of the people are Maasai. They are traditionally the pastorates and would be considered those least touched by the Gospel.

This parish is poor. They have no infrastructure. There are six out stations but only one of them has a decent church. The rest use classrooms or what we would call shacks. The inauguration of the parish took place under tents.

The community is very enthusiastic and hopeful to build a hall that can be used as a church, but their efforts to fund-raise have had limited success. No doubt we will be asking for help with this undertaking. Even our Oblates have no place to stay. We have rented a house 21 kilometres away. Our men have been busy trying to

Dionisius prays over  
intentions submitted  
by MAMI members



form community, which is far more important than church structures.

Transport is a major issue. During the rainy season it is impossible to cross the rivers. There are really no roads so 4x4s are essential. It is semi-arid and if you visit you will see the likes of zebras, gazelles and giraffes eating with the cattle, sheep and goats.

Formation continues to be one of our principle occupations. Our two formation houses in Kenya are busy. We have eight postulants in Méru and in Karen we have six pre-novices. The latter are studying philosophy. It is a three-year program after which they go to South Africa for their novitiate and theological studies. We currently have one novice and three scholastics.

In March the eight men from Méru will join us in Karen and so we will be 14, a full house plus. I have had the wonderful experience of receiving vows, presenting candidates for ordination that most of my Canadian counterparts have never had.

Most of my time is absorbed in administrative duties. I often think I don't do much but by the end of the day I am tired and I sleep well, but not enough. I end up going to countless

Ordination celebration





meetings. I am told meetings take the place of purgatory, so I should be in good stead.

The mission has been blessed this past year with two new Oblate members, Samuel Hong, who hails from Korea, and Constant Ilombun, who comes from the Congo. Both have just returned from language school in Tanzania (Swahili). Now we have to put them to work. Our community is international in scope: two Canadians, two Australians, four Congolese, one Korean, and four Kenyans. In the last weeks I have been told we are getting yet another member from Sri Lanka.

As some may know, in 1990 I was involved in a car accident that left me blind in my left eye. I am now having problems with my good eye. A cataract is forming. I have been advised to get this attended to. I have also been advised that I should not get this procedure done in Kenya. While the risk factors are minimal, it is the only eye I have so if they botch it then I will be with a white cane.

I have been granted permission to return to Canada in April and my first priority will be to attend to the medical issues; thereafter I will be available for assignment to a new mission.

While I am certainly happy to return 'home' I am also feeling somewhat guilty because I am abandoning ship before my term expires. In my head I know I am doing the right thing, but the feelings have not caught up. I think this is the first time I have had to quit something. 'Quit' is probably too strong a word, but it ties in well with the feelings.

I have been very fortunate that I have not been sick a day since coming here. For this I am grateful. This doesn't mean I don't have health issues. I turned (yes, like sour milk) 70 in July. I tell our students that I am getting old, and their response is: "No, you are old!"

I don't feel particularly old but then I have never been here before so I don't know what you are supposed to feel like.

*(Fr. Fiori is concluding four years as the superior of the Kenya Mission.)*



Samuel Hong, OMI

# The kidnapping

BY SAMUEL HONG, OMI

KAREN, Kenya – “I was on the way home and decided to walk to our place from the Karen bus station, as I usually do. When I passed Subiaco, I saw a car stopping in the distance.

“I didn’t pay much attention, when suddenly four men got out of the car and one of them was pointing a gun at me. He asked me to get into the car. I did whatever they asked. I gave them my debit card with PIN number. They threatened me with harsh words. I could feel that they just wanted money.

“They withdrew money from my account by ATM, but one is only allowed to withdraw 40,000 Kenyan shillings a day. I had 80,000 in my account (about \$1,000 Canadian dollars) at the time. So they took me to a house and tied my hands and feet. After midnight, they withdrew the rest, and then they released me. I was able to catch a motorbike taxi to our home.

“I could really feel God’s protection and Mary’s helping hands. I think it can happen to anyone. This time it was me. I do not blame anybody.”

## DONATING SECURITIES

*to Oblate  
missionary  
works*



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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.



Eleanor Rabnett packaging tea



## Kenya update

Jim Fiori, OMI, the Superior of the Kenya Mission, will be returning to Canada in April due to health issues and it is likely that Alfred Groleau, OMI, will follow in the fall. That will leave a dozen apostles to carry on the work in the Mission of Kenya.

Mario Azrak, OMI, rejoined the Kenya Mission in January while Fr. Sam Hong, a South Korean Oblate, and Fr. Constant Ilombun, another joining the Oblates from Congo, have completed their Kiswahili studies in Tanzania and are back in Kenya to begin pastoral ministry. Another Oblate, Praveen from Sri Lanka, has just received his obedience to the Kenyan Mission and will be arriving in early 2015. There now are four Kenyans in perpetual vows as Oblates.

Ken Forster, the provincial of OMI Lacombe Canada, recently spoke about the Kenyan Mission. "We have many

challenges as we try to assure financial sustainability of the mission in the future. We need to build an economic base in Kenya to support our missionaries and the formation years for our seminarians and candidates in the future.”

## TEA SALE

The Oblate Associates in Ontario raised close to \$3,000 for the Mission in Kenya after they were asked if they would be interested in packaging tea that had been brought from Kenya.

The tea was packaged in 80-gram bags, then sold in Ottawa, Arnprior and Hamilton.

“It was a fun project to work on – measuring the ground tea, wrapping small decorative bags with raffia and labels, and then counting out the bags of tea for each of the parishes,” wrote Eleanor Rabnett. “It gave us time to spend in sharing and lots of laughter.”

Many parishioners asked when there would be more tea available.

## KEN-YA HELP

The 2014 Ken-Ya Help fund-raising program at St. Augustine’s Parish in Vancouver raised more than \$20,000 for the Oblate Mission in Kenya.

Events held by the parish included a Knights of Columbus breakfast, a parish luncheon, CWL fall fair for OMI Missions, St. Augustine’s School advent concert, and, the highlight of the Kenya program, a dinner for 80 guests hosted by Ken



Ken Forster, OMI,  
at Ken-Ya Help dinner



William Konkin Elementary School students and teacher Tracy Vienneau (far right)

Forster, OMI, that featured an evening of information and fun activities to raise funds.

The money raised supports needs for schools, a new church and formation.

## SCHOOL FUND-RAISER

In response to the Christmas Oblate Spirit suggesting alternative gift giving, the Grades 5-7 French Immersion class at William Konkin Elementary School in Burns Lake, BC, raised funds to help young Kenyans receive the education we sometimes take for granted in Canada. These monies could then be used for items such as school desks, chairs and school fees for primary or secondary learners.

“Our class, at first, could not decide what it wanted to save for, so we voted to raise as much money as we could, with the goal of being able to donate at least one of each item,” explained teacher Tracy Vienneau. “When we counted the donations, we were excited to have raised \$455. With this money we hope to provide a desk, chair and education to four learners, two in primary and two in secondary.

“This experience has been so fulfilling for all of us and we have a great sense of pride and accomplishment for reaching our goals. We hope the recipients of this money will enjoy their educational experience.”

# A cry for help

BY ERIN RYAN, OMI ASSOCIATE

OTTAWA – For a long time I thought the work of lobby groups and organized social justice events was limited to political manipulation, marches with signs and banners, or vocal and sometimes angry protests that result in dividing people into more “us” and “them” groups. Of course I want peace on Earth and a healthy world that can sustain all of its inhabitants (who doesn’t?) but I seem to need to see concrete, practical plans and actions to solve problems before I happily engage. Lofty ideals and intellectual discussions are nice places to visit but I don’t want to live there.

That is why I was so impressed with the Mining Extraction and Justice symposium held in Ottawa. It was developed by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) office of OMI Lacombe Canada in partnership with St. Paul University. It was my first experience of an international event in support of an initiative I was grateful to have witnessed. I wasn’t expecting to have that reaction because, apart from voting in elections, I don’t consider myself a political person, and this seemed like quite a political subject.

The symposium’s formal title was The Global Cry of the People: Mining Extraction and Justice. There were some pow-

erful examples given of people crying for help and suffering because of the effect of mining extraction on their lives. The room was full and the speeches and panel sessions covered many aspects of this



Jennifer Henry, KAIROS Canada



complex topic. We heard first-hand experiences from Canada's First Nations and about mining issues in South America, Africa and Asia.

Archbishop Paul-André Durocher spoke positively about growing up in the mining town of Timmins, ON, and how, through community and union efforts and through legislation, the mining industry evolved over the years to improve working conditions and clean up the environment. His speech emphasized that there is not just one problem and one solution but that there are numerous issues, many possible solutions and a variety of approaches to solving the problems.

Striking and inspiring presentations were made by Jennifer Henry of KAIROS Canada and Chief Beverly Sellars of the Soda Creek First Nation in Williams Lake, BC.

By structuring the symposium so it progressed from exploring the context and the people's struggle for mining justice, creating positive change in Canada, finding ways Canadians can respond and strategies we can all adopt, Leonardo Rego, OMI, and his team educated, raised awareness, provided an opportunity to share information on recent developments and inspired participants.

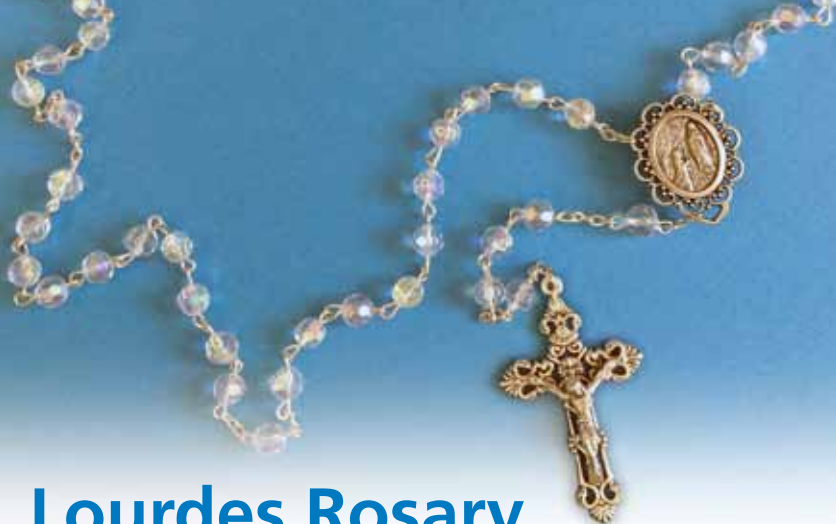
The presentations and the very phrase, Cry of the People, opened my heart; the factual data and information increased my knowledge; and the speeches and discussions looking at ways to bring about change provided hope and inspired me to

learn more and support the efforts of all these people who are working so hard to improve the lives of others.

It was a wonderful spiritual experience one can hope is just the beginning of other JPIC gatherings to find practical responses to big issues.

Leonardo Rego, OMI, JPIC





## Lourdes Rosary

To enhance your prayer life, we are pleased to offer a complementary Lourdes Rosary of fire-polished crystal beads with a traditional fleur-de-lis crucifix. The centerpiece features the image of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette with the back containing droplets of Lourdes holy water.

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



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*Oblate  
Spirit*

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