

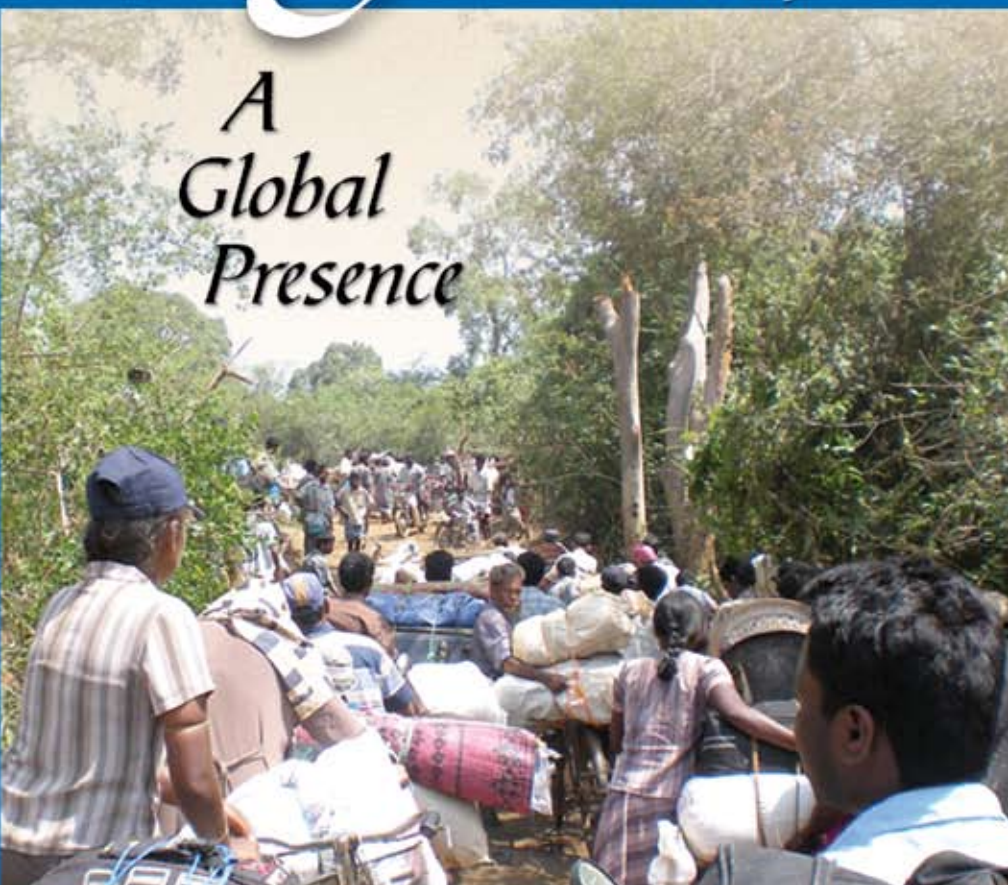
Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



November 2009

*A
Global
Presence*



Oblate Spirit



It has been said that ‘the more things change, the more they remain the same.’ You may have noticed the new name – *Oblate Spirit* – on our cover page. We believe the new title speaks to the heart of Oblates around the world; the content will continue to reflect their dedication, commitment and charism.

In the past, readers have received a variety of publications from the Oblate Mission Office of *AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI* ... from Mission Oblate, to Oblate Connexions, to the Annual Report and Needs publications. All come from us, but to avoid confusion we decided to wrap them under one banner. Thus, *Oblate Spirit* was born.

The Oblate heart around the world – lived by priests and brothers, as well as by lay women and men – shares the spirit of our founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod. It’s this spirit that will be the central theme in all our publications, but that’s not new. And we hope to keep it that way.

We open this issue with reflections from Diane Lepage, who recently had the good fortune of being able to trace St. Eugene’s footsteps from where he lived and preached to the tomb where he is buried. Diane’s account of her physical and spiritual journey is a fitting opening to this issue, which features developments at Oblate outposts around the world. From Northern Saskatchewan to South America, from British Columbia to Sri Lanka, from the Maritimes to Africa, the Canadian Oblates are a global influence.

You, our readers, also strongly reflect the Oblate nature with your ongoing support and your interaction with others. And those are stories we hope to share as well. Welcome to the *Oblate Spirit*.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

St. Eugene's spirit is alive and well

BY DIANE LEPAGE



OMI Grant Director Jeevandra Paul, OMI, recently gathered key Oblate Mission fund-raisers from around the world for a meeting in Aix-en-Provence, France, to continue collaboration efforts in addressing our mutual interests of raising funds for Oblate mission works. Ten participants represented Italy, Germany, Poland, Austria, United States, Ireland and Canada. Our meeting time was held in the very room where St. Eugene, the founder of the Missionary Oblates, met with his small community to discern the direction of the Congregation. We also had the honour of celebrating Eucharist in the private chapel where these courageous and daring men prayed daily. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to the Oblates of Aix-en-Provence for their generous hospitality and especially to Oblates Frank Santucci and Dominique Dessolin, who shared with us their infinite knowledge of St. Eugene and radiated the Founder's love, fire, zeal and compassion.

Walking down the street of Cours Mirabeau in Aix-en-Provence, France, one is immediately overwhelmed by the sight of old, large plane trees lining the promenade that features three beautiful fountains in the centre of the roadway. Lively conversations permeate





the air, easily drawing the imagination to picture famous artists such as Cezanne and well-known writers like Emile Zola and Ernest Hemingway who frequented the local cafés.

This was St. Eugene de Mazenod's stomping grounds, the place where he lived as a child, the area where the small community of Missionary Oblates was born and the city where their mission work continues.

Seeing a statue at the end of this famous street, I naturally assumed it to be a piece of art dedicated to St. Eugene, our beloved founder. After all, when we Canadians have a hero, we build monuments and erect signs proclaiming our admiration and pride for their achievements. Much to my surprise, the statue was not Eugene, the saint who lived on that very street, but of King René.

The next few days in Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles were filled with rich historical information and visits to places where Eugene and his Oblate companions prayed and served, including a visit to his tomb, a personal highlight that included a quietly powerful Eucharistic celebration.

Walking in the footsteps of St. Eugene held profound moments of awe. We learned about how he preached sermons

in the local Provençal language, much to the disapproval of the higher class; how he led dramatic parish missions bringing others to experience the love of God; we saw where he accompanied prisoners to their shameful execution in the middle of town; and experienced countless ways he comforted the poor and dying who were living in deplorable conditions.

Standing at the top of Notre Dame de la Garde, overlooking the breathtaking Mediterranean Sea, emotions welled up imagining how the missionaries felt as they were being sent to foreign lands only to look back, assured by a glorious statue of Mary silently bestowing encouragement and strength.

Eugene's spirit empowered his companions, the youth,

other religious communities and people to care for the poor and suffering in their midst. Exploring the mission works of the Oblates and Lay Associates in Canada and around the world today, one is captivated by their radiant love and sacrifice for others. In every mission we can easily see Oblates and laity active in humanitarian projects; social justice, peace and integrity of creation initiatives; inter-religious



dialogue; and as chaplains in prisons, hospitals, universities and other facilities. In countries of unrest the Oblates are martyrs, giving their very lives for living in solidarity with the poor; they selflessly continue working with the youth, the mentally and physically challenged, orphans and those who have been disregarded by society; they are highly involved in mass media through radio, print and television; they provide sanctuaries and spiritual places, promoting values in ethnicity, culture, arts, sciences and countless other meaningful ways.

There are certainly not nearly enough statues and billboards honouring the Missionary Oblates and laity for their love and service with the poor. However, the spirit and presence of St. Eugene, silently bestowing encouragement and strength, is definitely alive and well! ■

(Diane Lepage, an Oblate Lay Associate, is executive director of AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI)



Eugene de Mazenod

*We must lead people
to act as human beings
first of all, and then
like Christians, and
finally we must help
them to become saints.*

(1825 Manuscript)

Letter from Peru



Dear friends,

In case you
were wondering,

I am still alive. Although I have fallen behind in my correspondence once again, I want to assure you that I am very grateful for the support given to our missions in Comas, Chincha and Aucayacu, the three districts where I have worked since I arrived in Peru in 1963.

After serving in Chincha for the third time, from February 2007 to July 2008 (the earthquake occurred in August, 2007), I returned to the jungle parish of Aucayacu. I am the only priest in the district, but I am not alone. Two Oblate scholastics, who have completed their studies but are still in temporary vows, are now part of the Oblate team. There are also four Presentation of Mary Sisters on the parish team. Two teach religion in high schools, and two work with parish groups.

We have daily mass and two masses in the main church on Sundays. After the morning mass on Sundays, and a quick breakfast, I go to three rural villages for mass. During the month I celebrate mass on a regular basis in only six of the 105 rural villages that are within the jurisdiction of the parish. Our main contact with the rest of the people is through our radio station which transmits daily from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The bishops of Latin America are calling on all Catholics in Latin America to become missionary. This year we are trying to make direct contact with representatives of each of the rural villages. The next step will be to invite small groups from

the villages to come to Aucayacu to make an evangelizing retreat that will motivate them to continue to meet in small communities. When I was in Chincha (1990 – 1998) 82 such communities were formed.

Recent donations from Canada are enabling us to replace the thatched roof on the parish hall and remodel the retreat centre. Funds are also being used to train leaders for youth ministry and catechists for the rural communities.

Transportation to villages is difficult. We have a 1988 jeep that is not very reliable, a motorcycle and have recently been provided with a newer truck. On Sundays I go either north or south to celebrate mass in three villages, and a deacon goes in the opposite direction to celebrate the Word and give Communion in three other villages. The furthest villages we attend along the highway are about 30 kilometres from Aucayacu and it takes about 50 minutes to get there. It takes longer to get to the villages along the side roads, and many villages are on the other side of the Huallaga River. To cross the river, we go on a motorized dugout canoe, and then use a moto-taxi (a motorcycle transformed into a taxi). Other villages are accessible only by walking trails.

Violence is increasing again. Much of it has to do with drugs. Although the government has received millions of dollars to eradicate the coca plantations, it seems that more cocaine is being produced than before, and more people are consuming it. Lately, several people have been killed in the area. Bro. José



Renewing the thatched roof on the parish hall.

Zumaeta, OMI, was assaulted in May as he was walking on a trail leading to one of the rural villages. Five heavily-armed thieves took his money and cell phone, brought him to an opening in the jungle where a dozen or more people who had been assaulted



Walter Pissango

were tied and fearing for their lives. José also had his hands tied behind his back. After a time of silence, one of the victims untied himself and then untied the others. The thieves had left. José did not proceed to the village that day, but returned to the parish.

I am attaching some photos showing men renewing the thatched roof on the parish hall, and a photo of Walter Pissango, who was brought to a clinic for treatment. We are trying to locate a relative or a home capable of looking after him.

Thank you once again for helping us to evangelize. May the Lord pour down His blessings upon you and your loved ones!

Gratefully in Jesus and Mary,
Joe Devlin, OMI

The faces of desperation

BY JOE DEVLIN, OMI

PERU – My immediate concern is for a number of families I have known since I worked in Comas and Chinchá, and who are going through desperate situations. I will just mention two of them.

Juana Maria Petit Bobbio is a 60-year-old grandmother who has been taking care of her granddaughter Alessandra since her mother died in a bus accident when the girl was a baby. Juana worked as secretary for a bank for many years, until many banks were closed by the president of Peru several years ago.

Juana paid into a retirement fund when she worked in the bank. She and about 4,000 other ex-workers have been marching almost every day for the past two years trying to force the government to pay the fund. This was her hope for the future. Recently a list was approved, but to everyone's surprise, about 1,500 of the names were allegedly changed to favour friends of corrupt authorities.

The protests continue, and people like Juana are suffering for lack of everything: food, rent, medicine, etc. Juana owes \$297.63 for rent and money she borrowed for medicine for herself and Alessandra. If she is unable to pay, she will be evicted from her home.



Luz Aurora Contreras Salazar is a 21-year-old brilliant student whose mother died of cancer recently. She didn't have any money to pay the funeral costs. The funeral director told her she could pay when she had the money, so she signed a paper. After a week or so, the funeral director threatened to denounce her if she didn't pay immediately. I had to come to the rescue.



Luz then got a job as a teller in a bank, and because of good marks at the university, she was promoted and is supervising people much older than she is. She will receive a good salary, but the condition was that she continues her studies. She didn't have the money to pay her fees at the university, so she was not admitted into the classroom until I found some money to pay the fees. She was to get her first salary in mid-October. In the meantime, she is behind in her rent, and has no money for food. Her health is suffering.

I have run out of funds, so my hands are tied. ■

(Editor's Note: Because of generous donations through *AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI*, desperate situations are responded to when possible.)



Construction in Peru



Victims of war

BY M. PAUL NADCHETIRAM, OMI

SRI LANKA – Amala Annai Anpaham, an orphanage run by the Oblates of the Jaffna Province in Sri Lanka, has been experiencing untold difficulties and suffering as a result of the many displacements during the military confrontations between the Sri Lankan security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the past year.

They were first displaced from their home at Mulankavil in July 2008 to Akkarayankulam, a place covered by thick jungle, and from there to Kangapuram, to Piramananthnaaru and finally to Valayanmadam. During the course of this displacement, the directors, (two Oblates), their eight staff members and 45 children went through many traumatizing situations.

They faced starvation, loneliness and, towards the end of April 2009, they were mostly living in bunkers and unable to come out due to heavy and incessant shelling by the security forces.

These children witnessed many deaths, injuries and saw many people being left behind without any assistance and medical care. Thank God





they and director Fr. Alfred, OMI, came to Vavuniya unhurt and now are being kept at Cheddikulam Camp for internally displaced persons.

I visited their camp twice in May and June, although access is not granted. I went as the one who distributes food items. I was able to be with the children and the priest for almost five hours. The situation is terrible and they all look haunted. No water, no toilets, no medicine, no education, no security and no basic items for human life. However, we are maintaining the children and their staff as normal as possible during this abnormal situation. Even in the present camp they are being looked

after by the Province. We provide everything and the salaries to the staff members.

We have been trying to get them out of the camp but it looks as if it is going to be a long and slow process. There is a possibility of housing the orphanage temporarily in Mannar in one of our premises. Presently two of our Oblates are busy putting up sheds, dining rooms, classrooms, toilets and a kitchen. There is already a decent house for us in Mannar.

There is a new element. When the final war was staged, to eliminate the Tamil Tigers, many parents were killed and many of their children arrived at our orphanage. We are looking after them, but that cannot last.

Donations received locally and internationally were utilized to care for the children. Now we are preparing to house them in Mannar, God willing, and we need to find some other sources to continue.

Our sincere and grateful thanks to MAMI of the Canadian Province and all those who helped the children through humanitarian efforts. Please continue to pray for us. Thank God we are so far alive. ■

(Nadchetiram is the Provincial Superior of Jaffna Province)



Keeping the youth on the farm

BY PAULO EHLE, OMI

BRAZIL – Providing quality education within a rural context is one of the primary goals of the Family Agricultural School of Antonio Gonçalves (Escola Família Agrícola de Antonio Gonçalves) in northeast Brazil.



Students in the northeast receive no preparation or incentive to remain in the area, much less to make a living from the land. The cultural identity of the northeastern rural community is undermined by dreams of going elsewhere, abandoning the land to be taken up by companies, investors, speculators and profiteers.

In an effort to retain more young people, community leaders, church groups, farm union and farm association members in the region of Antonio Gonçalves, Bahia, turned to the Escola Família Agrícola (EFAG), which has four objectives.

1. To offer the sons and daughters of small farmers learning procedures based on their reality;
2. To set up a system of teaching wherein the parents take active part as agents of community change. The school is

an open channel for community organizations concerned with such issues as land, production, commercialization, culture and environment;



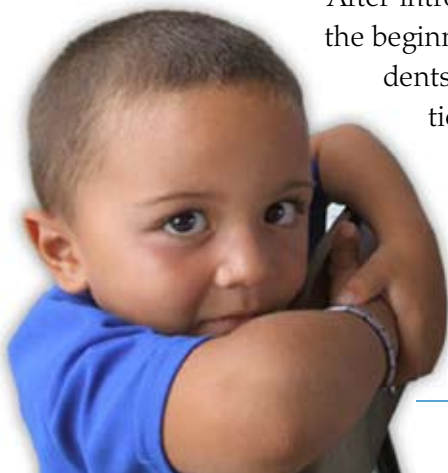
3. To develop technologies adapted to the semi-arid region, promoting “living with dry periods” as opposed to the “fight against drought”, fostered by the media, government projects, and ruling elites who see the Northeast as a huge pocket of misery, of backward peoples, and a way of life totally out of tune with the modern world; and



4. To provide study and research based on local conditions, giving practical activities a scientific basis. These activities are mostly linked to plant and animal husbandry of the region.

The school aims at a new model of a scientifically knowledgeable small farmer committed to the life of the region, overcoming the social stigma contained in traditional nomenclature such as ‘peasant’ or ‘dirt farmer’. At all stages of schooling, the EFAG strengthens students’ awareness of their cultural and religious heritage.

After introduction and adaptation at the beginning of the school year, students come into a live-in situation to participate in learning activities and small farm projects such as vegetable raising, beekeeping, and the raising of chickens, pigs and goats. They are



responsible for the daily routine of the school, cleaning and care of the facilities. The school maintains a lifestyle as closely as possible to any small farmhouse and property. After two weeks at the school, the students return home with assigned tasks involving the family and community. At all stages, they are encouraged to put into practice knowledge gained while at the school. As one group returns home, another arrives, so the school is operating full time throughout the school year.

Twice a year, EFAG organizes meetings with parents, educators, association directors and others involved in the project. The proposal of the school is restudied and deepened; related issues and problems are discussed and decided.

The EFAG has 80 hectares of land in a rural setting, about eight kilometres from the town of Antonio Gonçalves. There are separate buildings for male and female students, classrooms, kitchen and refectory, and housing for service personnel. All buildings have a rainwater cistern attached. The grounds include chicken and pig pens, goat barns, vegetable gardens, apiaries, sports fields and a bakery.



To make this all viable, an Italian Church affiliated NGO has supported the EFAG, but that will end in 2010. With more attention being given to financial sustainability, the school is focusing on income sources.

In an attempt at self-support, the bakery is being reorganized to be both a source of food for the students, and a bread supply for nearby communities. The EFAG is making an investment in chickens, pork, goats and vegetable gardens. Three new rainwater cisterns are being constructed and a project to plant manioc for animal fodder is under study.



However, diminishing annual rainfall due to global warming has created a need for an alternative water supply. Although cisterns take care of most of the human consumption, there is not a sufficient water supply for livestock and animal fodder to support the dry season. Wells are costly and there is no guarantee of water quality (most wells are too salty for use).

The most viable alternative is a dugout or small dam system to save the run-off from the annual rains. Is that a dream, or can we make it a reality? ■

Losing a Prophet

BY RON ROLHEISER, OMI



Five priests, driving north from Guatemala City for a community meeting in May, were stopped by masked gunmen. After robbing the priests, they opened fire, killing Fr. Lawrence (Lorenzo) Rosebaugh, an American priest, and seriously wounding Fr. Jean Claude Nowama, a Congolese priest.

This hit close to home, not just because the victims were priests, but because they were all members of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the community to which I belong, and the man who was killed was someone whom I knew well and deeply admired.

Lorenzo Rosebaugh, 64, was a special gift to the world, to the church, to our community, and especially to the poor for whom he gave his life.

In 1968, in protest of the Viet Nam war, he burned some draft files. This landed him in prison for two years. In 1975, he hitchhiked to Brazil and for the next several years lived on the streets of Recife, without a rectory or an address, celebrating the Eucharist with the street people and helping them find food each day. This aroused the suspicion of the authorities and he was arrested, imprisoned, and beaten. Given the political climate in Brazil at the time, he would no doubt have disappeared had there not been international pressure for his release.

In the 1980s, a near-deadly bout of hepatitis forced him to return to the United States for treatment, but he was soon active again. In 1983 he was arrested for sabotaging a public address system at Fort Benning and playing Archbishop Romero's last homily through it. For this action, he spent another 18 months in prison.

He authored a book about his experiences: "To Wisdom through Failure: A Journey of Compassion, Resistance and

Hope". I had the privilege of writing the foreword for this book, a disarmingly honest account of his inner journey through all of this. Among other things, I said this:



"Daniel Berrigan once said: A prophet does not make a vow of alienation, but a vow of love. This is what Lorenzo did. He made a vow of love and it has taken him over some pretty rough roads, mostly alone, mostly on foot, landed him in prison, left his body beaten and showing the wear and tear of it, but it has left him in the end - happy, mellow, gentle, faithful, honest, and wonderfully grateful. Our religious community was founded to serve the poor and our founder challenged us to learn the language of the poor. We all try to do that, but only a few have the charism and heart to actually get down and dirty, right on the streets where the poorest of the poor look for food, for a bed, for consolation, for dignity, and for God. Lorenzo learned the language of the poor, became their friend, their advocate, and their priest and we are proud of him!"

Lorenzo didn't like to talk about himself, but at our Motherhouse in France one night he shared this story: "Before I first went to prison for civil disobedience, I did a retreat with Daniel Berrigan. He told us: 'If you can't do this without growing angry and bitter - then don't do it!' I prayed the whole night before my first arrest, both because I was scared and because I knew I needed God's help not to grow angry and bitter!"

And he never did grow angry or bitter. Always gentle in spirit and baptized by the poor, I suspect that even in his final moments when an unthinking gunman was senselessly ending his life, he, like Jesus, had an empathic sense of why this was happening: "Forgive them; they know not what they do!" ■

(Rolheiser is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, and a regular contributor to the Prairie Messenger, where this column initially appeared.)

Peru Mission Travel

At long last, Oblate Mission Travel is going to Peru! Canadian Oblates have been serving the people of Peru for more than 50 years. We are very excited to be able to mission with them.

Mark your calendars for July 2010. We are working on the final dates and itinerary but expect to be travelling the last two weeks of July. These dates are convenient for the Oblates in Peru and are designed to be convenient for participants who are only able to travel in the summer months.

We will be visiting the Oblates in Aucayacu, as well as other parts of Peru. We will cap off the mission with an optional trip to Machu Picchu. The trip will be limited to 12-14 people.

We are also working on a mission trip to Guatemala in March or April 2010.

Please contact Neysa Finnie nmfinnie@yahoo.com or 604-736-3972 if you want to be on the list to receive more information as the details for Peru or Guatemala Mission trips are finalized. ■



Cause to celebrate

OTTAWA – It was an occasion for celebration when OMI Lacombe Canada Province marked the second renewal of vows by David MacPhee, OMI, and the acceptance into the pre-novitiate program of Rusty Gardiner.

David began his third year with the Oblate community, after spending the summer studying French at Laval University in Québec City and then with two Oblates from Notre-Dame-du-Cap Province in Chibougamau, Qué. He is continuing his theological studies.



Rusty has had a long association with the Oblates. He grew up in an Oblate-administered parish in Northern Saskatchewan, completed high school at St. Thomas College in North Battleford, and has worked extensively with Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie, OMI, in the Archdiocese of Keewatin-The Pas. He has experience in administration, business, and most recently as

a government employee with responsibilities in economic development and tourism. As he discerns the possibility of deepening his relationship with the Oblate community, he will be taking theology classes at St. Paul University. ■

Remembering Harold Kaufmann, OMI

BY CINDY L. WOLFF, IMPERIAL, SK

As I sat and read the latest news about Kenya, exciting news but also so much more to do in the trying times there, it brought back memories of Harold Kaufmann, OMI (1930-2008). Kenya has always held a special place in our hearts because of Fr. Kaufmann, a special person in our family because we had the great pleasure and honour to get to know him when he was our parish priest in Imperial, SK.



We rented the rectory for the winter while Fr. Kaufmann came in for the weekends for masses and he spent time at our home at Etter's Beach. Upon returning from Kenya he would always take time to spend a week with us. The excitement of



Fr. Harold when he signed up for missionary work in Kenya was beyond anything I have ever seen. Of course, we were worried about his health and age, but St. Eugene would have been proud because the love of Jesus in Fr. Harold's heart was amazing.

The Oblates have always addressed the hearts of people with their love, respect, and gentle (sometimes more) prodding to take and make a better path with Jesus. I was on parish council in Imperial with Fr. Harold and his humour and gentle kick to our behinds to smarten up, made our parish more loving and caring.

Here's to Fr. Harold Kaufmann for being in on the beginning stages to the missionary work in Kenya and to all of the others that still continue their good work there. ■

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.

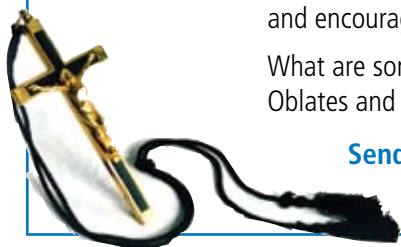
We are curious: Why did you choose us?

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



Walk right in

BY SANDRA PRATHER



Recently, my husband and I had the marvellous experience of walking a section of the Camino, the famous pilgrims' path to Santiago and the Cathedral of St. James. Starting in Leon, Spain, our 18-day walk took us over two smallish mountain passes divided by the Bierzo Valley. As we clambered up and down over the relatively steep passes, and through the rolling hills in the valley, I longingly recalled the Advent promises: every valley shall be exalted and every hill laid low. How much easier our walk would have been if indeed the valleys were filled in and the mountains levelled!

Advent invites us into just such a road construction project – but the road is into our hearts. The readings urge us to 'prepare the way of the Lord' and the image is of building a broad, smooth highway to allow for God's easy access into our lives.

For me, this means exploring the uneven terrain of my heart, the ups and downs of my relationship with the Lord. Increased time at prayer, making opportunities for fasting and engaging in charitable actions are the actions that help to fill in the valleys and level the mountains that hinder God's access into my life.

In this rebuilding project, St. Eugene de Mazenod stands as a model. John Paul II called Eugene 'a man of Advent' because Eugene allowed his life to be shaped continually by the Lord's coming. I too would like to be continually shaped by the Lord's coming. Then when Christmas arrives, I could welcome Christ into my heart with the invitation, "Walk right in."

(Prather, an Oblate Lay Associate, is director of Star of the North Retreat Centre in Edmonton)



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