

AMMI *Lacombe* MAMI
Canada

Oblate Spirit



November 2011

*Gifts
of Hope*



A gift, a smile



As we read through communications from Oblate missionaries in the field, one of the themes that seems to come to the surface is the gratefulness with which they are accepted into the homes of the poor, who always seem to have something to share, whether it be a cup of tea, some fruit or something as simple as a heart-warming smile.

Now as we move into the Christmas season, we reflect again about those in the world who struggle to survive against what seem like insurmountable odds. In this publication, we are presented with an opportunity to assist some of the Oblate missionaries who work with those less fortunate on a daily basis.

We would like to offer you some suggestions for alternative gifts to give those near and dear. For your donation, you will receive a donor card containing a description of the gift you have chosen; you can personalize it, send it to your loved one and both of you will know you have brought a smile to a stranger's face.

As Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."

We can make a difference.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



Gifts of Hope

Experience the joy of giving a meaningful Christmas gift to a loved one and bringing a smile to a face in a developing country.

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

Leo Buscaglia



Christmas Gift Options 2011

TO KENYA:

Gift of Clothing and Shoes

Thousands of children in Kenya are affected by HIV/AIDS. Some of the children are HIV+ and some are orphans of parents who had AIDS. Most are looked after by grandparents, godparents or guardians. Your gift of \$25 would buy a set of new clothes and shoes for a child, truly making their lives more joyful.

Clothes and shoes for HIV+ children and AIDS orphans ~ \$25







TO PERU:

Gift of a Home

In the devastating earthquake of August 2007, many people of Chinchá Alta, Peru, lost everything ~ their homes, jobs and even loved ones. Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI, operates a gravel pit making bricks to build houses for the poor. Receiving families actively participate in the construction. Join them in rebuilding their homes and their lives by giving a gift of love and hope.

Brick concrete home in Peru ~ \$1,800





TO PERU:

Gift of Health



Santa Clotilde is a 40-bed rural hospital serving an estimated 30,000 people along the Napo River in the jungles of the Peruvian Amazon. Your support is needed to provide malnourished babies with powdered milk and nourishment, giving them a chance to live and grow.

Feed 10 babies for one month in Peru ~ \$100

TO BRAZIL:

Gift of Nourishment

The Family Agricultural School has approximately 80 students between the ages of 9 to 18. It costs about \$8 a day to feed one student a simple breakfast, lunch, supper and nutritional snacks during the school year.



**Feed a student for
three days ~ \$24**



TO BOLIVIA:

Gift of Christmas Packages

Hear the giggles of laughter echoing as children run down the remote rural mountains of Bolivia, eager to receive a Christmas package of food, clothes, shoes, medicine and a small toy. Imagine their delight in knowing that someone in Canada cares for them, the poor near Cochabamba, Bolivia.

**Three christmas gift packages
in Bolivia ~ \$45**





Jim Fiori, OMI

TO KENYA:

Gift of Oblate Presence

The Oblate charism continues to be shared through personal human contact where many humanitarian and spiritual needs are met with compassion. Your financial support provides a simple lifestyle for one week of food, clothing and education of future Oblate missionaries.

Education and support of future Oblate missionaries ~ \$100



The mission of formation

BY JAMES FIORI, OMI

In 1997 when four Canadian Oblates set sail to establish the Oblate Kenyan mission, they left Canadian shores with no idea of what awaited them.

On arrival in the Meru diocese they busied themselves with learning something about the culture and language. This time of enculturation was short-lived and they moved to Kionyo, a rural community on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya. They took responsibility for a new Parish (St. Stephens) that encompassed 12 prayer houses.

The community of four was divided into two residences within the parish, Kionyo and Igandene. The roads, although this definition is a bit of an exaggeration, made walking to the various prayer houses easier than driving.



Bill Stang, OMI, Jim Fiori, OMI

Bill Stang, OMI, became known as the walking priest and it was in walking with the people that they came to know the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In establishing the mission, little thought was given to recruiting. In Canada vocations were a distant memory. It was a surprise to everyone when young men began to show up at the door asking to join us. What to do? The first four men moved in with the community in Igandene. Their accommodation was basically a tin shed and they began to upgrade and finish their high school education. This was the beginning of formation in the mission.



It became clear that the formation of Oblates was something we had to provide for. The property of a defunct coffee co-operative was acquired and became our first formation house, Blessed Joseph Gerard Pre-novitiate. In beginning formation ministry in a new location the Oblate community was divided. We now had parish ministry and formation ministry, a significant evolution.

It was understood at this new beginning that the young men would spend two years in this “pre-novitiate.” The objective was to prepare them for novitiate. To this end they spent time upgrading their English and learning some computer skills and being introduced to Oblate community life. It was a big moment when these eight men departed Kenya for South Africa to begin their formal initiation into the community and to prepare for religious life and the priesthood.

As I write this two of these men have made their perpetual or final vows, the first Kenyan Oblates. One is a brother now assigned to the formation house in Meru and the second has just been ordained deacon and will be ordained to the priesthood in the coming months. Two others will be making their final profession, probably in January, and they will be ordained in 2013.

Our formation process has evolved and in 2007 we opened

the Blessed Joseph Cebula Pre-novitiate in Nairobi. We acquired a property in the suburb of Karen. With the aid of our associates Norman Péladeau and his wife Sheila Sullivan, this property was developed. The program in Meru is now considered a postulancy where aspirants come for nine months to discern their vocation with the Oblates.

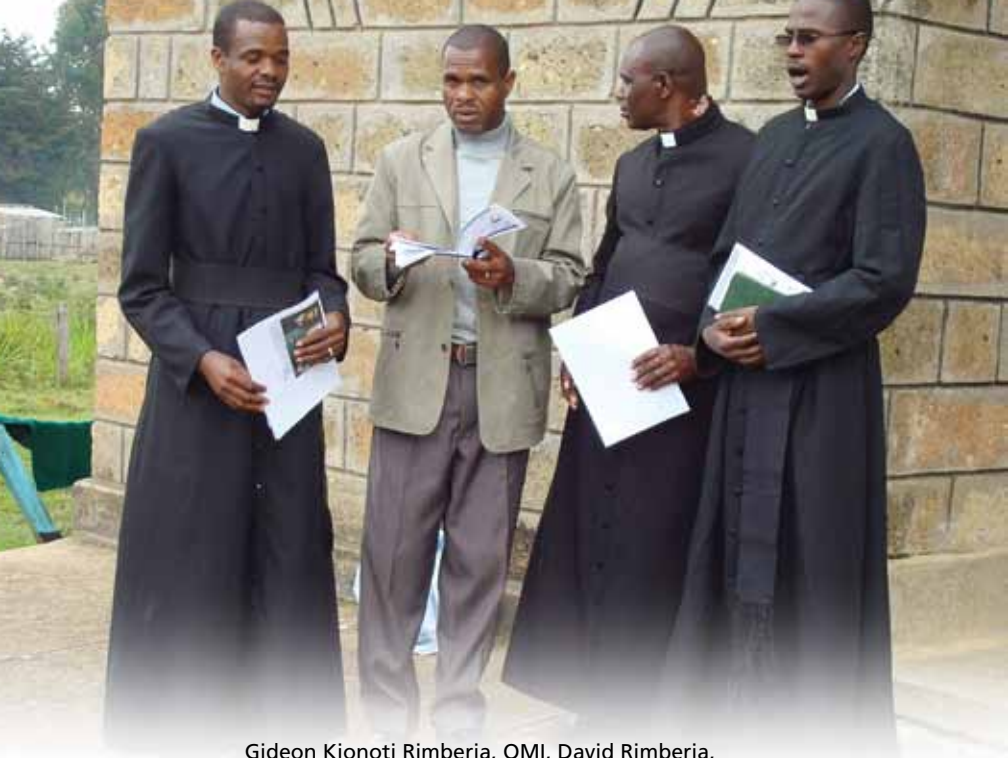
From the program in Meru the candidates move to the pre-novitiate in Nairobi where they study philosophy, a requisite for theological studies. They graduate with a bachelors' degree in philosophy. From here they go to South Africa for their novitiate year in Johannesburg and then to the scholasticate where they pursue their theological studies.

These past months have been incredibly gratifying as we receive these new Oblates into our community. The mission is maturing and growing. In welcoming these new men into the Kenya mission it is clear that we must expand. We are coming of age.

The mission is completely dependent on the generous support of our benefactors. Without the generous support of MAMI, we would not be able to live.

Supporting the formation of men to become Oblates and priests may not seem to be as helpful or as satisfying as support for some of the more immediate projects and





Gideon Kionoti Rimberia, OMI, David Rimberia,
Joseph Kiruja Magambo, OMI, Dionisius Mwandiki Ananua, OMI

undertakings like HIV/Aids or the water projects, but in fact it is more important and significant.

We are limited in our ability to help these causes by our manpower. Our mission is always to establish local church. To accomplish this, the Kenya mission must be Kenyan and made up predominantly of Kenyans. We are trying to find ways to make our mission self-sustaining.

We welcome and celebrate the arrival of the new Kenyan Oblates. We give thanks because it is through your generosity that this has been made possible. As donors you are as missionary as I am. I cannot be a missionary without your support. Certainly in the name of the mission community I thank you. I also thank you in the name of Jesus Christ, whose mission you support.

(Fiori is the Mission Superior in Kenya)



Life lessons

BY ALFRED GROLEAU, OMI

Oblate candidates in Meru have gained rich experiences from weekly visits to the homes of women who live in the slums. They have seen their living conditions, heard their stories, shared prayer and Scriptures with them, and have offered a supportive presence.

Our postulants recently hosted one of the women's groups that is sponsored by the Good Shepherd Sisters in the slums of Meru. Since the establishment of a formation house in Meru in 2002, our program for apostolates has plugged into the apostolate of the sisters who sponsor a number of women's groups in the slum, gathering these women in weekly prayer meetings and assisting some of them in micro-finances and school fees for their children.

I have been in contact with young Kenyan Oblates since 2006 and they always say the visits to these women have been the highlight of their stay in Meru, where they spend time as postulants and pre-novices. They were all deeply moved by the witness of faith of these devoted mothers whose faith has been tested by many life struggles.

Our three postulants this year, James Ibare, Moses Owino and Phelix Johya, have been visiting the Saint Euphrasia prayer group since they began their postulancy in March. Brother

Joseph Magambo Kiruja is the Oblate staff member who accompanies them.

Though I do not partake directly in the weekly visits, I have learned much from those who speak about the small living spaces that receive their visits. They reveal their compassion for the young adult son who is lying at home recuperating from a horrible beating, and they lament the outcome of a daughter's infatuation that caused her to refuse an opportunity for secondary school offered by the Good Shepherd Sisters and who eventually left the family with a blessing and the burden of two more little ones.

Following are the reflections of two of the young postulants, one from a visit by the women, and the second on visiting the women's homes:

MOSES OWINO

It was the turn of the Euphrasia women to pay a visit. As hosts we had to do everything possible to ensure the visitors did not go home disappointed.

We showed them many things that our community has put in place, primarily poultry farming, herd farming and agriculture. The celebration continued until the sun went beyond its horizon, giving room for the night. (In Kenya, sunset would be around 6 p.m.)

From these happenings I drew valuable lessons. I am grateful for the response of these women to our invitation, because many people do not respond to invitations. It was an opportunity for us to show that we care, since these women face many challenges in life. We want to show them our appreciation regardless of their rank in society. They show us an example of generosity because they came with gifts even though they own little.

JAMES IBARE

We arrived at J's house to find her preparing tea for us



outside, because the house is too small inside. J is a widow with two children, both in school and sponsored by the Good Shepherd Sisters.

She narrated her life experiences and all the difficulties she has faced. The story was sad and touching, but we tried to encourage her not to lose hope. Her mother died when she was still a young girl and she was the first born. She was left to care for the rest of the children and did not receive any help from her uncles and aunts who were financially stable and could have participated in bringing up the orphans.

She faced many difficulties and approached the point of suicide, asking God questions. But God was on her side, because her brother helped buy the land on which she lives and the Good Shepherd Sisters helped build the house. Her brother was lucky because he got a sponsor who helped him get an education and he is now employed and taking care of J's son, who is attending school.

At the second house, we found BK with a daughter and two grandchildren. She welcomed us joyfully. B is suffering from asthma, but she is always happy and seemed lifted by our visit. She had prepared lunch for us. She says that when a

person is happy, he/she does not grow old. She gives us courage every time we visit.

The day was lesson filled, especially from the discussion we had in J's house. It gives me courage to face problems, not run away from them, and to be a hard-working person.

(Alfred Groleau is the former mission superior in Kenya and a member of the formation team.)

NEW Gift Payment Option

We now have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed or call our office toll free: 1-866-432-6264 and we will be pleased to assist you in facilitating your donation to the Oblate missions.



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 new 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.

A day in the field

BY DAVID MACPHEE, OMI

KIONYO, KENYA – I recently decided to help out in the tea fields, where Kionyo's main crop is grown.

In the morning I waited for Mary's son Aaron to pick me up. Aaron is a 14-year-old man. I say he is a man because in the Merian culture you become a man when you are initiated. Aaron went through this last year. The initiation process includes circumcision and a period where you are secluded from your family. After this event you are not supposed to live with your mother, so Aaron has his own house on the farm property.

Mary is an active member of the parish. She sits on the parish council and does several jobs for the parish. She struggles to make ends meet for her son and there is no support from her husband, who has left the family for reasons I'm not sure of.

When I arrived at the farm I greeted Mary and her mother. Her mother did not speak a word of English but when she saw me she laughed with delight. When I asked why she was laughing Mary mentioned that she hasn't seen many white people, let alone one who is willing to work in the fields.

David MacPhee, OMI



Immediately after my arrival Mary, Aaron and I headed to the tea fields. Unlike Canada, where our crops are on flat level land, the tea fields are on dramatic slopes. I was put to work with Aaron with only one piece of advice: “two leaves and a bud.” When picking tea you have to pick the young leaves.

While I was asking Aaron about the right leaves to pick, Mary speedily snatched the healthy leaves with little effort, throwing bundles of leaves into her basket. If I were to guess I would say that she was picking about five times faster than Aaron and I combined. My suspicions were confirmed when I saw her full basket. My initial embarrassment at this was replaced with the realization that my livelihood didn’t depend on picking tea and, after all, this was my first time picking.

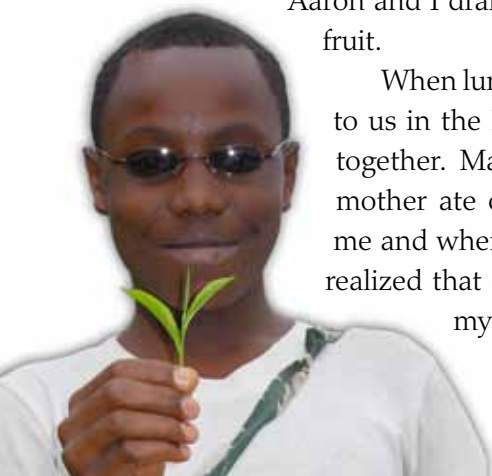
After about 10 minutes of picking I heard singing from the neighbouring field. I was curious as to what they were singing. I romantically thought they might be singing ancient songs only known to the tea pickers of Kionyo. When I asked what the songs were, Mary said they were church hymns. My romantic notions were not completely correct, but were satisfied.

After an hour I looked down at my fingers which had been my primary instruments of extracting the crop to find that my skin was covered in a brown hue. I cried out to Mary and Aaron “I’m becoming African!” We all laughed.

Finally at noon we took a break for some tea while Mary prepared lunch. Her mother lay on the ground for a rest while Aaron and I drank our tea and ate some tasty fruit.

When lunch was prepared it was served to us in the house where Aaron and I ate together. Mary, the young cousins and her mother ate outside. This seemed odd to me and when I thought about protesting I realized that as a guest I shouldn’t impose my ideas on Mary.

After lunch I asked Mary



when we were to take the tea to the tea-buying station. “We wait for the bell,” was her curt response. At 1:30 p.m. the bell rang. I attempted to carry the basket of tea on my shoulders but apparently it looked awkward so Aaron took it to save me from the embarrassment of the onlookers.

When we arrived I could feel the eyes of the tea pickers on me. “What is this mzungu doing here?” was the general sense I got from the cast of the tea-centre regulars. One of the employees was particularly forward in his curiosity. While sucking on a cigarette he boldly asked questions and made fun of my inability to speak Kimeru.

I did feel out of place, but I think that’s the point of being a missionary.

When the truck arrived it was a mad scramble to put the tea into the burlap bags provided by the tea company and have it weighed. This was the most action-packed activity of the day.

As I said good-bye to Mary and Aaron, they handed me a pineapple and six eggs as a thank-you gift. This is one thing that often shocks me about the people of Kionyo. They have so little, yet they give so much.



10 years later

BY TIM COONEN, OMI

OTTAWA – About 10 years ago I spent several weeks visiting the Kenyan missions. At that time we had only one location, the parish of Kionyo with its attached prayer houses. The mission had a telephone. It had a crank on the side of the box (I'm not making this up!). And the phone number was 'Kionyo 2.'

In July of 2011 I returned to Kenya, this time as the provincial treasurer. I stepped back into that same parish and spotted a sign over the church door in English and Kimeru: "Switch off UR phone!" Things have changed, everyone has a cheap pay-as-you-go cell phone, and the spirit of growth and energy is everywhere.

The purpose of this trip wasn't just to get reacquainted with the mission and its fine works, but to examine the books, help Fr. Mario Azrak (the treasurer of the mission) and Maria Kios (accountant temp) prepare the necessary reports, and to ensure that all operations that the missionary association sup-

Bishop Salesius Mugambi, Bishop of Meru

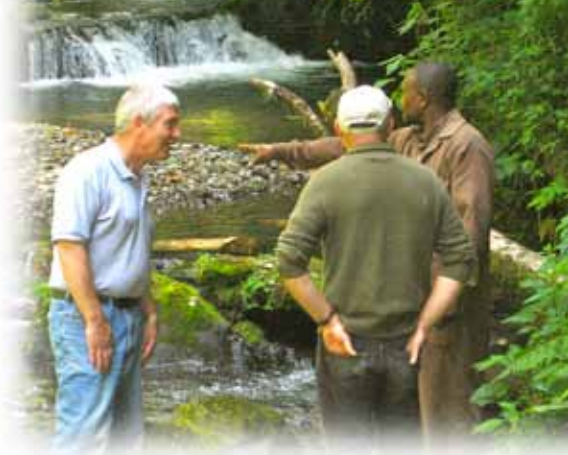


ports in Kenya are completely in compliance with the regulations of Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) Charities Directorate.

Things have changed over on the Canadian side of the world as well.

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 governments all over the developed world have increased their scrutiny of funds flowing across their borders, and that increase in regulation allows for no exceptions for religious groups. Whenever a government allows a registered charity (like AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI) to issue a charitable receipt, the government sacrifices the revenue it would have collected from those funds in the way of income tax. The government considers that 'lost revenue' to be its contribution, and exercises its right to see that those funds are used in ways that comply not only with the mission and purposes of the registered charity, but also with Canada's public policy. Before 9/11 religious groups largely operated without much scrutiny, but with the growing suspicion that in some instances terrorist groups are being funded by so-called religious groups, both the regulations and the CRA's auditing practices have increased significantly.

Diane Lepage and her team in Saskatoon have become experts in seeing that funds donated to the missionary association are used for their intended purposes; as well she successfully demonstrates to the CRA that MAMI maintains both direction and control over the use of those funds. The mandatory reports along with their full documentation take a significant amount of time (both from Diane, and from the missionaries who receive funds), but failure to provide these reports



Tim Coonen, OMI, touring the water project

carries a high price: revocation of the charity's status, and with that its ability to issue income tax receipts.

I am pleased to say that I found that our mission in Kenya was in full compliance with the CRA's regulations, and that the use of all funds was properly documented. This is no easy feat, especially in a country where most transactions are done on a cash basis, and where credit cards are rarely seen. I sifted through hundreds of hand-written bills of sale and receipts, many of which took me back to my small-town boyhood, where hardware-store clerks were never without their pencils and little sales books, carbon paper and all.

Fortunately, I had twice as much time as I needed to do this auditing task, and had time to do much more than sift through papers. Ten years ago I was hearing of Fr. Ken Forster's efforts to co-ordinate construction and find funding for a large water project in the foothills of Mt. Kenya; on this trip I was able to hike up into the hills and see the small dams, pipelines and holding tanks that now provide water to thousands in a country that knows too well the effect of drought. Benjamin Kaburu, supervisor, proudly showed me their work, and finally pulled

Cosmas Kithinji, OMI, James Mwiti, OMI, Josephat Gichana, OMI





the 40-year-old Land Rover over to a pile of rough hewn rectangular stones, saying “Next time you come, these will be the new office of the water co-operative!”

Ten years ago a few young men were living in our first parish, beginning to explore the possibility of joining the Oblates and sharing in our mission; this time I stayed in our houses in Meru and Nairobi, and got to know most of the dozen or so men in our Kenyan formation program. They shared the work of their hands: the milk from their cow, the produce from their large gardens, and also the dreams of their hearts: the mission to which these sons of St. Eugene are being called, to build a vibrant church and a stronger Kenya.

I happened to arrive just in time for a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the first missionaries in the diocese of Meru, and quite a celebration it was. Several thousand gathered with the bishop for an outdoor mass at our prayer house in Igandene. Led by dancers and a mass choir made up of musicians from the various prayer houses, we prayed and celebrated for hours. The offertory procession was amazing; along with the bread and wine, the faithful proudly brought forward the fruits of their hands and their land: bananas, coffee, tea and maize from their own land, and even a beautiful lamb.

I visited a rural dispensary in Gaturi, recently rebuilt with MAMI’s assistance. While the registered nurse in charge proudly showed me the new roof and windows and a

store-room full of medications, the lab technician touched my heart as her eyes brightened: “with this new microscope I can now diagnose cholera and typhoid right here.”

The deputy principal of the Kionyo Secondary School apologized that he couldn’t show me the textbooks purchased with MAMI funds: “The students have them.” But of course, that is where the books should be!

As treasurer (and as one of the Directors of AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI) I was of course pleased to see how a relatively modest number of Canadian dollars, converted into Kenyan shillings, can purchase, hire and build so much more over there than it would here in Canada; our generosity is multiplied like loaves and fishes in their hands. But as a priest who myself has spent 20 years in the missions of Canada’s Yukon Territory, I was most moved and inspired by the very evident work of the Spirit in these communities, where churches hewn of the native stones are yielding a Church built of human hearts of flesh, radiating God’s love.

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



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