

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit

September 2010



*Power  
of the people*

# Thinking of Christmas



The crops are mostly off the fields and there is much for which to be thankful. So it would seem a little early to be thinking of snow and Christmas. Well, skip the snow, because most of the places in the world we write about in *Oblate Spirit* rarely see snow. And it's much too soon for that in our lives. (We live in Saskatchewan).

But we would like our readers to start thinking about Christmas, because that is the season when we open our hearts even more. The next issue of *Oblate Spirit* will present some options for Christmas gifting, and the reason we bring it up is to foster some food for thought.

In our family, we often 'drew' names for Christmas, as do many friends and large families. We would like to suggest groups, book clubs included, consider pooling their Christmas gift-giving funds and buy something like a cistern for a family in need, or a case of baby formula for a hospital, or school uniforms, or a simple house of bricks that Blaise MacQuarrie writes about in this issue. Who really needs another gnome for their garden anyway?

We will publish several options and their costs in the November issue, but for now we just wanted to plant the seeds ... and hope they sprout this winter.

In closing, we want to thank our many friends in Latin and South America who took time from their very busy schedules to share their stories for this issue. We are humbled by their generosity of time when there is such a need for their presence in so many ways.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

# From your hands

BY MAURICE SCHROEDER, OMI

SANTA CLOTILDE, PERU – A long-time friend and supporter of our medical mission in Peru recently wrote: “I read in *Oblate Spirit* of your needs and projects ... among them the rewiring of the rural hospital in Santa Clotilde, Río Napo, Peru.”

I am happy to tell you that due to your good services and the tremendous generosity of friends of our folks in Santa Clotilde, the rewiring project is in process of becoming a reality.

In May we purchased the required \$40,000 of materials (transformers, copper cables, etc.) in Lima, thanks to one particularly generous donation that accounted for half of the cost. These materials were sent by land and river to Santa Clotilde, requiring almost a month in transit, but representing a substantial saving over purchasing the materials in Iquitos.





Our hospital was originally constructed in 1965 by the Sisters Missionaries of Our Lady of the Angels from Lennoxville, Que., who served the mission's medical needs with nurse-nuns for 40 years, beginning in 1951, long before our arrival (Jack MacCarthy, OMI, and myself) in 1986.

The original wiring is still in service in the older part of the hospital, but the new 20-bed wing built in 2007 has up-to-date wiring. However, the old part has been a hazard to our current sensitive diagnostic equipment, and worse, a fire hazard. The urgency of the need had been heightened for the last three years by the additional electrical requirements of the new wing.

We were also offered (and are in the process of receiving) a lesser but still substantial donation to the project (whose total cost is \$55,000) from a petroleum company active in the area (perhaps anxious to repair the damaged image of petroleum companies for environmental contamination in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico disaster).

Fr. MacCarthy and the Oblates in charge of the parish in Santa Clotilde, Frs. Edgar Nolasco and Roberto Carrasco, have assumed an insistent role with the oil companies invading our area to assume a co-ordinated and responsible role in the



health care of the communities whose natural resources they are exploiting.

When we encounter an especially beautiful flowering or fruit tree, we tend to admire the flower or the fruit. We don't often admire the foliage or the trunk, or much less the roots out to their hair-like tips that initiate the nutritive process that can result in flowers and fruit.

That's what goes on in our medical mission. For every flower or fruit that attracts attention, there is a tremendous, often overlooked organization and network making that possible, beginning with the hair-tip donations from you that nurture the whole process.

Jesus compared it to a body.

We call it the Body of Christ.

We thank you for being part of it.

*(Schroeder is an Oblate and doctor serving in Peru)*



# Homes for the poor

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA, PERU – It was a good year! Along with the homeless, we set a record in building houses and providing hope for the future in Peru.

But work and reality is so different from that in Canada. The memory of the earthquake and its destruction in Haiti this year is still fresh in the minds of many. Well, my friends, we here in Peru are still helping the homeless after the earthquake of 2007.

When you go to the 'back area' of the city you would think the quake hit yesterday! True, people still live in shacks and

poverty – a life of misery. But with the help of the funds you so kindly provide, this is how we approach the problem of helping the homeless.

First, the family *must* participate in the actual work of building a simple home. Yes, even the children! What we do is put down a good solid foundation – strong concrete column and beam reinforced by iron rods. We build four strong walls from concrete bricks and add a good roof.

We don't put in doors or windows or a concrete floor. Why not? The cost



for doors, windows and a concrete floor means another family will not get help. In short, because there are so many homeless people, we try and give these families a 'start with their house. What we are doing does have positive results because they put in the door, windows and concrete floor. They will even paint the house. Our social work is to help people to help themselves, and this does work.

To provide a clear picture of how your donated money was used, let me share with you these figures. We delivered 425,500 concrete bricks (420 truckloads); 2,760 half-inch iron rods; 3,450 quarter-inch iron rods; 2,300 three-eighths-inch iron rods; 9,200 bags of cement; 1.61 kilos of No. 16 wire; 1.61 kilos of No.8 wire; 805 kilos of nails; 2,760 bamboo poles; 11,040 bamboo rods; 1,010 reed mats; 77 hacksaw blades; 77 truckloads of earth (304 cubic metres); 690 truckloads of gravel (2,760 cubic metres).

Since the earthquake in August of 2007, a total of 220 little concrete houses and a chapel were built.

Let me take this time to once again thank you for all the help you send us. We give thanks to God for your kindness and goodness. As you can see your money is wisely used. Let me tell you that I do not receive a wage and if I did I would give it away ... to buy cement!



# A day in the life of ...

**BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI**

CHINCHA, PERU – My program here in the parish is still much the same: up at 5 a.m. daily, a bowl of porridge for breakfast at 5:15 (I write letters at this time). At 7 a.m. we have morning prayer, then I have a cup of coffee with the community.

At 8 a.m. I pick up the truck – our workhorse – from a garage at a place we call “The Ranch,” a property belonging to the Oblates. It is here where we make the concrete bricks for the houses we build. Once in the cab of the truck I head for the ‘pit’ where I have five men already busy at work (they start at 7 a.m.). In the pit we work from 7 to 12 noon and from 2 to 5 pm, 5½ days a week.

During the week we load and unload that truck 55 times, all by hand and shovel. At the end of the work day a good shower to wash off sand and dust gets me ready for the 7 p.m. mass. Usually I have supper (porridge) at 6:30 p.m. After mass I return to the house and pray Vespers, look at my e-mail, look at world news and sometimes I take the rocking chair and place it on the sidewalk close to the house and watch the cars go by! On Saturdays there is baptism at 4 p.m. (last Saturday there were only 28 children to be baptized). On Sundays I go to a community for the Celebration of the Word. In my spare time I like to read and loaf!

I have a dog called “Chiquito,” meaning “little one,” that I





found abandoned in the gravel pit. He was only five days old, hungry and very weak. He comes with me to the pit and is a good watch dog, especially in the house because robbers try to enter but the dog lets me know ... even at 3 a.m. In the pit when I take a little rest he comes and places his body over my chest just like a baby in the arms of its mother.

And that is the 'style' of my week. Believe you me, I am not bored!

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## *Oblate Mission* travel news

Plans are under way for Oblate mission travel in 2011, which marks the 150th anniversary of the death of Oblate founder St. Eugene de Mazenod.

We have confirmed with our Oblate brothers in Cuba that they would welcome a group in February led by Paul Feeley, OMI.

We are working to get a group to Peru in July.

There are many changes in Kenya. God willing we will be able to put together a group with Ken Thorson, OMI, as the spiritual director.

Please telephone or send Neysa Finnie an e-mail to get on the list of interested participants so you will be among the first to receive all the information as the plans come together. The contact information is: [nmfinnie@yahoo.com](mailto:nmfinnie@yahoo.com) or (604) 736-3972.

It will be a big year for mission travel. Join us!



# In your words

BY ELSIE OFF



THUNDER BAY, Ont. – In 1971, Rev. Dean St. James encouraged parishioners of St. Patrick Cathedral to support missions in the Third World. Several members were willing to support a mission but requested personal contact with the missionary through letters. Fr. St. James found us Brother Blaise MacQuarrie, who agreed to write and tell us of his work. Thus began our journey with him for 38 years.

Brother Blaise sends us personal letters and a letter every three months to share with the group, along with pictures of his work.

We started with six couples and over the years we have grown to an average of 24 members who commit themselves to donate the same amount of money (of their choice) every three months. Our secretary collects and sends this money to MAMI, which in turn sends the money to Brother Blaise. Receiving the same amount every three months enables Blaise to know what money he has to work with.

Blaise has visited our group in Thunder Bay many times over the years. On his visits we celebrate with a potluck supper with all the members. He always comes with small gifts from Peru for everyone. We all enjoy his company and stories of his work in Peru.

Blaise has built many brick houses (10x10), schools, chapels, has put in water mains and electricity, and all to the benefit of the people he serves. However, he required that the people work along with him in the process of building their homes. No free-bees.

We believe that Brother Blaise is a very special person and humble servant of the Lord, and we feel blessed to be helping him in his missionary work.

# Building a life

BY DAVID HEWSON

CHINCHA, PERU – I will always remember my first day in Chinchá. Padre Cesar, an Oblate priest, had driven me and two others from Lima, and as we entered, the reality of where I would be spending the next several months hit me: the simple brick houses; the dusty unpaved streets filled with garbage; the dogs howling at us as we passed; the three-wheeled moto-taxis darting into any possible free space. Lima had been busy, noisy and absolutely chaotic, but that was a place I was passing through. Chinchá was going to be home.

When you get the warm welcome I received from my host family and so many others, you feel at home more quickly than you ever thought possible. The traffic may be hectic, but the people on the whole are incredibly laid back, warm, and willing to talk to the gringo whose Spanish still needs some work.

Life quickly settled into a routine of (backbreaking) house-building, teaching physical education at the school, playing soccer, meeting neighbours and friends, getting better at Spanish, and eating absolutely delicious food.

The harsh realities of life for the poor people of Chinchá will sound familiar to people who are interested in developing countries ... little to eat; insufficient housing; exploitation by employers; corruption in government; alcoholism and drug addiction; widespread robberies; grossly inadequate services such as police and health care; and for the poorest citizens, no electricity, running water, or sewage.

But what often doesn't come through when Canadians talk about these problems is the spirit of many



of the people who, despite their circumstances, are striving for a better existence for themselves and their children. After meeting so many, I am impressed by how warmly they reply to a “Buenos dias!” and how willing they are to share what they have with a visitor, even if it’s only a glass of Coca Cola.



David Hewson (right)

This spirit in the people and the community isn’t always there in other parts of Peru. I believe that this hopefulness might come from the work that the Oblate mission (run by Canadian Oblate Blaise MacQuarrie) is doing, providing a home to the poorest citizens who for various reasons often have no other form of help.

As the theory goes, once you have built a home and have a roof over your head, you can start to build your life.

*(Hewson, an environmental engineering student at the University of Waterloo, was in Peru working with the Oblate missions as part of a university program called Beyond Borders. Most of his time was spent in Chincha, south of Lima, where he helped build houses.)*

## 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 which benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions.



# Sparks of hope

BY DAVID HEWSON

SANTA CLOTILDE, PERU – Due to the Peruvian Independence Day holidays, there was a lull in activity in Chinchá, and I decided to use the opportunity to visit some of the other Oblate missions in Peru that I had heard so much about. Although I had planned to see three missions in total, I never made it past my first stop – Santa Clotilde.

A small, isolated town of 3,000 people on the Napo River in the Peruvian Amazon, it is nevertheless the largest settlement in the area, where most people live by fishing, hunting and farming.

In 1986, Canadian Oblate priest and doctor Maurice Schroeder and Norbertine priest and doctor Jack MacCarthy established a medical centre here to serve the Napo River area. Although Fr. Maurice (or Moe) has left to become the Oblate superior in Lima, Fr. Jack is still at the medical centre and the mission is now led by two Peruvian Oblate priests, Edgar Nolasco and Roberto Carrasco.

When I arrived, Padre Roberto informed me that the upcoming week would be Parish Week, and that representatives from 44 different towns and villages from the entire Napo River would be coming to Santa Clotilde for the event. Given the cost of such a meeting, especially the transport for representatives from up and down the more than 400 kilometres of the Napo River and its tributaries, the week is a once-a-year opportunity for the entire community to unite and





discuss issues of concern. Since 2010/2011 is an election year, the theme would be citizenship and politics. I quickly rearranged

my travel plans to stay in Santa Clotilde as long as possible.

The first three days of the week started with an early morning mass, a communal breakfast and informational workshops concerning developments in Peruvian laws and indigenous rights. After lunch, small, discussion-oriented workshops gave participants a chance to voice concerns and possible alternatives for action. Following dinner, there was an evening mass – including one mass spoken in Kichwa, an indigenous language native to the Napo area and still used by people in the upper regions of the river.

The fourth day of Parish Week was dedicated to a forum with five of the candidates for the mayoralty of the Napo River area. At the end of the forum, community representatives presented the candidates with a document to sign – a “governance agreement” laying out the expectations for ethical behaviour by politicians and proposals for a better future in the Napo River. After considering the document and making some adjustments and revisions, four of the five candidates signed the document in recognition of the public’s expectations (the incumbent mayor was not present due to a previous commitment).

I left Santa Clotilde the next day, so I missed the end of Parish Week, but I felt that I had seen the most important part – the people united, and advocating a better future for themselves and their children in the Napo River.

In a region threatened by poverty and abusive resource extraction, in a country plagued by corruption, I will never forget the distinct sense I felt: hope, that the future could be better.

# Evangelizing in the Peruvian jungle

BY JOE DEVLIN, OMI

AUCAYACU, PERU – The ‘Jesus Salvador’ parish is in the Peruvian jungle, approximately 630 kilometres and a 13-hour bus ride northeast of Lima.

Aucayacu is the capital of the District of José Crespo y Castillo. The District is home to about 35,000 people, 20,000 of whom live in Aucayacu with the rest spread out among 110 rural villages.

After establishing parishes in Chinchá and Comas, the Oblates opened a new one in the jungle in 1967. Andrés Godin, OMI, and other Oblates who followed him contributed much to the development of the area. The land could produce almost anything, and the farmers organized co-operatives. All was going well until the government started importing rice from Ecuador, and the local farmers could not compete.

Then the farmers turned to the production of coca, and the drug trade began. The Shining Path terrorist group moved in and began to control the area. Between 1980 and 2000, more than 69,000 people were killed in Peru. The District of José Crespo y Castillo was affected the most. Apart from the hundreds or thousands killed and dumped into the river, 748 people disappeared. Despite the violence, the Oblates and the Dominican Sisters remained in the area.





Joe Devlin, OMI (centre)

I arrived in Aucayacu as pastor in 1999. Having had a good experience forming 82 small Christian communities in Chincha between 1990 and 1998, I hoped to do the same in Aucayacu. It took a year to prepare the facilities – a parish hall and lodgings for people from distant villages.

In September 2000 we had our first retreat and a couple of communities were born. There were pastoral activities and groups in the parish. One of them is Family Catechesis. This is a First Communion program involving the parents who prepare their own children for the sacrament. The parents meet weekly in groups of 10 couples to prepare the teaching that they pass on to their children. On Saturday or Sunday, young catechists meet with the children to celebrate what they have learned. We also have the Holy Childhood program that prepares children to share their faith with other children.

In 2005, I was on the move again. I became bursar of the Oblate delegation and moved to the Centre House in Lima. In 2007, I was assigned to Chincha and I was living there when the devastating 7.9 earthquake struck on Aug. 15. A year later, I returned to Aucayacu as pastor.

Two Oblate scholastics, Leonard Aguirre and José



Zumaeta, four Dominican Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, and two permanent deacons and I form the central team of the



parish. The co-ordinators of the different parish groups are members of the Parish Council.

We also have a radio station that enables us to maintain contact with all the rural villages, offering programs of evangelization, human rights, and education. Thanks to a group of volunteers, the radio is on the air daily from 5 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

I want to thank all those who have helped us by your prayers and financial contribution. The parish is not yet self-sustaining, and your support has enabled us to continue our work in this mission.

May the Lord bless you with everything you need and more!



# Challenge for a new Oblate

BY ROBERTO CARRASCO, OMI

SANTA CLOTILDE, PERU – The density and the distances of the Peruvian Amazon are immense, as is the challenge of being of service to a wide range of cultures and native ethnic groups.

In 2008, the Oblates of Peru assumed the Santa Clotilde mission. This was a moment of grace for me, fulfilling all I had been prepared for in the last years of formation. I was working in Radio Amistad, the radio transmission the Oblates run in Aucayacu. To leave this work was an important decision for me.

As a seminarian I had heard of Santa Clotilde, but had never been there. So when I accepted the position, it was a new beginning for me . . . new experience, new community, new responsibilities, new everything.

I made my final vows and was given the obedience to Santa Clotilde. On Aug 6, 2008, I started my new life as a missionary. On Sept 22 I was ordained deacon in Lima and one day later set out for Santa Clotilde.

The sight of rivers, trees, lush vegetation and beautiful open skies augured well for me. It was all a challenge, but on entering the





Oblates of Mary Immaculate I knew I was joining a religious family experienced in distant and difficult missions.

I was anxious not to miss the opportunity God was giving me. My first wonderment was at the peace and tranquility one feels in this place. Nature herself embraces you. It is a time of grace that I am still enjoying.

Before long our bishop proposed that I assume charge of the indigenous pastoral for the Vicariate. In our zone the population is native, and there is a big 'time bomb' brewing: the presence of the petroleum companies. Add to that illegal deforestation, the gold panners in the rivers and the coca cultivation for the cocaine trade. All this is radically altering the lives of the people. It is a dilemma for the more than 100 native communities in the parish.

The indigenous pastoral is a large order, coupled with the social and ecological dimensions. The harvest is great but the laborers few. There are only nine priests in the whole Vicariate.

Our objective is to see the Indigenous Face of Christ. We integrate 'Indian Theology' into intercultural and interfaith dialogue. It is a tall order, but fits our missionary challenge: to faithfully live our Oblate community and the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod in the midst of the Amazon.

# A lesson in giving

RoseAnne and Tim Forster of McBride, BC have been long-time supporters of the Oblates and the poor in Peru. However, it served more than one purpose.

“When our boys were young we saw a notice on a church bulletin board to support Peruvian children to give them an education. I had been looking for a way for our boys to give to charity in a meaningful way,” explained RoseAnne.

“They each contributed 10 cents per week (10 per cent of their allowance) plus one-third of bottle returns (which we collected on our walks) which was topped up by us.

“Although Brett and Reece have been away from home, Tim and I continue to fund a girl’s education in Chincha Alta. Wish we could do more.”



## Gift Payment Option

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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.





# Building dreams

BY BRIDGET MURPHY

Since 2006, I have made three trips to visit and volunteer with Parroquia Cristo Redentor Mission in Playa Grande, Guatemala. This Mission is run by the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and serves 120 villages. Many of these villages are accessible only by walking up mountains, which can take up to two hours.

This mission serves one of the poorest regions in Guatemala, and in fact is one of the poorest regions in Central America. This area of Guatemala is known for the massacres of entire villages (women and children included) during the civil war of the 1980s. This region is mainly inhabited by indigenous people, the Maya Q'eqchi, who receive little or no financial support from the government.

I was fortunate to be able to visit many of these villages



and experience first-hand the poverty in the area. Many live with little access to adequate jobs, medical care, good drinking water, electricity, housing or education.

Many villages have no high school, and the schools that are found here have few or no educational resources. They are poorly staffed, have no electricity, no



Bridget Murphy and children

running water and no proper bathroom facilities other than an outhouse. The children have no access to a library, a computer room, or a gym. In addition, education is only guaranteed to Grade 6, after which many must try to find work, for very little pay, to help support their parents and siblings. The families have great difficulty in providing the basic needs of daily living.

In January 2008, I made a visit to Centro Chactelá. During that visit a group of teachers met with José Manuel Santiago, OMI, seeking support to help build a high school. Observing the poor conditions of primary schools and the need for a high school, I decided to take action and help the teachers achieve this need. As a result “Guatemala – Children First Project” was born. The goal of this project would be a fund-raising effort to supply the high school with textbooks, basic school supplies and desks. Some of my efforts to date have included penny drives, yard sales, cookbook sales and soliciting donations.

You cannot imagine my disappointment when I received word that the youth of this region would not be getting a high school any time soon. Their proposal had been denied. Not to be deterred by this news, I decided to start the second phase of “Guatemala – Children First Project” titled, **“Building**

**Dreams.”** My project would not only provide school supplies, but hopefully will provide the materials required to build the high school and four latrines.

I am very pleased to report that “Guatemala – Children First Project” has raised close to \$18,000 to date. I am so overwhelmed by the spirit of generosity and goodwill that flourishes within the community of Happy Valley–Goose Bay and indeed within my province of Newfoundland and Labrador that I have no doubt the dream of having a high school will become a reality for the youth of Centro Chactelá. For this support, I am very thankful and appreciative.

Together, We Can Build Dreams!

*(Murphy is a parishioner of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish,  
Happy Valley Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador)*

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

# A land of promise

BY GERARDO KAPUSTKA, OMI

GUATEMALA – The Mayan people live from the land. For centuries the land of ‘eternal spring’ has supported the peoples, despite the many attempts to destroy them. Although times are difficult most small farmers are still able to sustain their families, and at the same time yearn for the day when all who desire to work the land will one day have enough to support a dignified life.

One of the reasons for the eternal hope is the presence of

God in their lives. As a deeply religious people they walk in the presence of God, especially in difficult times. Although there are divisions regarding the practice of Christianity and the ancient Mayan religion, there is unity



in a basic truth: God is first and foremost in their lives.

We have a community very active in religious activities, but very slow or reluctant to tackle the social problems. Many find it easier to express their commitments through the practice of popular devotions. We hope that with time the fruit of these devotions and more awareness will also be a source of commitment to the more needy members of the parish.

As Oblates ministering primarily to the indigenous farmers, we realize that Guatemala is the land of promise for the Oblate family. Our missions have been a seed bed for vocations to the religious and missionary life. Although we are few (10 Oblates) and have only two rural missions and one urban mission, we have been blessed with vocations. God's calling

has been answered by several young men.

During the last 15 months we have had three ordinations to priestly life: Agustín Cruz Cano García, Santiago Coc Ché and Guillermo Hernández Morales.

The three ordinations are the crowning work of many Oblates and families who continually pray and promote vocations to the Oblate life, and there will be more. We presently have eight young Oblates in different years of formation at the scholasticate in Mexico City.

We are also blessed with two young men in Paraguay in the fifth month of their novitiate. In our pre-novitiate in Guadalajara, México, two aspirants are getting ready to begin their novitiate and five students from our missions and surrounding areas are preparing to begin their pre-novitiate. As part of our vocational promotion program, 10 to 12 students are having their first experience of Oblate community and mission.

Guatemala is truly a land of promise for vocations to the Oblate religious and missionary life. May our loving Father continue to bless us and may our friends continue to support these young men during the years of formation.





# Food for thought

BY JUAN CAYOJA AND DAYSI REA CAMPOS

BOLIVIA – Jaraña is an institution that was created by Emery Mulaire and Carmen Cano, together with a group of friends wishing to improve the living conditions of the people of the high plateau in Bolivia. During its 15 years of existence, Jaraña has worked in the extremely poor rural areas of the Andes, respecting the cultural and social values of the region.

Using the donations received from Canada, we have planned and completed various projects in the Oruro region, always with the approval and input of local authorities. With the work of the people and the use of local materials, we have dug some 500 semi-deep wells, ensuring the availability of water for human consumption and the production of vegetables. We are also excavating water reservoirs to capture and store rainwater for raising sheep and camel.

With the implementation of these projects came the initiative to produce vegetables and lettuce in solar tents (greenhouses). After several years of experimentation, it was found that production of quality vegetables on the highlands is fea-





sible and ecological. This has become a pilot zone for the production of vegetables that are marketed in the municipality of Toledo and in the city. The growers are few but fully motivated, which seems to indicate that the region may become a market gardening zone.

In the zone where we are presently working, the gardeners are small-scale producers. They are progressing, but are restricted by a lack of roads and transportation. Hence they try to sell their products in weekly markets or in community fairs. This is good for the rural population because costs are below the prices in town, and allows for the availability of vegetables and lettuce in rural areas.

Long term it will be necessary to promote diversified agriculture with proper irrigation. To the production of native crops must be added that of vegetables in solar tents and larger surfaces of improved quinoa because these offer great potentials and opportunities for the expansion of commercial agriculture.

With the support of MAMI Lacombe Canada, we are currently working on a consolidation of gardeners, so as to expand the production in the region and amplify the successful experiences previously executed in the municipalities of Toledo and Huayllamarca.

# Mission to Cochabamba

BY CRISTINA RODRIGUEZ

BOLIVIA – Arque, Tapacari, Tacopaya and Bolivar are some of Bolivia's rural areas that are situated in the Cochabamba upland at an altitude of more than 3,000 metres. Travel is arduous and roads are practically inaccessible. With the exception of potatoes and wheat, the frigid and arid climate does not permit cultivation of diversified agricultural products.

Houses of the Cochabamba upland are built with stones and have thatched roofs. Mainly located in the mountains, the different residences are far from one another and access is on footpaths.

There is no electricity, and fresh water and sanitation is lacking. There are usually five to eight children per family and living conditions are extremely poor. Due to malnutrition, the rate of infant mortality is alarming.

In these rural areas, the purpose of our work is the construction of a more humane and just world for the people. In the light of the Gospel, our purpose is to spread and proclaim the Kingdom of God. We explain and share with them the life





of Jesus. We insist on the fact that, in a very special way, Jesus loves simple people and the unprotected ones. Thanks to the teaching material we get here, our apostolate can be done in Quechua, the people's native language.

We also provide humanitarian aids, mostly medical, nutritional and educational.

Volunteer doctors and nurses travel to remote rural areas every three months offering medical care to all in need. Groceries are brought to the needy, and school supplies and clothing are distributed.

Through these regular trips, we were able to identify children who were about to go blind or were afflicted with other problems that required specialized medical attention. Fortunately, we were able to bring those children to Cochabamba City where the children could receive all the medical treatment they needed.

In the village of Cliza we also provide some assistance to a group of elders.

In actual fact, there is always some work that needs to be done. All our work would not be possible without the help and collaboration of AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI. May God reward all that generosity and fill you with grace and blessings.

*(Rodriguez is a friend of the Oblates carrying on the charism of St. Eugene in Bolivia)*



# Quenching a thirst

BRAZIL – Paulo Ehle, OMI, has spent more than half his life in the Brazilian outback. While most missionaries bring a message of hope, he also tries to quench the thirst of people needing reliable and safe drinking water.



Ehle has been involved in building more than 1,000 cisterns in the last five years. And at age 70, he says he is not done yet. The ultimate goal would be for every dwelling in a rural area to have its own cistern.

Ehle serves the poor people in northeast Brazil – the outback. It is a semi-arid land subject to periods of prolonged drought. “Global warming has made water a precious commodity,” he explained. “Churches and schools provide education about environmental issues but have to compete with messages coming from industry, agribusiness and government.”

And often those messages are self-serving. So Ehle helps the poor help themselves to a good water source by facilitating the construction of cisterns.

Cisterns (at a cost of \$700 each) are preferred to deep wells, which are expensive to dig and upkeep. Well water is mostly saline, and the wells have fallen under the control of politicians and large landowners.

Instead, old-fashioned cisterns of cement blocks are constructed. People are taught how to capture the water so it

is not contaminated, and a 16,000-litre cistern will hold enough water for cooking and drinking for a family of four to survive the annual drought.

Once a community in need of cisterns is selected, meetings are held to explain the contribu-





tion conditions and educate the people on cistern usage. All will get cisterns, but the meetings will determine the order, with preference given to the most needy, those furthest from water, the elderly and widows.



The community is fully involved, helping dig the holes (two metres across by two metres deep); gathering good quality sand and gravel for making cement; providing labour; feeding the brick layers, and attending educational meetings.

“People are left with a real sense of ownership,” said Ehle. “They take care of their cisterns. If it breaks down it is their responsibility to repair it or find someone who can.”

Ehle shares one of his most memorable stories.

“There was a huge family in the outback that had a crude cistern, but it was very dirty. When they got a new one, the father, with eyes shining, said: ‘this is the first time in my life I knew what water tasted like.’ As a result his children and grandchildren drink more water, and have fewer incidents of worms and parasites.”

Ehle is not part of any particular government plan or agency, thus he has ‘voice’ and can speak for the poor and against injustice. He is also involved in leadership training, small Christian communities, scripture training and sustainable development. He helps in a parish, but doesn’t want to be tied down by parish work.

He has been in Brazil since 1970. He is still mobile, but admits to some health problems. “And there are times when I am lonely.”

So how much longer will the 70-year-old native of Saskatchewan stay in Brazil? “I’m sure they’ll have a grave here for me somewhere,” he says.

One, hopefully, near water!

# Haiti Update

BY DIANE LEPAGE

The destruction of the entire infrastructure for Haitian society and church took a mere 35 seconds; rebuilding Haiti will take decades.

On behalf of all the victims and those suffering from the earthquake of Jan. 12, Haitian Oblate priests Ellince Martyr and Wilson Fouquet have expressed personal thanks to you for your sensitivity and response to this catastrophic tragedy.

The obstacles the country faces are immense:

- 250,000 to 300,000 people have died and many are still buried under the debris;
- 250,000 houses were destroyed;
- 4,000 schools were damaged;
- The education system was severely affected with 7,000 teachers and 38,000 students dead;
- Many churches, hospitals and schools for religious studies are in ruins or deemed unsafe; and
- 1 million people are in refugee camps.

There are approximately 130 Oblates and 45 scholastics in Haiti. Those in studies have been relocated to parishes, with some living in tents. The Oblates face many challenges including the responsibility of evaluating where and how to rebuild the Oblate provincial house, offices, formation houses of study for philosophy and theology, schools and churches as well as responding to the many ongoing needs of the homeless.

The present critical issue relates to the thousands living in tents with no future or hope, suffering in unbearable conditions of extreme heat during the day and frigid nights of cold, heavy rains and high winds. Camps are in public places and people are being forcibly moved to other locations in order to build schools and necessary public structures.

Left to individual owners, clearing the damage and debris

of concrete, mangled iron, glass and steel, is an overwhelmingly monumental task. For the most part, the work is being done painstakingly by hand with sledge hammers, wheelbarrows and sheer physical labour.

The people of Haiti and the Oblates themselves have been deeply traumatized. Psychology programs are being put into place in order to respond to the drastic increase of mental health problems.

Tremendous efforts are being made to care for the children, especially those with nutritional, physical and educational needs.

Donations for the Oblates in Haiti can be sent through the MAMI office and will be used to meet real and urgent needs in this devastated region. Your compassion and prayers of solidarity are greatly appreciated.



# Students raise money for Haiti

The students of Albert Lacombe Elementary School in St. Albert, AB, raised \$1,500 to help Haitians struggling after the devastating earthquake earlier this year.

School principal Julian Di Castri explained:

“During our Monday assembly we listened to a reading of the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew. The words of Jesus, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy,’ rang very true for our school community.

“The students and staff were proud to present Fr. Mike Dechant a cheque for \$1,500, money that the students raised through basket raffle tickets and the proceeds from a ‘beach dance’. This money will go towards the urgent needs of children in Haiti through the Oblates.

“It is yet another example of our students showing mercy, bringing the light of Christ to those who are desperately in need of hope.”



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