

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



September 2014

*New
Voices*



A stark reality

There are only 25 Oblates under the age of 55 that serve OMI Lacombe Canada. Of those 25, 18 met recently in Winnipeg. Of the 18, 14 were not born in Canada.



In the last five years, one Oblate made perpetual vows as a brother and no Oblates were ordained to the priesthood in Canada. In the last five years, one Oblate made perpetual vows as a brother and three Oblates were ordained to the priesthood in Kenya as members of OMI Lacombe Canada. They are the new voices.

That is a reality Canadian Oblates face: limited interest among Canadians, but a growing family in Africa. In this issue, we celebrate the ordination in Kenya of Dionisius Mwandiki Ananua (pictured on cover), who becomes the newest addition to the OMI Lacombe Canada priesthood. Sheer numbers alone tell us the mission in Kenya cannot go on forever with only Canadian-born Oblates providing the manpower. Dio's ordination is a welcome and natural progression.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Oblate team suffered another blow on Aug. 11 when missionary Paulo Ehle, OMI, died in Brazil, a country to which he had dedicated the last 43 years of his life. Another voice for the poor has been silenced.

On a high note, Rusty Gardiner, OMI, celebrated his perpetual vows in August to Oblate brotherhood. We'll have more on that in our next issue.

Canadian Oblates continue to make a difference around the world ... be it India, South America, Africa or in our homeland. We celebrate growth in the family, and are moved by another passing. The Spirit is at work!

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

A harvest of vocations

BY ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS SYLVAIN LAVOIE, OMI

MÉRU, KENYA – In 2003, Bill Stang, OMI, and Harley Mapes, OMI, invited me to the pre-novitiate in Méru to offer courses on leadership, human development and addictions awareness. They invited me to stay, due to the harvest of vocations there. I declined because in Canada we were hoping for a harvest of reconciliation with the Aboriginal People.

Needless to say, I quickly accepted the invitation earlier this year to return to Kenya to ordain Dionisius Mwandiki Ananua and to offer a retreat to the Oblates. I was grateful that Fr. Bill was asked to come along, as he founded the pre-novitiate that Dionisius attended. He was also able to do good vocation work and mentor some of the Oblates while there.

**Jim Fiori, OMI, and Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI,
consecrate Dionisius Mwandiki Ananua, OMI**



Fr. Dionisius is hoisted
on the shoulders of
the Oblate postulants





Fr. Fiori watches as Archbishop Emeritus Lavoie is presented with two roosters and a Maasai elder staff

I leaned on friends to help out financially, to whom I am very grateful as the donations covered the cost of the trip. Bill wanted to bring a guitar to Kenya for years. Pat McCoy donated \$800 towards a guitar when he heard of that desire. *Innovations Music* in St. Albert generously made a \$300 donation towards the purchase of one of their guitars. Colleen Quintal was the first to donate and did so very generously.

We visited Bishop Salesio Mugambi, then proceeded to the outdoor ordination in the Kanyakine churchyard ringed with tents. Seven groups of dancers took turns processing in, dancing in the lectionary, the gifts, and celebrating with exuberant joy afterwards. They danced with the newly ordained; the postulants picked him up and danced with him on their shoulders. I was given a senior elder's Maasai staff and two live roosters as gifts. The roosters were brought to the chicken coop at Méru.

We concelebrated with Fr. Dionisius at his first mass in Kionyo, then were taken to Njoguni, where again the singing, drumming and dancing was awesome. We were humbled by the pride they had in their church with a terrazzo floor.

We then made our way to Karen in Nairobi where I gave an 'Images of Hope' retreat to the Oblate community. After that, we went to the new parish Kisaju where the pastor Fr. Gideon toured us around the savannah to the four prayer houses on



Dionisius is vested
by his uncle

the roughest roads in the world. We saw zebras, wildebeasts and impalas. On Sunday, we were taken to Jambori for mass. The energy of the celebration at 8 a.m. was astounding. To exit the church and see only one car (ours) and no parking lot (everyone walked) was a bit of a shock.

In Kisaju, the people met after mass to discuss fund-raising for a new church hall, which they promised would be up by November. In the meantime, the children packed into a classroom in the back to sing and dance, and even sang an honour song for me in their language. All I understood was the word “bishop.”



Dionisius
prostrates
himself



The last days were spent visiting with Jim Fiori, OMI, attending a Canada Day celebration for diplomats and dignitaries at the ambassador's residence, touring the Great Rift Valley escarpment, a giraffe park where we fed a giraffe, and the Karen Blixen museum, author of "Out of Africa."

We returned tired but energized, with many memories and impressions. Foremost is the amazing faith of the people in the midst of their poverty, their willingness to gather, and especially their joyful sense of celebrating their faith and culture. I was struck by the sharp contrast between abject poverty (symbolized perhaps most by women trying to sell cobs of corn by the highway to earn a few shillings) and extreme wealth (more Mercedes in Nairobi than in all of Saskatchewan). The danger of violence was evident in the presence of security agents everywhere, including the malls.

Most encouraging was the sense of the steady growth of the Oblate mission, the appreciation of the people for what the Oblates have done to help them, their sense of ownership, and the excitement of young Oblates setting out on a new venture with energy, enthusiasm, faith and courage. The fruit of the work of MAMI and all the donors was evident, as was the importance of continuing to support this fledgling mission both financially and with prayers and personnel.

Deeply touched

BY BILL STANG, OMI

MÉRU, KENYA – On June 16 I joined Bishop Sylvain Lavois, OMI, for a trip to Kenya, where he ordained Dionisius Mwandiki Ananua to the priesthood on June 21. After a long flight we arrived at Nairobi and were picked up by Jim Fiori, OMI, and taken to their home in Karen.

On June 20, we all went to Méru to prepare for the ordination. Méru was the place where I helped to begin our Oblate formation program in February 2002. Dionisius was among one of the first groups of pre-novices.

The ordination took place in Kanyakine Parish. Kanyakine was the mother parish from which the Kionyo Parish came to be. When we arrived at Kanyakine, one could see that something big was being organized. There were tents all over the church grounds and many people were already finding their places. The procession was ready to move. There were some 20 clergy present for the occasion. As we marched in procession we were led by numerous dancers, all ages and all dressed in colourful costumes, and singing as only the Kenyans can





The book is danced to the podium

sing – loud and with much enthusiasm. There were at least six dancing groups present for the occasion.

Bishop Sylvain began the Ordination liturgy. At the time for the readings a group of Maasai dancers from a Kisaju parish danced in the book. The procession consisted of a young boy, holding the book, on the shoulders of a warrior who was guarded by four Maasai warriors with spears and joined by a group of women dancing the book to the podium.

After the Gospel, Bishop Sylvain gave a short homily, followed by the ordination ceremony. Fr. Fiori, the superior of the Kenyan Oblates, called Brother Dionisius to come forward. This was followed by the interrogation by the Bishop and the Litany of the Saints. Dionisius prostrated himself on a nice rug during the Litany. At the conclusion of the Litany the ordination began with the laying on of hands by the Bishop and all the ordained who were present.

The mother and brother of Dionisius, accompanied by the dancers, brought forward the gifts for the Mass, which was followed by many congratulation speeches and gift giving for

the newly ordained priest. At one point the Oblate postulants came forth to greet him and proceeded to hoist him on their shoulders and dance around the enclosure as people cheered with great enthusiasm. Fr. Dionisius then gave his first blessing to the crowd while the rest of us were asked to attend the prepared feast.

On June 22, we attended the first mass of Fr. Dionisius, which took place at Kionyo. I was deeply touched as I observed how well Fr. Dionisius led us in the liturgy. I could not help but shed a few tears when he spoke to the people in their language without an interpreter like I used



Fr. Dionisius celebrates his first mass



Following tradition,
Fr. Dionisius feeds
Bill Stang, OMI



Guests receive a blessing from Fr. Dionisius

to have to do. I was deeply touched just to realize that these good people had given four of their sons to join the Oblates and now they had one of them ministering to them. What a blessing indeed.

This became more evident as we went to celebrate mass at Njogune, where Brother Joseph had just finished a lay-led service. I was told many times by the good people how proud they were of these four and promised to give us more of their sons.

Later, in Nairobi, Bishop Sylvain presented a retreat to the Oblates. My job was to speak with the young Oblates that had begun with me, and also with Fr. Sam, a Korean Oblate who has been assigned to the Kenyan mission. It was so good to have this time with them and for me to see how well they are fitting into the ministry.

A highlight for me was the Sunday service at Kisaju and Jambori. Here we saw first-hand how two of our young Kenyan Oblates are ministering in the new Parish. It was good to see how excited Fr. Gideon and Fr. Stephen were to be assigned to this ministry. Also it touched me deeply again to see how the



Fr. Stang and Archbishop Emeritus Lavoie present Fr. Dionisius with a guitar

people were so happy to have them as pastors, and they are Kenyan. This is a whole new beginning for the mission.

It was a blessed time and I was so grateful to have been given the chance to accompany Bishop Sylvain on this great visit. Thanks to all who have made this possible for us.



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A job well done

BY JIM FIORI, OMI
Kenya Mission
Superior

“His master said to him ‘Well done! You are an industri-

ous and reliable servant. Since you were dependable in a small matter I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come share your master’s Joy!’” (Mt 25: 21)

These words from Matthew’s Gospel summarize the life of Fr. Mario Azrak, who after 13 years is leaving the Kenya mission.

Fr. Mario came to the Kenya Mission shortly after it was begun, actually shortly after he was ordained, and spent 13 years in the mission, the longest serving missionary. Fr. Mario came to us from Australia. Part of his mystique, however, was that he was born in Sudan and was fluent in Arabic. While here he became fluent in Swahili.

Ordained in 1999, he spent two years in the Australian Province before joining the Kenya Mission in 2001. He was officially assigned to OMI Lacombe Canada – Kenya Mission in 2005.

His first assignment in the Kenya Mission was to St. Stephen’s Parish, Kionyo, as assistant pastor to what was our only parish. He became pastor of the parish in 2008.

Mario took on the role of the mission treasurer in 2002, a role he played for nearly all the time he has been in Kenya.



Mario Azrak, OMI

After relinquishing the role of pastor, he took responsibility for the various development projects. After a well-deserved sabbatical he resumed his role as treasurer but took up residence in our formation house in Karen, Nairobi, helping in the formation of our pre-novices.

He also brought good order to our finances and to the management of our properties. In June of 2013 Mario accepted an assignment as the team leader in undertaking the establishment of the new Kisaju parish in the diocese of Ngong.

While the parish is not yet officially erected, he still led the team in building the Christian community, visiting each and every home in the vast expanse of what is to be the parish.

Mario had a financial background prior to joining the Oblates. We have been greatly blessed by his incredible organizational skills. While the mission does not have a lot of money I can assure you that what we have is well accounted for. The financial process is second to none. Whatever he does he does with precision. His expertise and skills have also been enjoyed by the African /Madagascar region.

For most of his time in Kenya, Mario also served on the board of the Oblate Investment Pool (OIP). He was also a part of the Interprovincial Council of Treasurers in the African sub-region.

Mario's leadership and incredible organizational skills have served us well.



Samuel Hong, OMI, a Korean Oblate priest, has joined the team in Kenya



Ken Forster, OMI, right, and 18 younger Oblates met in Winnipeg

Communion in Winnipeg

BY KEN THORSON, OMI

...now we are striving to become saints as Eugene exhorted us. Now we can deepen our communion of life with others in apostolic community, not because the community is fulfilling my needs, but [because] in freedom I choose to love those who are my brothers and sisters. Now we are free people who can collaborate with others and who can execute together a plan with priorities. Now we make ourselves available. We discern together and ask God, "What is the mission you want us to do?"

These challenging words were spoken by our Superior General, Louis Lougen, OMI, at the 2011 convocation in Vancouver, words that guide us as we discern God's will for the coming years. We hope that *Renewing Our Life and Mission*

(ROLM), an 18-month process of discernment initiated by the present provincial council, will help us begin to answer Fr. Lougen's question: *What is the mission you want us to do?*

This spring, Oblates and associates were encouraged to gather for meetings in their districts to begin the process, and in September a second set of meetings will continue the process. In addition to all these, a meeting for the Oblates younger than 55 years was also held. In his invitation for the meeting Ken Forster, OMI, wrote: "You are still of the age where we hope, God willing, you will still be very capable of an energetic and spiritually rich active ministry for years to come." And so from near and far, we gathered at the Benedictine Sister's Monastery June 19-22 in Winnipeg.

As is the case with most Oblate gatherings, the greatest blessing of the weekend was simply being together. We don't know each other well (at all in some cases), so it was a chance to share stories from our lives, our cultures and our ministries. It is worth noting that of the 18 younger Oblates present (seven were not with us), 14 were born in countries other than Canada.

Other highlights included our conversations after watching Fr. Lougen's address at the Vancouver Convocation; personal reflection and group sharing on excerpts from Fr. Lougen's writings on the theme of community; and on Friday evening we played a game developed by Fr. Jim Brobst, an Oblate in the U.S. province. With a map of Canada before each of five groups, the idea was to imagine and create a province with significantly fewer Oblates.

While not a serious attempt to create a plan for a future province, it was a revelation to see, on a map, the scope of the decisions before us in the coming years ... and above all it was a lot of fun.

On Saturday evening we went into downtown Winnipeg for National Aboriginal Day. Sunday morning was an open session of sorts, and some of the Oblates spoke about their

experience of coming to Canada as young Oblates, and what it has been like since. This was a powerful moment for us all.

While there were no great moments of clarity regarding the decisions before us as a province, and while various differences (theological, ecclesiological, etc.) between us remain, there was a deepening of the communion between us ... and we agreed that our time together was very good, and that we need to do this again, and soon.

Ken Thorson is a Core Team member of the OMI Lacombe Canada Province

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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

A voice for the poor silenced

BY JAMES HELLMAN

BRAZIL – Paulo (Leroy) Ehle, OMI, died Aug. 11 in Recife, Brazil, the country to which he devoted the last 43 years of his life.

Paulo and I were classmates throughout high school, novitiate and part of seminary studies, until he went to study in Rome. We worked together in St. Paul's parish in Salvador, Brazil, for about five years.

Paulo always had a keen mind and could *see through* any phony situation, be it blatant Brazilian injustices, ostentatious clericalism, bishop pedestals, whatever. He announced Gospel truths, and denounced any, and many, deviations from "The Way, Truth and Life." This at times caused clashes with religious and civil powers-that-be.

Paulo always stood his ground, totally faithful to the Gospel and to Church social doctrine. No one can be at ease as long as there are defenceless poor to be defended. Liberation theology preaches absolute equality of all, despite social, political, sex, age, racial or religious differences. This was Paulo's line of thought and action.

Aside from defending small family-plot farmers against powerful and ambitious land owners, and organizing the construction of hundreds of 5,000-litre cisterns to help these same families catch roof rain water in the semi-arid regions of the northeast, Paulo also taught Scripture to the illiterate and semi-illiterate. He prepared a number of booklets as a biblical correspondence course for the poor. The first book began with insights as to what the Bible is, how to use it, preliminary notions, then progressed to explain the Gospel of St. Mark and other books of the Word of God.



Paulo Ehle, OMI, April 18, 1940 - August 22, 2014

Paulo was ordained in Rome in 1966, then taught philosophy at St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford, SK, for four years before moving to Brazil in 1971. “He was a gifted teacher and a multilinguist, but most of all he was a dedicated missionary with the poor and a liberation theologian in the best sense of the word,” wrote Martin Moser, OMI. “He was generous with his time and talents, always working with poor people in their local communities.”

Rather than giving people fish for food, Paulo taught, prepared and enabled them to catch their own. He was a true Oblate, a keen educator and untiring missionary, bringing Christ to the poorest of the poor in Brazilian northeastern remote areas. He lived and breathed the true Oblate Missionary Spirit.

(Hellman is a former Oblate priest who has ministered in Brazil since 1965, and along with his wife continues to do missionary work, working closely with the Oblate community.)



Oblate ministry empowers women

BY FAUSTIN LITANDA, OMI

MERU, KENYA – Since their arrival in Kenya 15 years ago, Oblates have been involved in many projects empowering the local people to become self-reliant. With the assistance of MAMI Canada, many projects have come to realization, including the Catholic Women’s Association Bakery in Kionyo.

Accompanied by a group of young men interested in joining the Oblates, we visited the bakery that was pioneered by Ken Forster, OMI, our Provincial Superior. We were welcomed and taken through a practical lesson of baking (and tasting) bread and cake.

It takes the women about three hours to produce a hundred loaves of bread in a project that has significantly grown. Kionyo bread is consumed beyond the region, and has empowered a number of women in the bakery and men who buy and sell the bread.

Further travels took us through a region green, rich and attractive with tea bushes, coffee plantations and several large tea factories.



Kionyo, where one of the Oblate parishes is located in the Méru Diocese, is a rich tea plantation area known by many and a region where the Oblate presence is remarkable and evident through their ministries and work.



Faustin Litanda, OMI

We were welcomed and briefed by the management of the Kionyo Tea Factory. It was fascinating for us to learn how tea leaves are transformed through various stages and end up with the final product – black African tea. We left the tea factory bearing tea for the community.

Prayers and thanks are offered for the Oblates throughout our travels. The Kenya mission is experiencing growth with eight young people responding to God's call, including Sylvester Paul, Patrick Musiomi, Edwin Onyango, Stephen Wekesa, Benjamin Karani, Samuel Onduso, Stephen Mose and Samuel Macharia.

They have started their journey at the formation house in Méru. We are confident the flame of our founder St. Eugene de Mazenod will continue to burn in our hearts, the church and the world.

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Oblate Mission travelnews

Mission Trip to Kenya Jan. 19 – Feb. 6, 2015

(Dates may change by one day, depending on flight availability)

BY MARY BATTLE

VANCOUVER – The Canadian Oblates started their missionary work in Kenya in 1997, under the leadership of Ken Forster, OMI. Since then, several groups have participated in an Oblate mission trip to Kenya, witnessing first-hand the impact the Oblates are having on the local spiritual and economic growth in many areas of the country.

This January, participants will have the opportunity to volunteer their time and energies at an orphanage in Méru, Oblate supported secondary schools, local primary schools, and a dispensary. There will also be opportunities to explore a developing project at a tea plantation and see the successful projects MAMI has supported in Kionyo – the water project and Women's Co-operative Bakery. For the first time, participants will experience the Oblates' newest parish in Kisaju, south of Nairobi.

The trip, however, is more than just seeing the work, the schools, and the projects being done in Kenya. This mission

Mary Battle with a group of orphans



trip is about meeting the local people and Oblates, getting to know them and gaining some insight into their daily lives, struggles and joys.

It's about seeing how we can best help and support the people working and living in various areas of Kenya, and it's about what they can teach us. We won't be building a school, or digging a well; rather we will make connections with the people and witness the faith, joy, love, gratitude and hope they have in their lives, despite having what by our standards is so little. What we can learn from them is much more than what we can give to them. And what we will see on this trip is God's love in action.

For more information about the trip, contact Oblate Mission Travel at 604-736-3972 or email missiontravel@nfin-nie.com.

To follow our progress, and see highlights from past Oblate Mission Trips, please "Like" us on Facebook/Oblate Mission Travel. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Oblate-Mission-Travel/149066315156392>

Mary Battle with a group of students



Safe haven

BY M. CHINNAPPAN MARI SUSAI, OMI

AANMODAYA ASHRAM, India – The Oblate Ashram christened *Aanmodaya* (awakening to the divine self within) was established by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1990 at Enathur, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, in the southern part of India. It provides a sacred space where people of all walks of life irrespective of creed, nationality, religion, gender, language or caste can come to experience the Divine and/or the silence of nature, or just to rest their tired limbs to regain strength for their continued pilgrimage of life.

The foundation stone was laid Oct. 14, 1989, by Canadian Oblate Denis Dansause on the vigil of the feast of the great Christian mystic St. Theresa of Avila. The ashram was blessed open in February 1992 with late Swami Amalraj Jesudass as the guru. There has always been a core Oblate community assisted by brothers, sisters and other domestic helpers.

Meditation is given the pride of place. The core Oblate community spends time in meditation, celebration of the Eucharist and Tri Samdhya, which means the meeting of people and God at the three important hours of morning, noon and evening. At the end of every meditation we particularly spend a few moments to send peace vibrations to people, events and



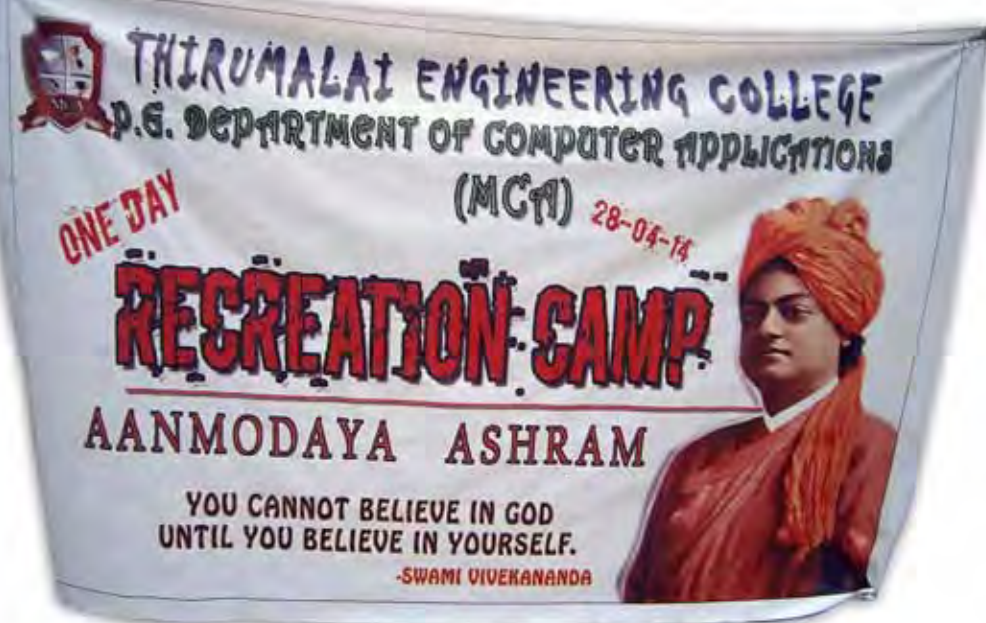


places where the Lord's peace is needed. The midday prayer is totally dedicated to world peace.

The ashram also provides a focus on inter-religious dialogue. In our temple we have the Scriptures of all major religions, and the pillars are adorned with the symbols of all the major religions of the world. This makes the people of different religions feel comfortable to come and experience the silent atmosphere of the place, as well as pray and meditate, leading to communion with the Divine. People come asking to be initiated into meditation and yoga, a service we offer with great joy.

All the major seminaries, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, send students of theology for specific programs, especially for Indian Christian spirituality and ashram experience. Many religious women congregations send their sisters in large numbers for retreats based on Indian Christian spirituality. They spend time in meditation and are exposed to the Scriptures of other religions. The Bible and other Scriptures are used in our prayer and Liturgy that are always inculturated. They partake of the simple vegetarian meal and contribute their share of manual work to keeping the ashram clean.

Priests, brothers and sisters also come to make their annual retreat, often in groups. People from India and all the



continents have been coming here to experience life in an ashram as well as to be exposed to inculturation and inter-religious dialogue. The foreigners, both lay and religious, appreciate the thrust we give on inter-religious dialogue and inculturation. So the good news is the ashram is growing and fulfilling the vision with which it was established.

Family life in India is rapidly changing. Families that were so united and peaceful are now splintering. Consequently, the youth are facing problems and situations with which they are not able to cope. We want to make this ashram available to such families in distress. This ashram has resource persons that



can help them cope with their crisis. The natural setting of the ashram, away from the town and noise, is most conducive for these families to experience healing, peace and to have a sense of communion with the cosmos.

We have resource persons who animate the participants on the need to care for the environment and on holistic health and values that often dovetail into the teachings of the major religious traditions. Recently we have introduced pre-marital and family counselling, training in value education and eco-spirituality. As part of our social concern we feed the hungry who come to the ashram, take interest in the growth of some orphan children and visit patients in nearby hospitals. We have plans to offer free homeopathy treatment and conduct free medical camps with the help of some of the friends of the ashram. We also welcome some of the social workers in and around Kancheepuram to share their struggles and challenges, which evoke a proper response from those in the ashram.

While the number of people visiting our ashram has been increasing, the atmosphere, the accommodation, the facilities and the safety are not up to everyone's expectation. We believe





the ashram can become self-sufficient with some investment to safeguard it.

The most urgent need is for a compound wall to prevent vehicles passing through and causing a constant disturbance for those who come for silence, solitude, time in prayer and exposure to nature.

Second, we find it difficult to accommodate larger groups. Five new cottages constructed four years ago can accommodate only 10 individuals or 20 persons if they are willing to share a room. The 25-year-old cottages, which most seekers prefer, need repair. Engineers advise us not to accommodate anyone in the old cottages because foundations have sunk, the floors and walls have cracks, wood is deteriorating and tiles are broken. Septic tanks have fallen and the pipelines leading to these tanks are broken.

We pray for ongoing generosity to maintain and develop this Oblate ashram so more people can be served. In this way, we hope Canadians can share in this beautiful ministry.

M. Chinnappan Mari Susai is the director of the Aanmodaya Ashram in India

Kenya notecards

Diane Lepage and Glenn Zimmer, OMI, on their recent visit to the Oblate Mission in Kenya, took photos of everyday life. We would like to share some of these photos with you in the form of notecards you are invited to use in sending out notes to your friends and to help bring awareness of the people dear to our hearts. Please indicate on the enclosed gift form if you wish to receive a complimentary set of Kenya cards.



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*Oblate
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**Communications
Coordinators:**

John and Emily Cherneski
lacombemissions@yahoo.ca

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