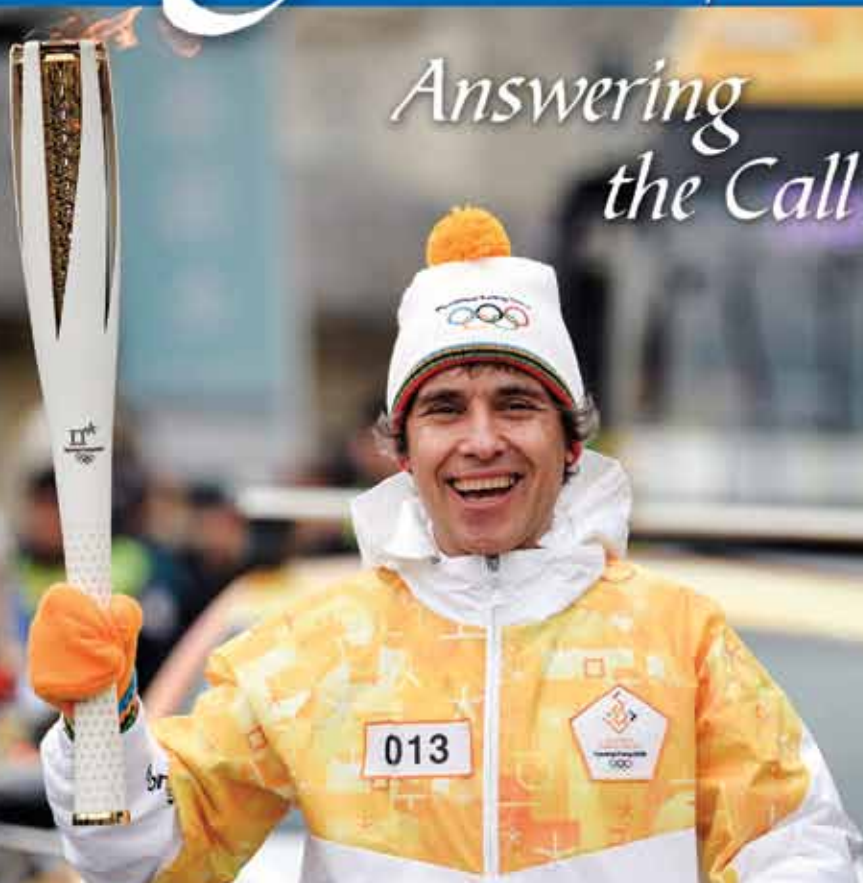


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit

April 2018

*Answering  
the Call*



# Fanning the flames of humanity



If we say the words immigrants, or immigration, the images conjured become so mixed because of the political rhetoric with which we are bombarded from south of the border. "Build a wall, keep them out!"

Therefore, it is so refreshing to read the story (Page 4) of Vincenzo Bordo, an Oblate missionary from Italy serving in Korea. In the spirit of *'universal brotherhood,'* he was asked to be a torch-bearer for the Korean Winter Olympics in February.

It was a beautiful gesture on the part of the Korean organizers to recognize the work of this Oblate, a foreigner in their country. We don't often publish stories about Oblates who are

not Canadian or linked to Canadian missions, but this was such a wonderful reminder of what the Oblates represent around the world.

At the same time, many lay people across Canada and Kenya, drawn to the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod, responded to the call to a closer relationship with the



Oblate community and were accepted as associates at celebrations across the country.

Closer to home, Oblate priest Albert Lalonde relates the story of discovering his Oblate vocation in Saskatchewan. He has been a priest in Canada for more than half a century. Fr. Lalonde was born in this country, but he came from immigrant roots. Didn't most of us?

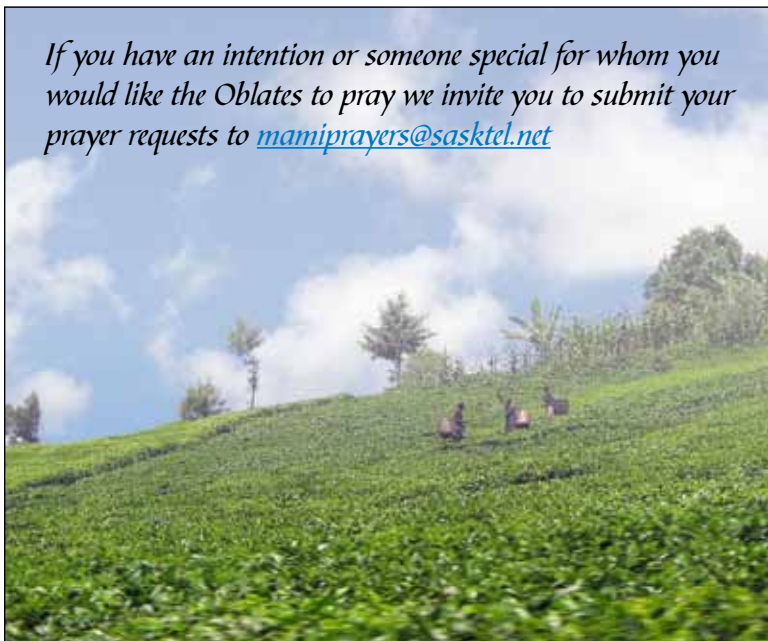
More than 20 years ago, a handful of Canadian Oblates were assigned to a mission in Kenya. They were foreigners in a foreign land. They had different skin colours, different habits and spoke a different language. Today, despite the daily hurdles experienced, that mission is thriving and expanding.

So, when we read about Italian Vincenzo Bordo holding aloft the Olympic torch, we can envision that it was lit with more than the Olympic flame.

It burned with Oblate Spirit!

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

*If you have an intention or someone special for whom you would like the Oblates to pray we invite you to submit your prayer requests to [mamiprayers@sasktel.net](mailto:mamiprayers@sasktel.net)*





Vincenzo Bordo, OMI

# Carrying the torch

BY VINCENZO BORDO, OMI

SEOUL, South Korea – “This is the Korean Olympic Committee speaking. Are you Mr. Kim Ha Jong?” says the voice on the other end of the phone.

I immediately think: “They have noticed my cycling skills and they are calling me to be part of the national team”. This thought passes through my mind like a flash; then a second thought: “But at the Winter Olympic Games there is no cycling.”

I concentrate and listen more attentively to the one who is speaking to me. Is this a stupid joke? “We are calling you,” continues the speaker, “because we want you to be one of the bearers of the Olympic torch, a torch bearer.”

“Excuse me, please, there must be a mistake. I am Vincenzo Bordo and I am an Italian”.

“Yes, we know”

“But I am a foreigner,” I continue.

“Yes, that’s why we are calling you. The spirit of the Olympic Games is a spirit of universal brotherhood and welcome, and with this gesture, we would like to say to our fellow countrymen that Korea is one country and that all those who live and work here are part of this people, without discrimination or prejudice, and are part of this wonderful story that we are building together.”

With hesitation and joy I accept the offer. At the same time I feel honored to live and work in a nation that is capable of expressing these values of acceptance and kindness towards immigrants.

Yes, I am a foreigner too. Today, talking about immigrants is not easy because this word is too often associated with social degradation, violence, rape, robbery, theft and much more negativity. I also have experienced this difficult reality.

I remember the fear and the prejudices I encountered at the start of my life in Korea. There was misunderstanding because we did not know anything about each other: I did not understand nor speak the language, I did not know the habits of the Koreans; they did not know my culture, my origins, the reasons why I had come to a country so far from mine. I felt their distrust, their fear, so much so that children, startled and scared, chased me, shouting: "Stranger, foreigner, go home, go home."

Then I started to run a centre for the poor and for the street people. Next, the municipal officials accused me of tarnishing the good name of the city because so many of the poor, the abandoned, the beggars came to our centre, even from outside, to ask for help and have a hot meal which only we were providing.

Slowly our centre has become bigger and bigger: 550 meals distributed every day, a dormitory for the homeless, a small workshop for the unemployed, four family homes for street children. To handle all these activities, there is the constant effort of 600 volunteers, 5,000 benefactors and 40 young

We also run a bus called AGIT that operates between 6pm and midnight four times a week to meet the needs of the runaway teenagers by providing counseling, food, clothings, etc. In Korea, there are approximately 100,000 homeless people and 200,000 runaway teenagers, making it a serious social issue.





employees (social workers, teachers, counselors, administrative employees). It was obvious to everyone that our association was responding to people's real needs, and at that point no one could deny the positive contribution it made to Korean society.

At that moment, the desire to discredit me, to hurt me, perhaps even to destroy me, was born in the heart of jealous people of bad faith. So for about a year I found myself running between the police station, the prosecutor and the court because of being falsely accused of stealing the money of the donors and even having sexually abused some of our children. Yes, I too have been accused of sexual violence! How did it end? The one who accused me of these serious crimes is now in jail for extortion, defamation and forgery, while I am here to carry the Olympic flame.

I understand very well that when a stranger arrives, at first one has an instinctive fear and a natural anxiety because this person is different from us, speaks a language that we do not understand, eats food that smells disgusting and prays to a God we do not know.

But Pope Francis says, "It is important to promote the culture of the encounter, the openness to the other as a face, as a person, as a brother and sister to get to know and respect, with their history, their strengths and weaknesses, their richness and limitations. Do not be afraid of the differences nor of the conflicts that normally exist."

*(Vincenzo Bordo is one of the Oblates who started the mission in South Korea in 1990 and has worked there since the beginning)*

# In the beginning ...

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

It was during the hot summer of 1967, Expo year. While seated at the table along with the community in Carleton Place, ON, I received an envelope from the office of the Superior of St. Peter's Province. In the envelope there was one sheet of paper ... my obedience for Peru in Latin America.

"Where in the name of God is Peru," I asked. So out came the atlas.

In early fall I was seated on a plane from Montreal to Lima, Peru, via Mexico. This was my first plane trip. All I had with me was a small tool box and the clothes on my back. I was wearing a suit and my shoes were Kodiak work boots.

The flight from Mexico City to Lima was more than scary due to a long and huge thunderstorm. Landing at the Lima airport was something else because the airport was under construction.

Even before the plane landed there was this very strong smell of fish! All along the coast of Peru were many fish factories, and once off the plane the smell was even worse. I noticed the workmen had no boots or even shoes, and for caps they used paper from cement bags.

Leaving the airport we headed for a convent where the early Oblates lived in a few rooms until they had a permanent place in Comas, a new parish on the outskirts of Lima. Comas then had a population of 20,000; today there are more than 1.5 million.

After a few days at the convent, I was sent to Comas to get my papers





Br. Blaise has helped many families build homes

in order before I was sent to the eastern part of Peru – the jungle!

In the jungle there is a small town called Aucayacu, located on higher ground and close to two rivers. The early priests built a church in this town with the help of German volunteers. About 20 kilometres from Aucayacu there was a plot of land, still jungle, where volunteers built a small pre-fab house.

It was here I was to stay and work. My work was simple ... clear 17 hectares of jungle for the planting of crops like rice and corn. Why was I selected for this work? While at Holy Rosary Scholasticate, close to Ottawa, I was called the 'worker!' My childhood toys were a pick, shovel and a wheelbarrow. Because times were tough I worked at saw mills, at the coal mines and on a big farm. There were no vacations, just work and more work.

I don't recall being unhappy in what I was doing because I love to work.

At the new mission in the jungle was a small village called Pueblo Nuevo. Before starting to clear the land I began to build



two buildings, both for machinery. To help me with the work I had a tractor, all types of farm equipment and power saws. One building, more of a shed, was built in the form of the letter U so all different farming equipment was placed in a way that I could pick or select the machine needed for plowing, raking, sowing, etc. It was more of a shelter as there were no walls. The roof was made from tin sheeting and slanted so the rain could not enter and wet the machines.

The land had two levels and there was a small brook running through the property. The difference was close to two metres. Our little house was built on the higher level, one metre above the ground and on wooden posts because the big river close to the house, about two kilometres away, would spill over its bank and the flood water would touch the house floor.

In order to get to the other side of the brook I had to build a wooden bridge. I had to make two concrete pillars, one on each side of the stream, and used heavy planks for the construction of the bridge. I worked alone.

When it rained I could do little to clear the land. Meanwhile, in my spare time, I built a hen house for 700 laying hens.

The experience I had at the Holy Rosary Scholasticate looking after a farm with 36 milk cows, 200 pigs and 5,000 hens was enough background to get this hen house built. I put in a concrete floor, the water system and a lot of wire netting so the hens could eat, drink and drop their eggs in cages where it was easy to gather them.

That was just the beginning. It is now 50 years later ... and I still love my work!



# My vocation story

BY ALBERT LALONDE, OMI

INDIAN HEAD, SK – The Second World War began Sept. 1, 1939. One month later, on Oct. 2, I was born. I trust there was no relationship between the two events.

I was born to a family living on a small farm in northeast Saskatchewan, the youngest of 11 children. Farm language would have characterized me as the tassel end of a long rope.

Ours was an immigrant family. My mother was born in Brittany in France. My father's family was from France as well, but they had much deeper roots in Canada. The founder of the Canadian Lalonde family arrived in Montreal about 1666.

Ours was not a rich family. However, we learned that that did not really matter. The children of the families we met at the local one-room school were not much better off than us. Part of our shared poverty was that it was difficult to find teachers that would work in out-of-the way isolated schools such as ours. The adventurous souls who dared take on the task in

Fr. Albert with his parents on the day of his perpetual vows, Sept. 8, 1961





Fr. Albert, 1991

our school were either ill prepared to teach or without any previous teaching experience.

My grade school taught me two things: 1) I was terrible at math; 2) I was small. When the recess bell rang, the unleashed energy of some 30 students of various ages and sizes would make a mad dash for the open door and the freedom it promised. Rude experience taught me to be careful not to get trampled in the rush.

In order to attend high school, I had to leave home. For Grade 11, I boarded in the town five miles away. For Grade 12, I went to the Oblate boarding school, St. Thomas College in North Battleford, several hundred miles away.

During my Grade 11, I gave fleeting consideration to the problem, "What are you going to do when you finish school?" I drew a blank. I had no idea. However, I knew one thing for sure: "Become a priest? Preposterous, totally out of the question!"

However, the summer after leaving Grade 11, I experienced something that would mark the rest of my life. One warm summer afternoon, I was crossing the neighbor's field. I came to his fence. As I stooped to ease my way through the barbed wire fence, taking great care not to snag my clothes, the thought came to me, "No matter what path you choose in your future life, if God is not a part of that life, you will not be happy."

In Grade 12 at St. Thomas College, the question of "What are your plans after Grade 12?" took on more urgency. One of the priests on staff suggested I go to the novitiate. From the recesses of my mind, the thought re-emerged, "If you do not have God in your life, you will not be happy." Although I had no attraction for novitiate or the priesthood, I knew that I had to resolve the question as to whether God was calling me. That fall, I set off for novitiate. My goal in going was to prove that

God was not calling me. Needless to say, that endeavor ended in failure. On Sept. 7, 1958, I made my first vows as an Oblate. I am still an Oblate, 59 years later.

In my final year of theology, as was the custom, I wrote a letter to Father General asking to be sent to the missions. I had no particular mission in mind, but I knew that I would have much enjoyed the challenge of learning a new language and experiencing a new culture in a country that was not my own.

I must admit I was somewhat ambiguous about being sent to the missions. The missions I knew about were poor. Working in those missions, I assumed would largely be dedicated to relieving the economic hardships of the materially poor.

On the other hand, I was firmly convinced that the more difficult mission was to minister in my own country. In this country, I could not take on the role of the rich benefactor ministering to my poor brethren. In this society, I would have to share the Gospel with people much richer than me and not infrequently much better educated than I was. The superior general settled that question by assigning me to serve in Canada.

Looking back on 52 years of priesthood, what have been the greatest blessings I have enjoyed? I would have to say it has been to have met some outstanding Oblates, men I have come to know and admire. When people have expressed their admiration of a specific Oblate, I have never hesitated to say, "I am an Oblate, too." To enjoy some of that reflected glory has always been a pleasure.

Which ministry has most touched my heart? I would have to say my seven years as editor of a Catholic family magazine left its mark on me. In my role as editor, I had to address the question, "Who is the reader and how can I share the life of Jesus with him or her." Throughout that ministry, I had to struggle with that question. I am still struggling with it. Another incident comes to mind. At one stage, I worked as parish priest for a Métis community with an Aboriginal reservation beside it. I

was there for two and a half years and had to leave for health reasons. I have never been able to revisit that community. That is a visit I must make some day because I left part of my heart there.

Of course, in all those years something has always been in the background. That is the Oblate charism. It is something I would find difficult to express in words.

In my experience it is not something you define; it is something you live. All I know is that it is a gift and we know we are so gifted when people tell us they find in Oblates something special they do not find anywhere else.

In my experience, being Oblate means being close to the people. Sitting down with people and having them share their cares and concerns has driven home to me the importance of people having access to their priests and knowing that their priests are interested in sharing in their lives.

Do I have something to say to someone discerning their vocational path today? Yes, I do.

The most important lesson in one's life is to be concerned with learning how to live in peace and harmony with other people, and more important still, to live in harmony with God. We each have one life to live. Different people will come and go in our lives. God has always been there, and always will be there. When it comes to learning how to get along with someone, time and effort spent in trying to find out what God expects of us and what we expect from God is probably the best investment we can ever make.



Albert Lalonde, OMI



# Sharing the spirit

## *Oblate associates in OMI Lacombe Canada*

BY SANDRA PRATHER



Sandra Prather

EDMONTON – From its very inception in 2003, OMI Lacombe Canada Province has embraced Oblate associates: *We actively promote participation of women and men who share the charism and mission of St. Eugene de Mazenod*” [Preamble, Statutes, OMI Lacombe Canada Province].

In the creation of the new province, the Canadian Oblates took to heart Rule 37a, *“The charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod is a gift of the Spirit to the Church . . . and lay people recognize that they are called to share in the charism,”* as they named association as one of the founding pillars of their new province. Today, in that spirit, more than 90 associates across the country share life, mission and community with the Canadian Oblates.

A lot of work had to be done to actualize the Lacombe hope for association. The initial challenge was to bring together the existing associates from the six provinces who were involved in creating the new Lacombe province. At the time of the

Alberta associates





Ontario associates

consolidation, each had lay men and women connected to their communities, but they differed in things like formation, commitment, and participation in community life. The desire was to create associates for OMI Lacombe, women and men who would share a common identity with common formation, etc. With that end in mind, an associates' commission was named, a provincial animator appointed, and the work began.

Over the course of the next years and in dialogue with the district membership, a distinct identity for OMI Lacombe associates emerged and was adopted by the Province. A common ritual was drafted and the Oblate cross became the symbol of an associate's commitment. Policies and a manual were developed and approved. Structures were set up to support association: in each district, Oblate and associate animators were appointed. Recruitment materials, including a brochure and an introductory booklet, were created. Procedures for formation, from 'inquiry' through to 'commitment,' were introduced. A 70-page 'formation resource' was prepared and distributed and an associates' page posted on OMI Lacombe's website.

The first commitments of associates of OMI Lacombe Canada took place in December 2014 with a handful of Ontario



Saskatchewan associates and Oblates

district associates participating in the new ritual and receiving their Oblate crosses. The rest of the country followed suit in February 2015 when the five districts celebrated commitments of new associates. All in all, about 57 men and women joined the associate ranks that year. Today, association continues to grow with new associates joining every year and inquirers embarking on the journey in the districts.

## THE PRESENT

There is no one way to describe the Oblate associates of OMI Lacombe Canada. The more than 90 men and women who are associates are a diverse group, like the Oblates themselves. They are various ages and are involved in a variety of occupations and ministries. Some are prison chaplains; others are teachers; some work with the poor and others visit the elderly. There are catechists, church workers and retreat centre directors: the range of activities is extensive.

What the associates have in common, however, is that they bring an Oblate heart and spirit to their lives. They, *“recognize a Spirit-initiated call to live their baptism enlightened and formed by the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates. They are animated by a family spirit, sharing among themselves and with Oblates the same spirituality and missionary outlook”* [OMI Canada Oblate Associates’ Policy Handbook].

Four characteristics further identify the associates of OMI Lacombe Canada.

1. Association is seen as a vocation; associates experience themselves as called by the Oblate charism. It is their way to live their baptism, shaped by an Oblate spirituality, lived in connection with Oblate community and sent on Oblate mission.
2. Associates engage in a life-long journey of faith formation. They consciously seek to grow in their faith and knowledge of St. Eugene and the Oblates through prayer, study and faith-sharing.
3. Associates are active participants in Oblate community. Associates and Oblates take time to share faith and offer mutual support informally in their day-to-day lives, and formally through the basic Oblate communities, district retreats, assemblies and convocations.
4. Association is for the sake of mission. Associates, whether through formal church ministry, or the vocational call of daily living, strive to make the gospel come alive in a way that unites “head, heart, hands and feet,” especially in service to the poor.

## THE FUTURE

Some 20 years ago, Fr. General Marcello Zago, OMI, gave voice to a Second Vatican Council ecclesiology when he said: *“Evangelization in our times cannot be accomplished exclusively by chosen groups of religious. It must be done together with the laity. I would even say that lay people could better and more effectively reach out to those distant from the Church and to non-Christians.”*

Evangelization is at the heart of St. Eugene’s charism. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in embracing associates, empower them to be missionaries and evangelizers.

In sharing their charism, they also know themselves to be enriched: *“We already know from experience that such a sharing*

*in our life and mission is a source of life, dynamism and fecundity for both Oblates and lay persons alike. In a spirit of creativity and concerted action we will continue to explore structures for communion that are at the service of mission” [Witnessing as Apostolic Community, 41].*

In Canada, the vowed Oblates and the associates are on a journey together. Heeding the call of Christ heard through St. Eugene, together they reach out to the marginalized and the abandoned. Thankfully, their shared commitment will ensure that Eugene’s spirit continues to touch hearts and minds as it did so many years ago in post-revolutionary France.

For more information on becoming an Oblate associate: <https://www.omilacombe.ca/oblate-associates/becoming-an-associate/>

# 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: [lacombemissions@yahoo.ca](mailto:lacombemissions@yahoo.ca)**



# What does it mean to be an Oblate associate?

BY JIM AND ADELE LONGSTAFF

SASKATOON – Without realizing it, our journey to becoming Oblate associates began in 1979 soon after we made our Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) weekend. Shortly afterward, as we began our different leadership roles, we met and worked with Oblates from Saskatchewan and then Oblates from across Canada and then from around the world. Wherever we travelled with WWME, Oblates would be present and involved.

As we continued our work in WWME we became more aware of the special charism the Oblates lived – their commitment to community, their welcoming spirit, their hospitality and acceptance. For example, when we would facilitate a WWME weekend at Queen's House of Retreat in Saskatoon, we would be welcomed wholeheartedly and made to feel at home. Couples who attended these weekends – be they Catholic or non-Catholic, practising their faith or not – were every bit as welcome and felt comfortable being there.

We also realized the Oblate sense of family and community when we traveled internationally with WWME. Fr. Jean-Paul Vantroys, OMI, would contact the local Oblates wherever we were, be it in Uruguay, Zambia or the USA, and we would be welcomed and hosted.

Over time, we began to realize that we were attracted to the Oblates because they invited, and called us, through their



Jim and Adele Longstaff



Oblate community in Saskatoon

example, to a life of hospitality and of recognizing and accepting the poor and marginalized. This realization of the call to accept the poor and marginalized was never more apparent to us than after our youngest son died by suicide. We were accepted, supported, loved and carried by Oblates, our family and friends.

When we were invited to consider becoming associates, we struggled with wondering what we would have to do, only to discover that we were not asked to do anything, but simply to live a life that is open to being generous and hospitable and to living the Oblate charism.

In 2015 we, along with 22 other associates from across Canada, were given the opportunity to travel to Aix-En-Provence to learn more about the Oblates and the charism of St. Eugene. Here we learned about all the obstacles in St. Eugene's early life: he was exiled, he lived in a broken family, experienced extreme poverty, was not accepted for who he was, and lived as a refugee for several years. But despite all these experiences he still responded to God's call. This helped us realize that we, too, could respond, despite our brokenness.

To be an Oblate associate means to be open to blessing others; to seeing the good in others and calling that goodness

forth in any way we can. At our stage of life this means providing a communion service to a seniors centre in our community, pastoral visits at the hospital, assisting at funerals and various ministries in our parish. We answer this call by being present to family and friends who are ill and being prepared to support them and 'journey' with them and their families. This can be anything from providing meals, giving rides or simply being present with them.

One specific initiative we led in our local parish, which was certainly influenced by our Oblate charism, was to start a program where, for five years, our parish contributed \$500 per month to a mother and her four children to "top up the rent." This allowed her stable and safe housing to raise her children. This program has now been extended for a second period of five years to another family.

Our Oblate hearts help us to see others with compassion and love, and we hope has helped us influence family and friends to do the same. We have come to recognize that all of us experience poverty and marginalization in one way or another. We are more sensitive to the different kinds of poverty that surround us and know that poverty is more than a lack of material goods; it can include loneliness, mental illness, addictions and lack of acceptance.

One of our blessings as Oblate associates is being part of the Oblate community. Taking part in the various celebrations, being involved in community days and gathering to share our journey with others – vowed Oblates and associates – in our BOC (Basic Oblate Community) has given us a sense of belonging. We feel supported and challenged.

Over our 50 years of marriage, we have been blessed with many opportunities and experiences that have allowed us to grow in our marriage and our faith. Living the charism of St. Eugene with dedicated vowed Oblates and committed laity is not only challenging, but fulfilling. For that we are grateful.

# Committed to the Oblate way of life

**BY PRAVEEN MAHESAN SELVADURAI, OMI**

KIONYO, Kenya – It was a great achievement in Kenya mission to bring together lay people to form a group of Oblate lay associates. The initiative started from Kionyo Parish, the first mission location for Canadian Oblates in Kenya.

Having travelled with the lay people for more than a year in 2015 and 2016, with the support of Alfred Groleau, OMI, Rita Balachandran and various Oblates, we formalized our relationship with them by inviting them to become Oblate lay associates. The journey with these good people progressed through the various inputs about our founder St. Eugene de Mazenod, and community time with the OMI Kenya mission members.

In January, 2017, 16 members from the original group of 25 accepted the invitation and courageously came forward to commit themselves as lay associates. In the Holy Eucharist celebration, presided by Ken Forster, OMI (provincial, OMI Lacombe Canada), the members were called forward and made a temporary commitment.

**Fr. Praveen and associates on retreat**





Fr. Ken Thorson  
welcomes an associate

It was a magnificent and grace-filled moment to see the 16 members, nervous but proud, standing with candles in front of the altar and Fr. Forster for the commitment.

The candidates have kept that “candle” burning during 2017 as they engaged in various activities.

They not only committed themselves to the service of God but also actively contributed to strengthen the group. The seriousness and dedication was shown in different activities throughout the year.

On a monthly basis, we have been spending quality time together to study the life of St. Eugene and put our charism into practice by engaging in various activities. The structure of the Oblate lay associates has been formed with a president, secretary and treasurer to ensure better functioning of the associates.

While praying and studying, we have also visited the elders, children’s homes, and our postulancy formation house. In November, we spent time with the Pontifical Mission Society in Kionyo to pray with them and for children.

For the final program of 2017 we dedicated two days for a retreat at our postulancy in Méru in order to prepare our 16 members for the renewal of commitment and encourage another five members who were scheduled to take their first commitment in January, 2018.

We are also sending three lay associates to Kisaju Parish (our second parish in Ngong Diocese near Nairobi), to initiate a relationship and introduce the intention of the lay associates in the hope of starting a new group in Kisaju.

We thank OMI Kenya mission and OMI Lacombe Canada for their support and encouragement to continue our initiatives.

*(Fr. Praveen is the director of the Oblate lay associates in the OMI Kenya Mission)*



# A shared charism

BY ALFRED GROLEAU, OMI

EDMONTON – For the first time in Brother Anthony District, we witnessed three-year promises of associates committed to OMI Lacombe Canada, some of whom have journeyed with us on a district level for many years. Also, there were nine professing their association for the first time.

What is it that has drawn them to share the inspiration of our charism? For some it was the last World Youth Day in Poland that helped them get to know the Oblates better. Some have worked intimately with us, either in parish or retreat ministry, or, in particular, the Oblate mission team. In one case the friendliness of an Oblate to the children with his dog led him to discover that “lens” through which he found the meaning of his Christian life.

Certainly, the meetings of our basic Oblate community (BOC) provided a family ambiance that allowed for meaningful sharing as well as an exposure to the life and charism of the founder. We are grateful to our local associate animators and for the excellent resources developed by Sandra Prather that offer substance and structure for the initiation of new family members.



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# Kenya

## NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

### JAN. 7

I met with a water drilling engineer to see if he is reliable to employ, but I need to check a few references. We are preparing to drill boreholes at Kisaju Parish and on the Kisaju donated land. I'm trying to find a good hydrogeologist for the location survey. If we don't get it right we waste a lot of money.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

### JAN. 21

We welcomed Oblate Fathers Ken Thorson and Jim Bleackley back from Kionyo and Méru. On Wednesday evening, Br. Phelix Joyha and Br. Joseph Nzioka renewed their vows, received by Fr. Bleackley, who gave a wonderful homily reminding us of the deeper meanings of our vows.

He recalled that when he was in novitiate he wrote his mother and said: "I just don't feel good enough or worthy to continue." To which his mother wisely replied, "You are right, you are not worthy, but do your best." (At least that's my recollection – apologies to Fr. Jim and his mother!)

On Saturday, we received the first tender for the Karen residence. It was an Italian-led company, so we expect good work. We also received one Chinese submission and expect another soon. Now I need time to review



Kiirua farm water project

them. During the week, the workers, Br. Phelix and others started digging a trench from the water tower to the new house position.

In Kionyo, they held a special mass to welcome four new Oblate lay associates into the fold. The original 16 from last year also re-committed themselves at the mass led by Fr. Thorson. So they are now 20.

I also had an interesting Sunday. After 8 a.m. mass at Olturuto, I headed to Len-Chani, about 10 kilometres by road. I was feeling guilty being 27 minutes late. But the only person there was catechist Patrick setting up the altar. I asked him if anyone was coming. "Sijui (I don't know)," he said.

So I sat in the shade outside and read my daily office (fancy name for bible reading and prayers for the whole world). It was serene and peaceful, with a light cool breeze. A parishioner



**Br. Joseph Nzioka  
renews his vows**

**Oblates Faustin Litanda and Jim Bleackley**





Celebration for lay associates

arrived, then another 10 minutes later, followed by a near stampede of four more at 11a.m. Our congregation was about 17. We started at 11a.m., and at 11:20 a single male parishioner arrived, almost like an endangered species! The Maasai men are funny. They say, "I will bring the women and children to church, but not me." Because it was a small crowd, I asked the catechist to preach to them directly in Kimasai language, reading from my English text. The mass was in Kiswahili.

## JAN. 28

Hi from beautiful sunny Karen. God even sent us a few showers to dampen the dust, but sadly we are not getting much rain in Kiirua, so I hope the tree seedlings survive.



Last Sunday I had masses at Jamii-Bora and Kisaju. Everyone was on time waiting for me! It's the difference between the local

Parishioners waiting for mass at Kisaju parish



Maasai (last week) and the immigrants from all over Kenya. After the second mass I begged permission to do the final blessing and leave so I could attend a meeting with the architects, electrical and mechanical engineers.

We had a very long and productive meeting discussing the electrical and water needs. At the end, the architects gave me their tender document and promised they would be very good for us. They are the cheapest, but we will see.

Early Tuesday morning I snuck off early to Kisaju for the borehole location survey. Along the way I took a little risk and gave an old man a lift just as I entered the bypass near home. He was very happy and I drove him about 15 kilometres. As I was about to depart a young fellow asked for a lift. We had a good chat as I took him about seven kilometres. He's a Catholic lad from Méru, so I tortured him with my few words of Kimeru. He had finished his degree in media and journalism, and was looking for work. He had no money for the bus, so I shared a few sweets with him and he left the truck with a smile.

Fr. Fidele ventured to Méru last week and assisted with a change-over from Fr. Praveen to Fr. Daquin. On Tuesday, Fr. Praveen moved with the postulancy to Kisaju House and

Altar servers







Oblates Gideon, Bright, Fidele and Joseph

Fr. Daquin will look after the Méru property with two pre-novices (Samuel and Sylvester) as they wait to start novitiate in May in the Philippines. Fr. Daquin will also take over daily supervi-

sion of the farm and the young men will assist there to reduce costs.

Friday I worked on correcting the tender document and spreadsheet. I had to go back to basics and recalculate the actual volumes of concrete, because the total cost was at heart-attack levels. I'm only half-way through and managed to trim 15 per cent and hope to squeeze another five per cent off by the end. Although I was half annoyed, I actually enjoyed the challenge of making a spreadsheet and many small calculations. The engineer in me is not dead yet!

## FEB. 4

We met with the Kisaju parish committee and architects to discuss the latest drawings and ideas for the church and physical plan of the Kisaju Centre of the parish. Then the architects, Fr. Gideon and I went to Jamii Bora to meet their parish committee and discuss the latest plans for their church building.

Fr. Bright celebrates his third anniversary of vows





Oblates Bright and Zachary visit schools to encourage vocations

They are anxious to start digging holes themselves. “We don’t have much money but we can do much of the digging ourselves,” they said.

This week Fr. Bright and Br. Zachary were promoting vocations at one of the many schools in Kionyo. Fr. Praveen was busy preparing for the three postulants coming to Kisaju OMI House. I’m hoping they will do a lot of outdoor work, making the place look good and also producing some vegetables.

During the week we received approval from city council for the Karen residence plans, but now it has to go to the Senate committee. One wonders about all these committees. I also noted that the Kenya Revenue Authority (tax man) was holding an internal meeting at the expensive Ole Sereni Hotel. Taking money from the poor to spend at expensive hotels doesn’t sound right.

Wednesday, I visited my doctor Paul at Kenyatta National Hospital. I had a small issue with my skin I wanted checked because I had a melanoma in 2004. Dr. Paul sent me to another hospital with better equipment for an ultrasound that came back very clear. Thank God for that.

I was working on a Sunday homily on my laptop at Karen when a man sat down beside me. As he spoke I recognized him as Jackson, the son of an elderly man I buried in 2013 (one of the former Mau-Mau leaders in the fight against the British in the 1950s). I always remember the man because I drove him back home from the big 100-year celebration for the diocese, and he often boasted proudly to people that “a white man was



Orphans perform for guests during the Nyumbani Home's anniversary celebration

my chauffeur." Apparently the last time a white man drove him anywhere was to prison. Anyway, Jackson's daughter, Linda, was upstairs with a head problem, possibly a small tumour. So he asked me to come up and pray with them and for her. Linda, 23, just completed her law degree. Let's pray for her good recovery.

## **FEB. 11**

Sunday was a great celebration at Nyumbani Home for HIV positive orphans. The home started 25 years ago and, as is often the case, there were many nay-sayers in the beginning. Aid organizations overseas said: "the children will die anyway, put the money into prevention programs."

After a little history and recalling the previous statement, it was very moving to see a young man, Joseph, stand up and thank everyone. He came as a six-year-old boy in 1996, and has just graduated as a lawyer at age 27. He never received medications until he was nine, so the care at Nyumbani was really special to keep him alive until new medications were invented.

## **FEB. 18**

Greetings from a cool Karen in Nairobi. Everyone seems tired after the big Oblate celebrations at Kisaju community,

where we (Karen) gathered with the postulancy and parish communities to celebrate our feast day, the 192nd year of official approval, but 200 years since the constitution and rules were written.

During the lively celebration we also formally welcomed and commissioned the three postulants who commenced “life in community” two weeks ago. Sitting around the altar were eight Oblate priests. Our two brothers, Joseph and Zachary, were in the congregation.

On a drive to Méru we stopped for a picture at the equator sign which, as a country boy growing up below the Tropic of Capricorn, still makes me smile: one moment we’re in the southern hemisphere and the next moment in the northern hemisphere.

On Wednesday we loaded a small bull donated to Fr. Constant and drove it to Karen. It was a long story and many phone calls getting our movement permit for the bull. We left at 12 and arrived at 5:59 p.m., one minute short of the curfew for carrying livestock. Thankfully the little fellow sat most of the way, so bumps were not much of problem.

## FEB. 25

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday I concentrated on the Karen

residence  
calculations.

It was a bit  
tedious, but  
I enjoyed the  
challenge.



Br. Phelix doing  
pastoral ministry





Youth group leader Kenrod (on left) along with Nairobi youth deliver gifts to Our Lady of Hope Girls Home in Marimba

### MARCH 3

The rain has come! Two days of steady rain put two feet of water in our underground tanks. It's a welcome relief from the dust.

I was very happy last weekend when our Nairobi youth took the time and resources to give materials and cash to Our Lady of Hope Girls Home at Marimba. I was proud of Kenrod,

the youth group leader, for instigating the event and organizing everything. It gives us all hope for the future that the youth can make sacrifices for others when they barely have enough for themselves.

The engineers are still working on the Kionyo church roofing and it is getting close to completion.



Kionyo Church construction

# Why I choose to donate to MAMI/AMMI

BY JOSEPH BYRNS

OTTAWA – I chose AMMI/MAMI as a natural cause for my donations. I grew up in St. Joseph's Parish, in Ottawa, a church staffed by Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Two priests played tennis with us. Attending St. Patrick's College for both high school and university, I was again exposed to helpful Oblates.

I entered the Oblate Novitiate in 1953 and had a wonderful time within our bounds in Arnprior, ON. I returned to Galilee House last year to meet, pray and experience enjoyment with fellow ex-Oblates.

Because the Oblates looked after me spiritually and bodily for two years, I naturally felt that giving something back to them came easily.

In the autumn of 2016, I visited Holy Rosary Scholasticate, my one-year home on the hill. I went to visit a dear friend who was in the throes of Alzheimer's disease.

Some of my fellow Oblates went on to be great followers of Christ. Peter Sutton was in my year. As an archbishop of the North, Bishop Sutton was often mentioned in Oblate and mission publications.

*(Joseph Byrns resides in Blackburn Senior's Residence, East Ottawa, and enjoys the arts, his dining mates, book club, card games and attending mass at Good Shepherd Parish)*



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**Printed in Canada by:**

St. Peter's Press  
Muenster, SK

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