

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit

April 2019

Gratitude



Mission Accomplished

When the Canadian Oblates started their mission in Kenya more than 20 years ago, it wasn't with the goal of taking Canadian culture to Kenya, but one of sharing the global Oblate charism. Ken Forster, OMI, was there at the beginning with a team of Canadian Oblates to establish the mission, and visited again recently, this time as the departing leader (provincial) of the Canadian Oblates.



Harley Mapes, the treasurer of OMI Lacombe Canada, travelled with Fr. Ken and, in a brilliantly written (and photographed) piece, documented the journey throughout the mission. It is through Br. Harley's eyes that we can see the impact the Oblates, and particularly Fr. Ken, have had on the people in the Kenya mission.

We also asked Fr. Ken to reflect on the Kenya mission, from their expectations when they made their first foray into Kenya, to the reality of the work that is happening there today. The growth has been astounding!

Not to be outdone, Br. Harley also left his mark on the Kenyan mission. As his time on the journey drew to a close, Harley decided the team in Kenya needed to learn one more lesson – the art of pizza making. In his words, it didn't quite turn out as expected.

But that would be metaphor for the overall mission. It didn't likely turn out the way Fr. Ken envisioned, but it did serve to feed a spiritual need ... just like the pizza, one slice at a time.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



Harley Mapes, OMI, riding home from the mission at Ilpolosat

The heart of the Kenya mission has a powerful beat

BY HARLEY MAPES, OMI

OTTAWA – “I’m the luckiest person in the world to be an Oblate and in this place!” runs through my mind. I am kneeling on sacks of maize in the back of a half-ton, bouncing and jolting across the Kenyan savanna, scanning the plains dotted with acacia trees that stretch on to the distant, purple hills, winding our way to one of the Maasai missions.

“Stop!” More zebras and wildebeest. The camera is already overflowing with photos of exactly this scene, but every click of the shutter expresses my hope to never forget this experience.

During a November 2018 provincial council meeting discussion of Fr. Ken Forster’s upcoming trip to Kenya,

someone casually threw the comment on the table, "I think that, as the treasurer of OMI Lacombe, Harley should go to Kenya with Ken." My jaw dropped; heads around the table swivelled toward me.

"What do you think Harley?"

"Well, ahhh ... well, I don't know, ahh. I suppose. This is a bit of a surprise."

"You were there before. What, 15 years ago?"

"About that, I guess."

"We're making decisions about the Kenyan mission at this table and it's been 15 years since you were there. I think it would be good for you to go back and see these places."

Nods of agreement.

Two hours later, I am in possession of a ticket to Nairobi which, much to the chagrin of famously parsimonious Fr. Ken, cost less than what he paid months earlier.

On New Year's Day, we stepped out of cold, damp Ottawa into the warm embrace of the Kenyan Oblates.

"Karibou! Karibou! Welcome! Welcome to Kenya! How was your trip?"

Fr. Fidele, the mission superior, grins from ear to ear as he insists on taking our luggage from us and loading it into the back of the vehicle.

"Good ... but long; 17 hours flying and five hours sitting in Frankfurt."

We weave our way out of the airport and fly along the Nairobi bypass, allowing us to skirt the congested city core, and arrive within 45 minutes at the Oblate residence in Karen. There isn't much interest in anything other than a shower and sleep, remembering to carefully draw the mosquito net around the bed. I'm not interested in returning to Canada with a permanent malarial reminder of this trip.

Three weeks in Kenya were a blur, a juxtaposition of people, scenery, names and impressions.

Kionyo parish is the heartland of Oblate presence in



People in the marketplace were happy to see Fr. Ken

Kenya; there, more than 20 years ago, the first Canadian Oblates began. The progenitors of the mission – Ken Forster, Bill Stang and Harold Kaufman – are remembered with near reverence. Walking the Kionyo market with Ken is as close as I will ever get to being a rock star paparazzi. Trailing in his wake, snapping pictures, a wave of whispered, “It’s Father Ken! It’s Father Ken!” raced ahead of us. Merchants came out of their shops; mothers brought their children; selfies snapped again and again; vehicles slowed as people leaned out the window, waving and shouting, “Hello Father Ken.” With each he met was the formal interaction in Kimeru:

“Murungu ni umwega!” (God is Good)

“Magita jonthe!” (All the time)

“Uri umwega?” (Are you well)

“Ndi umwega mono.” (I am very well)

“You still speak our language!” People were delighted to hear Ken using Kimeru despite his long absence from the mission.

Working his way forward, to vigorously shake Ken's hand, one man declaimed, "I know you! I wasn't here when you were, but everyone knows you. Today, people don't talk about the Mount Kenya Water Project, they just call it 'Father Ken water'. All the people remember how you helped the community."

It was a scene repeated again and again throughout the next hour. Shining eyes and glowing faces witnessed to the connection people have with him.

Oblates are proud of our approach to mission, describing ourselves as "Always close to the people." Seeing Fr. Ken moving through the crowd, greeting people by name, inquiring about the health of family members, and the whereabouts of now grown children, it was apparent from their interaction that the people love him, and he loves them.

In reminiscent scenes, albeit with different Oblates in different locales, Fr. Gideon Rimberia (one of the first Kenyan pre-novices 14 years ago, now ordained and pastor of St. Paul's Parish in Kisaju), along with Bro. Joseph Magambo and Fr. Praveen, are showing the same close connection with the people.

In a country often riven by tribal animosities simmering just below the surface, Fr. Gideon is a Bantu speaker from the Méru tribe amongst Maasai, who speak a Nilotic language. Fr. Gideon's people are farmers, patiently tending their tea crop, whilst the Maasai are nomadic herders, ever in search of new pastures, restlessly moving their cattle across the parched savanna south of Nairobi. Language and culture, however, are barriers crossed over by the intentions of the heart. Fr. Gideon drives endless kilometres from the parish center, to its different missions: Embuyagat, Olturoto, Inkiele, Lenchani, Jamii Boara and Ilpolosat. Roads are mere tracks across the savannah; driving directions consist of "Turn left at that tree and drive until the termite mounds, then turn right."

With his quiet, steady, prayerful manner, Gideon is wisdom, comfort, and hope for the people. We spent hours in Jamii

Boara with the prayer house council members as they shared their struggle at being forced off the land where their church was located, and subsequent pride at how the faith community came together and quickly erected a corrugated iron structure sitting on a well-finished concrete slab. Like the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes, individuals have nothing, but, working together as a community with Gideon to lead them, are able to accomplish the impossible.

From the council meeting, we moved on to prayers with the family of the former parish secretary; Esther's sudden death had left her husband and family in shock. The service was in Kiswahili so although the words were incomprehensible, the strength they drew from Fr. Gideon's words of comfort was obvious.

Lenchani is about the most abandoned spot one could imagine for an educational facility. It's a Catholic-sponsored school and thus, while the Kenyan government provides some funds for basic items, they still turn to the parish for assistance. Principal Michael shared with Gideon their desperate need for funding as he showed us about: windows without panes, badly rusted, corrugated iron roofs, young children in rooms with bare, concrete floors, blackboards that consisted of an area of the wall covered with black paint (no need to look for a power outlet for the digital projector here!), 10 textbooks shared by 40 students. What I assumed was a storage shed, turned out to be a classroom. The derelict office chair used by the principal epitomized the sad state of affairs. With both the parish and Oblate community's lack of resources, Fr. Gideon was unable to promise financial assistance. Nonetheless, he was a source of hope and comfort to the staff as he listened patiently, assuring them he would do all he possibly could.

"We want to expand our church because it's too small. More and more people are sitting outside. But, most of our people come from the slum and they have so little money."

"The people of this area want to build a prayer house



Oblates Gideon Rimberia and Joseph Magambo at Lenchani School

because they walk for more than an hour to come to church on Sunday.”

“Young men want to become Oblate priests and brothers, but can we afford to accept all those who want to join? The years of training are so expensive.”

Coming from a western, secularized country, where professing one’s beliefs and attending church services is seen by many as a quaint, mildly embarrassing practice, Kenya is a startling change. Faith – and expressing that faith – is a normal part of life. Sundays are given over to God; what would be considered unusual is a prayer service or mass lasting a mere 50-60 minutes! How, in such a short period of time, could a congregation possibly cram in all the clapping, dancing, singing, and processions that make up a Kenyan celebration? Worship isn’t a chore; it’s a joy!

“Ok, Brother, just keep your eye on that fellow. He seems to know what he’s doing” I mutter to myself. For someone like

me – rhythmically challenged – it’s a mystery how an entire church of people from those barely old enough to stand all the way to wizened grannies can effortlessly sway and clap in unison. I’ve learned to focus on one person, attempting to co-ordinate my clapping with him or her. In answer to the question, “Why don’t you dance too, brother?” I prevaricate. “When I was growing up, if we so much as turned around to look at the back we would get a cuff on the side of the head ... so, no, I don’t dance in church.” They laugh. I leave unsaid that when they are dancing and singing, it’s poetry in music and motion; were I to attempt the same, the result would be less inspiring.

Years ago, one of our Oblates said of the Catholic high school in his parish, “Were I to go over and ask for volunteers to help at the homeless shelter, 30 or 40 would put up their hand; were I to ask how many were willing to spend some prayer time at the church, I might get a few nervously volunteering.” Adult Canadians are not so different. We donate generously to humanitarian projects but are often reluctant

Inside Lenchani School



to support people when it comes to faith-based requests. The dichotomy between faith and good works doesn't exist in Kenya. Repeatedly, I was surprised at people, evidently living in impoverished conditions, who asked for help not with things I would have found obvious such as housing, schools, and water, but rather "Can you, somehow, help us finish our church? So many people are coming but it discourages them when they have to sit outside in the hot sun or the rain because we can't all fit inside."

Given the manner in which faith permeates people's lives, it's not surprising that there are many young men seeking

Harley Mapes, OMI



to serve as priests and brothers. While the original Kenyan Oblates came from the Kionyo area where we first began in Kenya, now young men are being drawn from all over the country, inspired by our option for serving the poor and devotion to Mary. And what a group of young men they are!

When speaking to the group of pre-novices, I said, "When I went to novitiate to begin my life as an Oblate, I was a dumb 19-year old who thought he knew everything but in fact knew nothing." In contrast, our Kenyan candidates range in age from 24 to 30 years old; they are men who had an established life but felt the desire within to serve Christ and the poor. It would be hard to imagine a happier, more committed group.

They, together with the formators Fr. Steve and Fr. Faustin, live at Karen, on the outskirts of Nairobi, and attend classes at the Catholic University of East Africa or Tangaza University College. From Karen, should they have the desire and be accepted to continue with the Oblate community, they will

Joseph Magambo, OMI, served tea at the Embuyagat mission





Oblates Gideon Rimberia, Phelix Johya, Harley Mapes
and Joseph Magambo at Embuyagat

attend an intense year of novitiate in South Africa, Cameroon, or the Philippines, and then continue their studies in one of those countries, Rome or possibly the United States.

While our main financial concern in Canada is finding the money to pay for the care of elderly priests and brothers, Kenya's financial issues stem from having more young men wanting to be priests and brothers than we can afford.

Funding is needed for food, accommodations, studies, books, plane fare ... and, of course, the more who join us, the higher the costs. "How are we going to pay for this" is a question that dominates many conversations. The young men are doing their part. On the grounds of the pre-novitiate is a garden they tend after university classes are over for the day, and a cow that is useful for keeping the grass trimmed, although one day it will be used for meat or sold. Fortunately for the cow, munching grass in this bucolic setting, it's blissfully unaware of the fate that lies in store for it.

A great Sunday was spent in the kitchen working with the pre-novices, teaching them how to make pizza. Ordinarily their diet consists of ugali (a very stiff porridge made of ground white corn) and sukumowiki (closely related to kale). The two dishes are eaten seven days a week so when I mentioned mak-



New Olturoto church

ing pizza for students in the northern Saskatchewan community in which I taught, their ears perked up.

It wasn't long before they came along and asked if I could teach them how to make pizza for themselves. As it turned out, it was a lot more difficult than I thought! Whereas I'm used to popping down to the local supermarket and picking up supplies, it's not so simple in Kenya. Local open-air markets are not selling pepperoni, ham, bacon, salami, pizza sauce, instant yeast, and mozzarella cheese.

Former Olturoto church





Harley Mapes, OMI, in the kitchen

Procuring the ingredients necessitated a trip to an upper-end shopping area, surrounded by walls and policed by security guards. The terrorist attack in Nairobi had happened days earlier and they took no chances as they searched every incoming vehicle. Going into the mall meant passing through a metal detector and having any bags X-rayed! Outside of an airport, I haven't seen such a high level of security.

Stepping inside the mall was a (near) instantaneous trip back to Canada with western fast food chains, department stores and high-end electronic stores. Searching up and down the aisles in the supermarket got us almost all the needed ingredients, although we left without pizza sauce and had to make our own.

We spent a fun – and stressful – few hours prepping the

ingredients and assembling the pizza ... the stress? That came upon discovering the oven had no temperature gauge!

"How do I set the temperature for this thing without a gauge? What do the cooks do during the week?"

"I don't know, brother. They don't use it very often. Sometimes they make banana bread."

"So, I have to guess at the temperature?"

Hesitantly, comes the response, "I guess so."

"Ahhhhh! How can I make pizza when I don't even know how hot the oven is?" It was a rhetorical question, addressed in despair to myself!

In the end, the pizza crust was done more than it needed to be – which, of course is a euphemistic way of saying it was burned – but as long as one focused on the top, it looked pretty good. Good enough to eat at any rate. The fellows who had helped in its preparation were proud of their accomplishment.

Now, slogging through the snow, ice, and slush of Ottawa, dodging snowploughs and returning again and again to the car wash to rinse away the thick coat of road salt, Kenya seems like a dream. The beauty of the country; the faith of the people; the generosity of young men wanting to give their lives in service of God and the poor, are inspiring. A natural response is to want to help. In the face of such need, the Oblates of OMI Lacombe Canada continue to seek ways to enable people to improve their lives and express the faith of a young, enthusiastic church.

Yay! pizza





Everyone was excited to see Fr. Ken

Kenya in the mirror: A look through a grateful lens

BY KEN FORSTER, OMI

OTTAWA – As I move toward the completion of my term as Provincial of Lacombe Province, I have been asked a question regarding our Oblate Mission in Kenya: “When you started the mission in Kenya 20 years ago, what were your expectations? Have they been met or exceeded?”

The Oblate Conference of Canada, eight Oblate Provinces

at that time, believed that a new commitment to a foreign mission might, as an offshoot, give new energy to our troops here in Canada. In collaboration with our General Council in Rome, we responded to an invitation from a diocese in Kenya.

Has this Kenyan Mission given new energy to our Canadian life and mission? This is a question that the membership of Lacombe Province today must answer and even the readership of Oblate Spirit magazine might venture an opinion. To many of us who were directly involved in the mission as Oblates, the answer is not difficult to discern. My life has been changed in a radical way by my direct involvement in this ministry in another culture and an African faith community.

When the three other Oblates joined me as the first mission team, if their expectations were anything like mine, our expectation was to fulfill what the old Bishop of Méru, Silas Njeru, requested when he told the Superior General, "I want the Oblate charism in my diocese."

This mission is so much different than when we started. I certainly could never have plotted where the growth would spring through, but I do believe we made some very important decisions to prepare the ground for possibilities. We refused

Fr. Ken at mass with the Kionyo Oblate associates





Oblates Ken Forster and Joseph Magambo, along with the Olturoto parish council, inspect the water tower construction

to accept a village that was originally selected by an advance exploratory Oblate scouting group. Bulesa, in northern Boran territory, was not the right choice and Harold Kaufmann and I rejected it. It was a very difficult village with many challenging hardships but most importantly a totally Muslim community, of which we had no experience, with obviously little possibility of religious vocations, perhaps for generations.

The second decision that I believe impacted growth was a clear decision not to build a dependent church. The original team of Bill Stang, Harold Kaufmann, Joachim Singarajah and myself lived simply, lived with the Merian people and shared the hopes of the people for a deeper relationship with the Christ who they already knew. We deliberately chose to shape a society together where we cared for the needs of one another

and where each took responsibility to give what each could. We had every expectation that we would work together to create an environment where our faith and God's grace touched real life and influenced how we built relationship with one another. We were there to "do with" not "do for". They were quick to learn that missionary strategy. The church became the salt and the light that affected the total community.

On my last visit in January of this year, as I walked through the Kionyo market with Bro. Harley Mapes, a minister of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa that I recognized came to speak with us and expressed gratitude that the Mount Kenya East Water Project was not a project for one faith denomination but was open to all in need of water. I believe the first Oblate parish in the Méru diocese became an example of industrious collaboration, with the building of three secondary day schools and one primary school, improvement on another dozen primary schools, building of a bakery, a water project serving 2,500 families on small tea farms, 10 permanent church buildings and many other community projects. The people took pride as they determined the projects, they raised funds through their

Fr. Ken and Magdelaina Festus





Fr. Ken visits in the Kionyo marketplace



Fr. Ken at the Marimba Our Lady of Grace Children's home



Everyone was happy to see Fr. Ken

“Makethas” (fundraisers), and MAMI friends from Canada matched everything they themselves sacrificed, “shilling for shilling.” The dedicated ministry of successive pastors and assistants served the spiritual needs of youth and families, and faith communities grew in number.

We now serve three parishes in Kenya, are engaged in prison chaplaincy, ministry to orphans, JPIC and have a serious Oblate plan to construct hostels for university students so that we guide the young adults and encourage true Christian vocations.

Oblates of other international units have joined the mission and young men began to join us as brothers and scholastics. We now have two brothers in final vows, three ordained Kenyan priests with another waiting ordination this spring. As our nine young men complete their novitiate this year, we expect to have a dozen studying theology and several others as philosophy students or as postulants. We pray that they

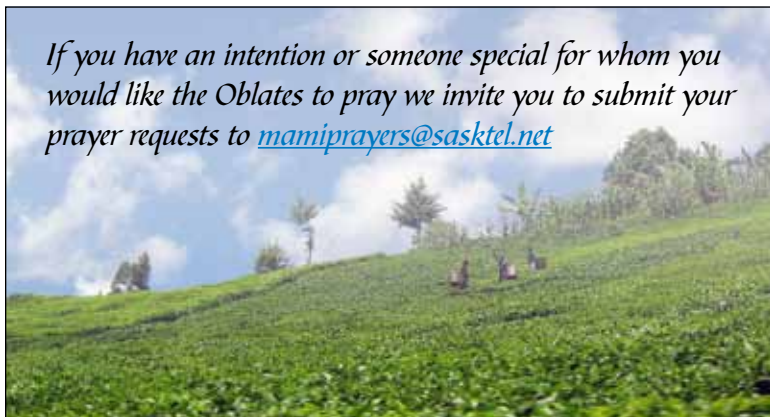
are shaped by good formators to desire to live the charism of St. Eugene with zeal. Our greatest resource is our personnel. Although we have a good number in first formation, we know that the formation process is quite long and numbers that complete and permanently join the Oblate community are not many.

We have been blessed with a good number of Oblates who strive for the ideal, and encourage one another to be “Oblates”, to make of their life an oblation, a sacrifice for building the kingdom of God. We recently have invited laity to share the charism of St. Eugene, who, through his canonization as a saint, becomes an example beyond our congregation, for the world. We have welcomed 20 Oblate associates and others are being trained in the following of St. Eugene.

The most important lesson I learned from my time in Kenya was a lesson taught from my first days. Tartiscio Riungu sitting at my table, making the sign of the cross and stopping to pray before drinking a cup of tea. Be grateful to God for whatever you have, much or little. Always say thanks! Today on behalf of the Missionary Oblates in Kenya and the people there who offer us friendship, I thank you for your prayers for the mission and your generous contributions to the many projects respecting the human dignity of those who have less.

Tharima Murungu! (Bless us Lord)

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



A new challenge at an older age



BY MIKE DECHANT, OMI

Mike Dechant, OMI

SASKATOON – I write this in a whole new context in my life.

Last July, Bill Stang, OMI, and I took over the pastoral leadership of St. Philip Neri Parish in Saskatoon. It was the same day as Fr. Bill's birthday. What a birthday gift for a 79-year-old.

After all these years in youth ministry, I now have additional responsibilities as a parish priest. I have always wanted a direct association with a parish, so as to integrate the young people of the schools and university into an active and vibrant parish life. So here I am now with both a chaplaincy at Holy Cross High School and the pastor of a parish.

Besides the high school, we also inherited two elementary schools, and two nursing homes. One Wednesday each month, Fr. Bill reaches out to the nursing homes with mass. There is also a team of parishioners who share prayer and the Eucharist the other Wednesdays of the month.

St. Philip is a parish of about 850 families. Our strongest ministry is that we have two parish nurses who reach out to the sick and the dying – an amazing ministry.

Many parishioners are involved in various ministries. Our major focus is to try to reach out and involve our youth and young adults into the life and mission of the parish.

My involvements at Holy Cross High School are both exciting and demanding. I try to be present at the school events – sports, drama, music, pep rallies, etc. I join the fellows

on the football field, to pray with them before the game, and to encourage and challenge them to good sportsmanship. I also have classroom masses, trying to integrate their curriculum into the scriptures and our faith values. (How does calculus relate to our faith life?)

My highlight of the year was to do the play-by-play of one of our junior football games. It introduced me to a new career (when I retire?). It was fun to be “the voice” for the folks in the stands, and to add a little humor and cheer to the game.

For now, the parish keeps me focused and close to home with weekend masses, baptisms, the occasional wedding, and many funerals as we are an aging parish. The good news is that we’re baptizing more babies than people to bury.

I am doing well, as we connect with many great people. A regular surprise after mass is that we often get to meet students and friends from the past – students we taught 40 years ago. Life is coming full circle again.

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

Barking up the right tree!

BY JEFF MAHONEY

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

HAMILTON – Tony O'Dell, OMI, and Jarek Pachocki, OMI, share a natural impulse to give comfort, especially to the afflicted. As priests, they've spent their lives fortifying that inborn drive, with learning, practice and techniques of ministry about what works best.

But then TJ and Sutton would show up at a hospital-bed visit, and the men's priestly skills didn't seem to matter. "It's OK, Father," they might hear, "next time just bring the dogs."

It's an exaggeration. But when Tony explains, with a laughing shake of the head, how the two black Labs of St. Patrick's

Fr. Tony with TJ and Fr. Jarek with Sutton





TJ visiting a kindergarten class

seemed sometimes to eclipse their own efforts, the animal adorer in me has to smile in agreeing recognition.

What a power these animals can have, in general, but TJ (for Tony and Jarek) and Sutton seemed to have it in particular.

Since 2012, when Tony and Jarek took up co-pastorship at historic St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, TJ and Sutton became more than mascots.

No, they didn't go to seminary, but they should have had DDs after their names — dog-tors of divinity.

Their presence was a force of goodness in the life of the congregation, a dynamic thread in the fabric of the community and a source of reassurance. Their great heads propped on the laps of people in the pews; waggy greetings as visitors came through the doors; their patient, gentle strength, wherever they went, be it sick bed or high school ... ambassadors, as it were, of an all-enveloping love.

"They were so close, since puppies," says Jarek of Sutton

and TJ, both of which died recently well into their teens. They lived wonderful, long lives for the big dogs (Labrador retrievers) they were ... full lives in constant community and affection.

Their loss was a great blow to the church community, especially to Tony and Jarek.

But during a recent visit, I'm met enthusiastically at the De Mazenod Door Outreach by Nesbitt and Carlin, Jarek's and Tony's new Labs, as well as Bailey, the youth minister's dog. They're beautiful, young and they're truly helping.

"They create a magic," says Tony of the dogs in the church, now a St. Patrick's tradition of sorts.

"You see people pick up around them," adds Jarek.

Nesbitt, five, came to them after he couldn't be certified as a service dog, for which he was trained. Carlin, younger, is being adopted.

"I always wanted a dog growing up in Poland, but in a small apartment there was no room," says Jarek (Jaroslaw). When he and Tony began sharing ministry in Labrador, where Tony was born, the time seemed right to correct the canine omission.

Fr. Tony playing with TJ and Sutton



“The idea was that the dogs would be both a companion” and also join in ministry, part of the Oblate charism.

TJ quickly became Tony’s dog and Sutton Jarek’s. Sutton was TJ’s half-brother (same father), born on the same day as TJ, but a year later.

“They were different,” recalls Tony. “TJ was a mellow, calm dog by nature and Sutton had so much energy he couldn’t be tired out.”

“He’s the reason I started running,” says Jarek, now training for his seventh Around the Bay Race. He’s also completed several marathons.

In the time they’ve been at St. Patrick’s, Tony and Jarek have made such a difference, not just to the church, but to the whole city. They added 65 new families last year; “a lot more baptisms than funerals,” says Tony, and that’s called going in the right direction.

As I part company with handshakes (priests) and pats to the head (dogs), I see outside that the lineup is thickening for the food at the De Mazenod Door Outreach where St. Patrick’s serves about 400 people a day, year-round.

When it comes to feeding and comforting those in need, rain, snow or sleet, the fathers (along with Nesbitt and Carlin) can be quite dog-matic.

And, believe me, if they ever add a feline friend, my catechism puns won’t be far behind.

(Reprinted with permission)

Fr. Jarek and Nesbitt at
Run for the Kids in Toronto





Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

JAN. 13

The sun is shining with only occasional showers the day before pouring concrete, so one could say we were well blessed. It was a key moment in the Karen building. With thanks to God, we managed to pour the first-floor slab over two days.

Fr. Ken Forster, our provincial (leader), and Br. Harley Mapes arrived back from Kionyo on Monday evening in the tender mercies of Fr. Daquin. We had special finance discussions that were helpful as we move forward.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

JAN. 19

My first thought as I sat to write this morning was: what a wonderful week we have had here in Kenya, but then I remembered the terrorist attack on Tuesday. As we pray for the

First floor concrete pour for the Karen residence





Nairobi youth visit the Malindi children's home

victims and their families, we remain alert but not alarmed, and we have received many blessings. It's amazing how quickly the attack has disappeared from our minds and conversations. People move on, and we know the security and intelligence agencies are working hard to prevent others.

Don't be worried about us, because I really feel just as safe as if I was in Melbourne or London.

I was happy a few of our Nairobi youth could come and visit Fr. Ken. They were late for mass but in time for breakfast! However, Fr. Ken was happy the Oblates are walking with our youth once they leave home. And the youth are becoming guardians of a sort for the new men and women from Kionyo/Kisaju coming to Nairobi for the first time. We have 49 members on our WhatsApp youth group.



Joseph Magambo, OMI, visits at the Jamii Boara mission

Fr. Fidele concluded with his annual report before Fr. Ken and Br. Harley Mapes were given the floor to share their observations after being in Kenya for two weeks. We then celebrated the renewal of vows for Br. Phelix Johya, OMI, who will be in Kenya this year for pastoral experience.



Phelix Johya renews his vows

Thursday we held a special finance committee meeting while the provincial (Fr. Ken) and treasurer (Br. Harley) were present from Canada. This was a great conversation and sharing, opening some new possibilities for us to work on for self-sustainability while doing ministry in the project.

JAN. 26

Br. Harley accompanied me to the usual Nyumbani Sunday mass, and thankfully didn't fall asleep during the homily! Br. Harley is a good photographer and left us a great archive of photos from all around the mission. He is also a very good chef and started training the pre-novices on Sunday and Monday before he left. I was sad to miss out on Br. Harley's pizza feast, but managed to steal a slice when I arrived home.

Tuesday morning, Fr. Stephen kindly changed the schedule to have morning mass, and invited Br. Harley to preach. It was good encouragement for our brothers to see it is not only priests who can preach.

My dad joined us for the big Oblate and church feast of St. Paul. For the OMIs, it is the anniversary of when St. Eugene and Fr. Tempier started the Oblate community life. This year, it was also the closing mass for the Oblate Year of Vocations.



The youth inspect a plot at Kiambu for raising goats

FEB. 3

We are all very happy after learning that our five Kenyan novices in South Africa took first vows. Four will travel directly to Cedara for scholastic training (South Africa), joining Br. Joseph Nzioka who is already there. Br. Charles has travelled to Kenya to prepare for Rome (the OMI International Scholasticate). He'll be away for three to four years. At least he has Br. Moses there to show him the ropes.

I was happy with our youth this week. The group in Nairobi, St. Stephen's on the Move, is now constructing a small shed for the goats' project on a property owned by a friend. They are coming together and working well, probably because I'm too busy to spend any time with them at the moment.

I hauled four bags of dairy meal from Nanyuki to our Kiirua farm, where Euticus, our manager, used his motorbike to carry the 70-kilogram sacks up the hill because the road is still terrible from the rain. Fr. Daquin's planting project of peas, potatoes and maize is doing well.

Fr. Daquin took me to a school for blind girls from all over Kenya. It was built in 1986 and is a bit run



The peas at Kiirua farm are almost ready to harvest

down. All the taps are in bad shape, the roof is rusty brown and near non-functional; but the girls were happy.

Sr. Lucy from the Sisters of St. Francis has been there 10 years and said she is tired. But whenever Fr. Daquin visits she is always laughing and smiling. She is a great woman and a wonderful missionary. I didn't take any pictures in order to be sensitive.

We were asked to look at the school and provide cost estimates so the Italian supporters can send money. It is something good to be attached to our Méru community. Maybe our students can do some work there.

FEB. 10

Last Sunday I asked Fr. Pascal to accompany me to Nyumbani Children's home to introduce him to the ministry as he has agreed to help out while I'm away in Australia. I was very touched by the children who gave me a lovely signed thank-you card with many little tributes.

My father and I later flew to Australia and were met by Fr. Paul Smithers, my old companion in the seminary. He was in great form and agreed to take an excess bag for safe-keeping, and is giving dad a bed for a few nights before we head to Perth.

FEB. 17

Our young
friend George
assures me all the
youth are well in

Fr. Gerry blesses
the children at the
Nyumbani children's
home in Karen





Fr. Gerry talks to Gr. 9 students at Iona College in Australia

Nairobi and is reminding me to say thank you to our great friends in Melbourne, the Johnsons, who supply him with a special mix of minerals and vitamins only available from Australia. These prevent his degenerative eye disease from getting worse and it is working.

FEB. 24

I visited Mazenod, our Oblate managed college, and renewed a few friendships with staff who still remember me from 2008. I gave 17 short talks over three days and hope they might get a positive spin on what the church is doing in the Kenya Mission. I also took the time to thank them for all the



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sacrifices they make each year to raise money to help the overseas missions.

Saturday morning I enjoyed a smooth drive from Melbourne to Aubury before heading to Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, where I was born and raised until age 15. Melbourne to Wagga is about 550 kilometres, which took only five hours. In Kenya it would take between 9 and 12 hours to drive.

MAR. 2

I continued my holiday in New South Wales meeting with relatives young and old. Wagga Wagga, Binya, Coolamon. My sister Jane kindly lent me her car and I managed to avoid any scratches. The families are well and facing the same struggles of all families: the transition from teenagers to young adults and moving away from home for university.



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In your words

BY OWEN CAMERON

In issues of *Oblate Spirit* you ask for stories, and reasons why we may have chosen to support the work of the Oblates. Here is mine.

My wife Marie and I will be married 55 years on June 22. Although we are by no means rich, we always believed in helping and supporting where we could, but to know just where is not easy. There are multitudes of places constantly looking for money. One wonders, what to support and where will one's money have the greatest impact.

A story was shared with us about 30 years ago by a good friend, Fr. Hugh A. MacDonald, and that story was about Bro. Blaise MacQuarrie. My story goes as follows:

Br. Blaise comes from Inverness, a little mining town in Cape Breton. My wife and I both come from Mabou, a little village 13 miles south of Inverness.

Fr. Hughie, as he was called, told me that he preached a mission in Inverness many years before, and Blaise MacQuarrie was an altar boy. Fr. Hughie was so impressed at how Blaise conducted himself, that at the end of the mission he took Blaise to one side and told him that he thought Blaise might have a calling to the religious life.

Blaise told him that the next day he was leaving for Montreal to join the army. Maybe a year later Fr. Hughie said he received a call from Blaise asking what order he (Fr. Hughie) thought Blaise should join. Fr. Hughie recommended the Oblates.

Fr. Hughie told us of Br. Blaise's work in Peru, and suggested we should support him when we could. That was the start, and for the first time I felt every cent we contributed was accounted for, and made a difference. For the past number of years, we started automatic monthly bank withdrawals.



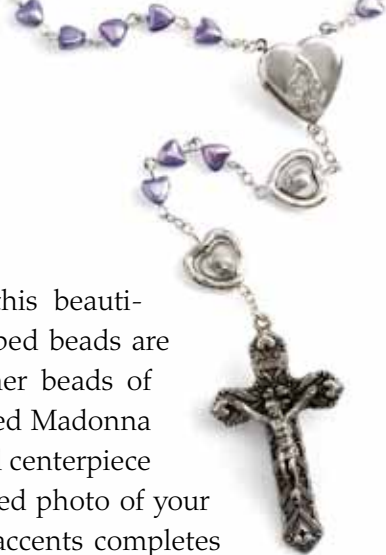
Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI, always ready to work

I look forward to the *Oblate Spirit*, and especially to Br. Blaise's letters and pictures. The letters are as interesting and funny as he is courageous and determined (typical Cape Breton characteristics). I can look at a picture of a poor family moving into one of the houses he just finished, and say with pride that I can see the difference my money is making in the life of the poor. It is a good feeling.

Whenever Br. Blaise comes to Cape Breton, he comes to visit us. It is an honour, and a most pleasant experience, to be sure.

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