

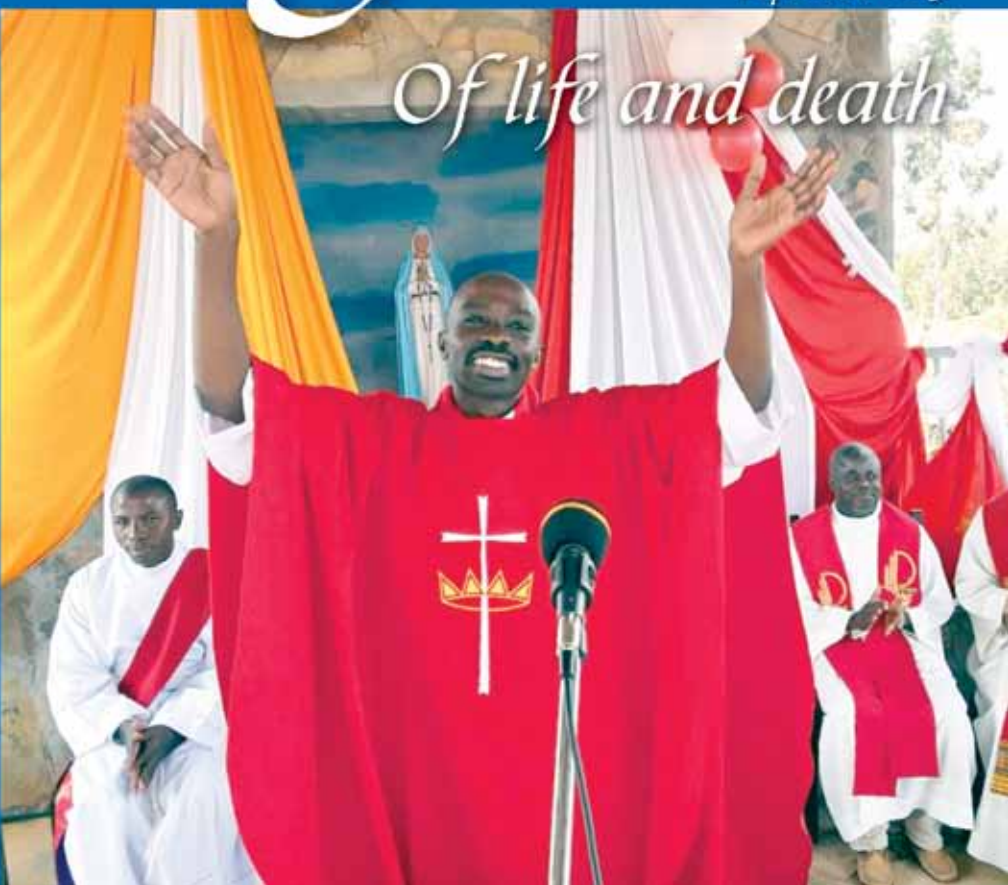
AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit



September 2019

*Of life and death*



# Life and death

Jackeline, an orphan, was a teenager walking a long distance to school, when she was attacked and killed (Page 9). She was hoping for a brighter future, a better life.

Cosmas Kithinji, a young man, was recently ordained an Oblate priest and greatly celebrated in his Kenyan parish (Page 3). His spiritual life is just beginning to unfold.

In this issue of *Oblate Spirit* we link those two stories as we provide the opportunity to pray for those we love who have since died. Fr. Cosmas, the newly ordained Oblate priest, has agreed to present our prayers for the dead in a mass on All Souls Day. The image of him learning to ice skate on a visit to Canada remains vividly imprinted in our minds.

It seems that death has played a more pronounced role in our world than the many celebrations of life. Rarely does a day pass when we don't hear about some tragedy on the nightly news, whether close to home or on the world stage.

It is good and right to pray for our beloved deceased friends and family. At the same time let's offer prayers for peace in these troubled times. It is the least we can do.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

Cosmas attempts skating  
during his Canadian visit





Fr. Cosmas leaving the church

# A new Oblate priest

*Cosmas Kithinji Kubai, OMI, ordained*

**BY KEN THORSON, OMI**

NKUBU, Kenya – Surrounded by family and friends and his Oblate community, Cosmas Kithinji Kubai, OMI, was ordained a priest in a joy-filled celebration June 8 at the minor seminary in Nkubu, Kenya. The next day he celebrated his mass of thanksgiving, his first mass, at his home parish in Kiirua, near Mount Kenya.

Méru Diocese Bishop Salesius Mogambi, a friend of the Oblates, presided at the liturgy and ordained Cosmas, along with eight other young men who were ordained deacons for the diocese.

Close to 2,000 people gathered

Oblates Cosmas Kithinji and Ken Thorson







Fr. Cosmas is lifted onto the shoulders of the people



in Nkubu to pray for the church and for these young men called into service.

In his homily, Bishop Mogambi, speaking mainly in Kimeru and English, encouraged the nine men to lead simple lives, to serve God's people, and to avoid getting drawn into the culture of accumulation.

At the end of the ordination mass it was my pleasure to announce Cosmas's first obedience: Fr. Cosmas was assigned to the Kenya mission and commissioned as superior of the Oblate pre-novitiate in Nairobi, and director of the Karen community.

Following the celebration, the parishioners of Kiirua served a meal for parishioners and for the family and friends of Fr. Cosmas. Not far away, Oblate associates from Kionyo parish, which is just down the road from Nkubu, served a meal for the parishioners of the Oblate parish in Kisaju, a small town south of Nairobi. The 50 parishioners from St. Paul's in Kisaju

began their four-hour bus journey at 1 a.m. that morning.

The next day at his home parish in Kiirua, Fr. Cosmas celebrated a mass of thanksgiving – his first mass! Vested for Pentecost in a red cha-

suble, a gift from friends in San Antonio where he'd completed his studies, Cosmas presided and preached with confidence, quite comfortable in his new role. His preaching and presiding at the Eucharist was surely the highlight of the day, followed closely by the joy expressed by the gathered community.

In a lovely moment, parishioners invited Fr. Cosmas down from the sanctuary to present him with a new suit and black shoes from Marks and Spencer. Then they lifted him onto their shoulders, singing and cheering as they carried him through the congregation.

Late in the afternoon the Oblates began the four-hour drive to Nairobi. After a short night they made their way to Mombasa for their annual retreat. Cosmas remained on vacation with his family in Kiirua for the next month.



It was a time for dancing and celebration



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# Praying for the Dead

BY RON ROLHEISER, OMI

Recently I received a letter from a woman asking me to explain the Christian teaching about praying for the dead. Her son had been killed in an accident and she had been dissuaded from attending any special prayers for him. Her question: Does it make sense to pray for the dead?

The Christian answer is unequivocal, yes! It makes sense to pray for the dead and our Christian faith asks us to do so, both in liturgy and in private.

Why? What possible good can it do? To remind God to be merciful? God needs no reminders. To ask God to see a good heart beneath all the struggles of a human life? God doesn't need a lesson from us on understanding. God is already perfect understanding, perfect love, and perfect forgiveness. As a cynic might ask it, why pray for the dead? If the person is already in heaven, he or she doesn't need prayers; if he or she is in hell, our prayers won't be of any help!"

So why pray for the dead?

For the same reason we pray for anything. We need to pray. It does us good. Objections to praying for the dead might, with equal logic, be raised against all prayers of petition. God already knows everything and there is no need to remind God of anything. Yet, God has asked us to pray and to pray in petition because prayer is meant to change us, not God. Thus, the first reason we pray for the dead is because that prayer helps us, the living. Prayer for the dead is meant to console the living.

Closely tied to this is a second reason: We pray for our dead loved ones to help heal our relationship to them. When someone close to us dies, it is natural, always, to feel a certain amount of guilt, not just because that person died and we

go on living, but because, being human, we have had a less-than-perfect relationship with him or her. There is unfinished business between us. In praying for that person, among other things, we help wash clean those things that remain painful between us.

This takes us to the heart of the matter. We pray for the dead because we believe in the communion of saints, an essential Christian doctrine that asks us to believe that a vital flow of life continues to exist between ourselves and our loved ones, even beyond death. Love, presence, and communication reach through death.

We pray for the dead to remain in communication with them. Just as we can hold someone's hand as he or she is dying, and this can be an immense comfort to both of us, so too we can hold another's hand beyond death. Indeed, since death washes many things clean, in our prayers for our loved ones who have died, often more so than our conversations with them when they were alive, the connection is purer, the forgiveness is deeper, the perspective is wider, and the distance between us is less. Communication with our loved ones

Ron Rolheiser, OMI



after death is privileged, undercutting much of what kept us apart in this life.

Praying for the dead, our faith assures us, not only consoles us, but also offers real strength and encouragement to the loved one who has died. How? In the same way as loving presence to each other offers strength and consolation here in this life. Picture, for example, a young child learning to swim. The child's mother cannot learn for the child, but if she is present and offering encouragement from the edge of the pool, the child's struggle and learning become easier. Things are more easily borne, if they can be shared. This is true even for a person's adjustment to the life of heaven.

By praying for the dead, we share with them the pain of adjusting to a new life. Part of that pain of adjustment (which classically Roman Catholics have called "purgatory") is the pain of letting go of this life. In our prayers for the dead, we offer them our presence and love, as a mother on the edge of the pool, as they adjust to a new life. Purgatory is not a geography, a place distinct from heaven, but the pain that comes from being in heaven, without having fully let go of earth. Love, even as we know it in this life, already teaches us that.

From my own experience of having loved ones die, as well as from what others have shared with me, I have found that usually, after a time, we sense that our deceased loved ones no longer need us to pray for them. Now they just want us to connect with them. Prayer for the dead does that and even though our prayers might still be formulated as if we are praying for them, we are now simply connecting with them and what was formerly a cold, cutting absence now becomes a warm, comforting presence.

*Used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser.*

*Currently, Father Rolheiser is serving as President  
of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio Texas.*

*He can be contacted through his website, [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com).*

*Follow on Facebook [www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser](http://www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser).*



# Difficult to overcome fear in the face of violence

BY PHELIX JOHYA, OMI

NAIROBI – On June 27, we laid to rest Jackeline Makena, a student at Gachanka Day Secondary School, which is a Catholic sponsored school under Irinda Parish which we serve.

Jackeline, an orphan, was raped repeatedly and killed on June 19 on her way home from school, allegedly by three young men who have since been arrested and are in police custody pending investigations.

On June 24, I received a phone call from the head teacher of the school asking me to attend the Board of Management meeting on behalf of Daquin Iyo OMI, who was away at the time.

The agenda of the meeting was just one: how to raise money for the funeral expenses because the family is poor and could not buy even a coffin. The board decided that the school should accept responsibility for the funeral expenses,

Kionyo youth made a pastoral visit to Marimba to encourage the young girls



with some additional contributions from individual board members, teachers, students and the Church.

After that meeting we left on a nine-kilometre journey with a few teachers and some students to visit the family of the deceased and to offer our contribution.

I was moved to tears looking at the family situation, and the terrain on which Jaki walked 18 kilometres to and from school five days a week in search of an education to better her life, only to have her dream brutally cut short.

Rape cases in the region are on the rise, with few arrests being made. It's not because of lack of evidence, but because society tolerates the culprits for fear of perceived danger. Those who have attempted to speak against violence on women and girls have been intimidated previously and have resorted to silence for fear of retribution.

It is shocking that few have the courage to speak out against the increased violence, especially against women and children, and particularly those from poor backgrounds. There are many people who would like to speak against this injustice, but they are afraid to do so.

It is our Christian responsibility to stand up for our weak brothers and sisters in this fight for justice.



# Youth group offers safe haven

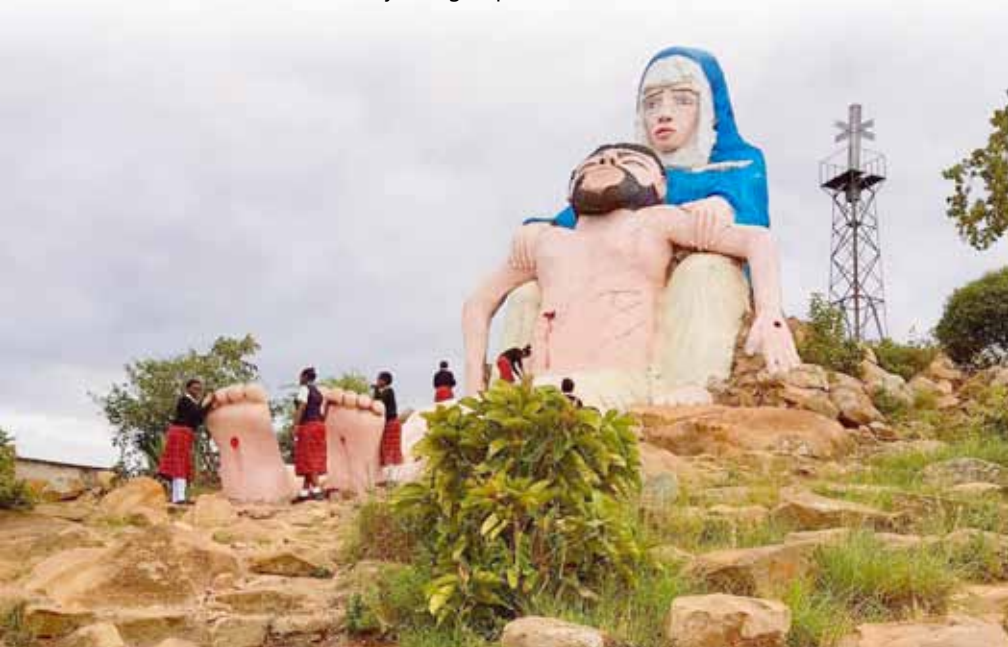
**BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI**

NAIROBI – OMI life in Kenya can be tough when you are far from home and the village community.

In Kenya there are no aged pensions, few well-paying jobs, and only partial higher-education loans for university. On top of that HIV is a high risk; jails are not pleasant and prisoners require family support in the event of sickness.

Aware of the struggle of our youth from our Oblate country parishes, the Oblates formed a group in Nairobi, the capital city, where many of the youth come for university and work. It started in mid-2015 with five members and has grown to about 50. The monthly meetings attract up to 20 members for companionship and activities such as bush-walking, visiting a shrine out of town, or coming to the Oblate house for mass, a snack and a chat.

The Nairobi youth group visited the Komarock Shrine





At the Komarock Shrine

The group selected the name St. Stephen's on the Move because the members initially came from St. Stephen's Parish in Kionyo, about 250 kilometres north of Nairobi.

The purpose of the group is primarily to offer a safe village community away from home. The members are reminded that they are important to each other and able to reach out for help when struggles arise.

What struggles? Unexpected sickness drains the finances and accommodation is lost, or exam fees cannot be paid. A job is lost and there is no money for food while job hunting. If forced to change residences, they have to wait up to two months for the "bond money" to be repaid from the former house, and yet require "bond money" immediately for the new home. (When I say "house" it's usually a 3-metre by 3-metre bare and empty room, with outside toilet/shower. They cook inside their room.)



Usually, they share a room between two or three persons to split the rent.

The focus of the group is both inward and outward. They care for each other but, since 2017, they've been searching for ways to "give back" to the community. They make annual pilgrimages home to Kionyo to give inspirational talks to the Year 12 students in our four day-schools (and send a bit of cash for coffee and incidentals during exams); they visit a home for the elderly and they visit orphanages and child rescue centres.

Of course, when they "give back" it's not just time and transport they sacrifice, but they collect cash and food goods for the elderly and children. This may not seem extraordinary until you realise they have very little money and, often, don't have transportation money to come to the monthly meetings.

As the chaplain to this group, I often look for small donations I can supply to individuals who are desperate at particular moments. I try to channel the money through one or two of the senior youth so they think they are helping each other and

Youth group visits the Umbrella Children's Home Kahawa West



have a greater desire to repay when they can. The group has a simple and typical leadership structure.

Fortunately, we also have a kind patron whom we call the Minister for Finance. He's a successful restaurateur and we use his city centre restaurant for our monthly meetings.

The members do their own planning and are currently establishing a small project to help generate a small income.

Our parents in the country parishes appreciate the group, knowing their sons and daughters have a safe community to join when they arrive in the city. They can share accommodation while they settle, and the newcomers get advice on where to go and how to 'operate' in the city. In general, they come from poor families who cannot send money on demand so, without support, they would otherwise be driven to desperate measures such as prostitution, stealing, selling drugs, etc., just to get enough to survive and cover essential costs such as exam fees (you can't sit the exams unless all course fees have been paid).

The Oblates are most concerned to help them avoid the pitfalls of desperation. We are grateful to the Oblate family and communities in Australia and Canada for the necessary donations that get our youth through the tough times.

Who knows, one day in the distant future, our youth will be great supporters of our mission in Kenya.

**Youth group visits the Langata Prison**





Ken Thorson, OMI, visits the almost completed Wathine Prayer House

# Self-reliance is the goal

**BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI**

NAIROBI – Self-reliance is the initiative of the Kenya Mission to generate local funding for the mission operating costs and projects, especially since Jim Fiori, OMI, was the mission superior.

Although we have a long way to go, the process begins by sensitizing and encouraging each mission member to be faithful to our vow of poverty, to be transparent in what we receive as gifts, contributions and stipends.

As missionaries in Kenya, we have to overcome the local

belief by many people that priests and religious work in the church as a means to make ourselves rich. This is seen when some priests use parish property, such as cars, for their personal business.

In general, most members contribute something during each year. And now we have three parishes making annual contributions of about 350,000 Kenyan shillings (KES) per parish as a set salary. In addition there are contributions of 100,000 KES per parish for mass stipends and community gifts (100,000 shillings converts to about \$1,350 Cdn.)

It was especially heart-warming when Cosmas Kithinji Kubai, OMI, made a 100,000 KES donation from the gifts at his recent ordination. Br. Zachary, who took final vows in May, 2017, offered 51,380 KES and Fr. Fidele contributed 154,000 KES in 2017 and 98,500 KES in 2018 from his teaching and counselling ministry. It reduced in 2018 because of his new duties as mission superior.

The idea is to contribute as much income as possible to the mission by our ministry in collaboration with our local people. Through our inspiring actions and generosity, we hope to encourage/empower them to also contribute in building up the Kingdom of God,



Parishioners at  
Wathine Prayer House



which begins by growing a happy and peaceful community for all, here on earth.

We are happy to see and encourage our lay associates group growing and learning that it's not about them, but about what they can do to thank God by serving the people entrusted to our care.

Once self-reliance is achieved – and sadly we have a long way to go – it will allow either that the funds we receive from overseas can go to other more needy places, or we can do even more than we are now.

Finally, without self-reliance, the good work and sacrifices made yesterday and today may have a short life expectancy if the projects cannot continue into the future.

## DONATING SECURITIES

*to Oblate  
missionary  
works*



Do you have publicly traded securities that you would like to donate to the benefit of the Oblate missions? You can directly donate your publicly traded securities (shares) to **AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI** and receive an official income tax receipt while avoiding the payment of capital gains tax.

To take advantage of this tax-saving offer, please call Diane Lepage (1-866-432-6264) at our office for further information. A minimum market value of \$5,000 is suggested. We would be happy to facilitate this exchange that benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions.



### PILGRIMAGE TO MEXICO AND OUR LADY OF GUADELOUPE

You are invited to join Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie and Fr. Susai Jesu who will be the spiritual directors of this pilgrimage that will take place Nov. 9-14, 2019. For more information contact Maria by phone at 780-707-1683 or by e-mail at [marianathatours@outlook.com](mailto:marianathatours@outlook.com). For the complete itinerary go to <http://marianathatours.org>

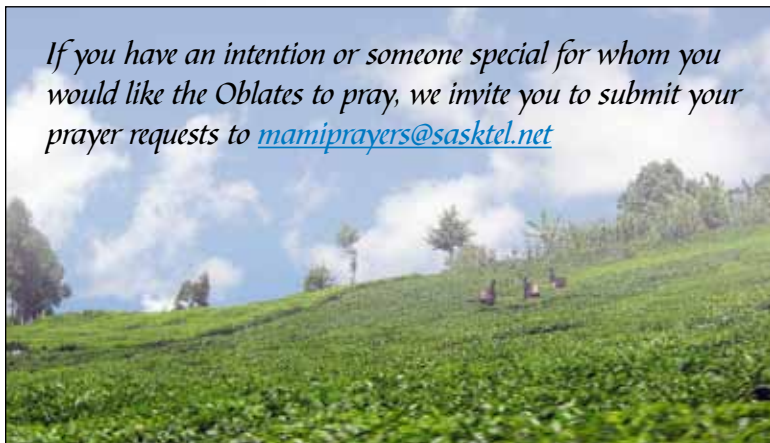


### FINAL VOWS

Congratulations to Br. Joseph Nzioka Kyuli, OMI, an OMI Lacombe Canada Oblate of the Kenya mission who took his final vows August 9th at St. Joseph Scholasticate in Cedara, South Africa, where he has been studying theology.

Oblates Fidele Munkiele  
and Joseph Nzioka after the ceremonies

*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)*



# Sacred Heart rosary

To enhance your prayer life, we are offering you a gift. The Sacred Heart rosary is made up of fire-polished dark blue crystal beads joined with a sturdy, lock-link silver chain. The traditional fleur-de-lis crucifix and Sacred Heart centerpiece are silver-plated.

Please indicate on the enclosed gift form if you wish to receive a Sacred Heart rosary.

*(One rosary per member, limited quantity available)*





# Gifts of Life

*"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*

*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

*(Matthew 25:35-36; 40)*

This quote beautifully exemplifies the good works of the Oblates whether it be in Kenya, Peru, Canada or other places of need in our world.

We invite you to partner with the Missionary Oblates, who profoundly touch the lives of those in need, through your prayers and through your donations. Your vital prayers and support are key to ensuring the continuation of good works such as: building houses and providing beds and mattresses; visiting men, women and their children in prisons; assisting poor families with access to education for their children;

providing meals or food baskets for the hungry; engaging in parish ministry and pastoral care; and answering the call of the poor.

Gifts of life





Ken Thorson, OMI, visits St. Paul's Primary School children and teachers

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# *In your words*

BY MARGARET HYDE

## *Dear Oblates:*

I'm enclosing a cheque in memory of Fr. Veyrat who was the pastor of St. Michael's Mission in Ross River, Yukon, until he moved to the Oblate Centre in Whitehorse. My husband and I and our three children moved to Ross River from Saskatchewan in 1977 after my husband, Bede, accepted a teaching position at the school in Ross River.

At first, Fr. Veyrat was very quiet but after several Sunday and Christmas dinners with our family he became a good friend and almost part of the family. He came with us to the air strip in Ross River when we said goodbye to our older son, Martin, who was leaving to join the air force after he graduated from high school in Faro, Yukon.

Fr. Veyrat had a great sense of humour. I remember one dinner in particular. I'd put food on the table, Father said grace for us and I told everyone to help themselves while I was busy at the stove. I heard muffled giggles from our children. When I turned, Fr. Veyrat was pretending to put food in his hand – I'd forgotten the plates!

Father was very well liked by everyone in Ross River. At that time he still had a dog team and would visit outlying Native camps. The dogs always howled when he rang the church bells on Sundays, prompting more giggles from the children.

We left Ross River in 1986 to move to Whitehorse but kept in touch with Fr. Veyrat over the years until we left

the Yukon for Victoria and he had moved to Whitehorse.

Fr. Veyrat lived a very spartan existence in Ross River without many amenities. He was a good hunter and an excellent marksman. We always admired his dedication to the Native people who had a great respect for him.

With many fond memories of a dedicated Oblate.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Hyde

*(On Feb. 27, 2014, Reverend Pierre Veyrat, OMI,  
passed away at the age of 90 years.)*

# 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)**





Alberta Oblate Associates make their commitment

# The Mazenodian family experience

BY DEBBIE DOORNBOS

EDMONTON – It began for me with an encounter and an invitation that took place 20 years ago over wine and cheese at a parent advisory Christmas party at a west-end Catholic high school.

It was an Oblate parish with a mission in need of a co-ordinator, and I was a newcomer desiring to connect into a faith community in a new city. “Yes, I’ll do it,” led to encounters with other Oblate priests, brothers, friends in mission, lay people in Oblate ministries, and more invitations.

It opened the door to beautiful experiences of community, rich spiritual experiences and a deep sense of belonging. Now, as an Oblate Associate of OMI Lacombe Canada and co-district animator of Brother Anthony Community, I continue to experience this same deep sense of belonging.

My heart is at home in the Oblate community.

So, when I received an invitation to attend the Mazenodian



Debbie  
Doornbos



Family Vocational Congress at San Antonio, Texas, I was delighted to go. I have always enjoyed my experience of Oblate events. In all honesty, it was not hard to consider escaping our Canadian winter in January for a few days!

The Mazenodian Family Vocational Congress was a unique title that left me curious. It was the first time I had not heard the word Oblate used in a gathering with Oblates present. As the days unfolded, so did the vision that Fr. Frank Santucci presented. It became clear that the use of the word Mazenodian (not Macedonian) was because in his vision it was the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod that was at the centre.

St. Eugene's canonization in 1995 declared him a saint of the universal church, he reminded us. This follows that the charism is inclusive, extending out to others, vowed and non-vowed alike. He drew a circle with the charism of St. Eugene in the middle of the circle and the various aspects of the Mazenodian family around it – Oblates, associates, employees, partners, affiliates, MAMI ... eight different groups in total.

Even though the structure in the U.S. is different than in Canada, the vision presented of the charism of St. Eugene being central seemed like a paradigm shift to me. As I listened and reflected on it, this vision felt expansive, inclusive and full of potential.

While there is so much that could be said about the congress, it was a conversation I had with one of the young men

Alberta Oblate Associates



who had been an Oblate affiliate and decided to get married that stayed with me. He told me how much hope this congress gave him. He realized he could be part of the Mazenodian family and live out the charism of St. Eugene as a married man. His joy was obvious. He was working with youth in a parish in Los Angeles and I couldn't help but wonder how the charism would go out through him and inspire vocations.

In February I watched three people make their first commitment as associates of OMI Lacombe Canada and 10 people renew their commitments. I then watched several Oblate priests and brothers renew their vows. It was a joy-filled occasion.

The relationship between Oblates and associates is often described as life-giving. We walk together in the footsteps of St. Eugene de Mazenod, connected by the charism, each in our own vocation, ministry, or way of life striving to make a difference in the world. Associates proudly wear their Oblate crosses, reminding them of their commitment to community, prayer, formation and mission. In many ways it is a Mazenodian family experience.

That takes me back to my original experience 20 years ago. It was an encounter and an invitation that drew me into a wonderful journey with the Oblate community ... with the Mazenodian family.

How many people are waiting for just such an encounter and an invitation to become part of something where they can say 'my heart is at home with the Oblates'? All we have to do is ask.

*"See I am making something new; can you perceive it?"  
(Isaiah 43:19)*

# My trip to Vietnam

BY CLAUDE LAVERTU

PORT ALBERNI, BC – It started with a Christmas newsletter from Fr. Ken Forster, describing his visit to Vietnam.

Fr. Ken, who I have known since 1984, outlined how the provincial administration of Lacombe Province, which he headed, decided to “develop collaborative relations” specifically with countries such as Vietnam, Poland and India.

One sentence about his Vietnam visit caught my attention: “Their young men in formation are very interested in learning English and they are encouraged to pursue this study in whatever way they can. The mission would very much welcome an Oblate or lay person(s) to live with the scholastics teaching English.”

My so-called bucket list included doing volunteer work in a foreign country, always believing it would be in Central or South America. In discussion with my wife, I said “I can do that.” To which she replied, “Go for it.”

I corresponded with Fr. Jacques Nguyen, OMI, who is fluent in both French and English, over the next few weeks to get a sense of what the

Fr. Jacques Nguyen  
and Claude Lavertu



mission was looking for and what I would be getting myself into. Essentially, they were looking for someone who would be willing to stay at the scholasticate and engage the scholastics in English conversation.



Traffic is a little crazy in Vietnam

I arrived in Saigon on Jan. 2, 2019. Fr. Jacques greeted me at the airport and drove me to Chi Hoa, the aspirant's house in Saigon, where I stayed two nights to acclimatize and sightsee. He then drove me to one of the districts of Saigon (13 million people) to the St. Eugene de Mazenod Scholasticate, which was to become my home for the next six weeks.

The drive down the one-kilometre dirt track, past a commercial chicken coop, several expensive homes, a low-cost housing complex next to a convent, an abandoned half-torn-down building, and a house under construction, led to the scholasticate, an oasis of calm in a teeming suburb only a five-minute walk away. It was a pure study in contrasts.

As was the traffic. There is no comparison between the organized, wide-open highways and city traffic in Canada and the seemingly chaotic mass of motorbikes, cars and trucks used by 96 million people. Safety is measured in inches due to the number of vehicles on the road; each trusts the other not to stop suddenly and disturb the ebb and flow, a stop that would result in chaos.

Boarding school, whether as a teenager or adult, is based on routine. During the week, you are awake at 4:30 a.m., then prayers at 5 a.m. and breakfast at 6 a.m. The scholastics would leave at 7 a.m. for their university philosophy or theology classes (all of them already have a bachelor's degree in one field or another), then return around 11:45 a.m. Lunch

is at noon, followed by rest time until 1:30 p.m., then study time or alternate classes such as music (singing, keyboard), English (vocabulary, grammar, language) depending on the day of the week. Sports time at 4 p.m. was always eagerly anticipated, either volleyball (they were happy I quit trying to play) or ping pong (at which they tolerated my bottom-end performance). 5:15 p.m. was showers, laundry, personal time; 5:45 prayers and dinner at 6:15 p.m.; from 7:30 to 9 p.m. was study time; prayers at 9:15 and lights out at 10:00 p.m.



Ken Forster, OMI,  
during his visit to Vietnam

Saturdays, there were no classes, so the time was occupied with cleaning the courtyard, bedrooms, fishponds and any other chores assigned. There was no paid help other than a cook who prepared lunch and dinner six days a week. A couple of

Some of the scholastics and Claude





the scholastics were assigned kitchen duties on the cook's day off.

On Sunday mornings, all the scholastics were involved with teaching catechism or

other pastoral activities after mass in the several local parishes, or assisting at the orphanage. Sunday afternoons was their only free time, where they could meet with friends, go for coffee or simply relax. As January was the end of the school term, many chose to stay put and study.

My knowledge of the Vietnamese language was non-existent other than a few basic phrases. However, a smile, a nod, hand gestures and a lot of laughs carried us through. At the outset, it also helped that Fr. Phillippe (the formator) spoke both French and English passably well.

Engaging in conversation with the 37 scholastics was easy; understanding them was more difficult. Given the fact the end consonant in Vietnamese words isn't always pronounced and that they have little if no opportunity to speak English, conversation in the first week was challenging; but once I got used to the way they pronounced, I was able to figure out what they were saying. One of the scholastics, on a break from university studies, was studying for the IELTS exam which, when passed, would allow him to study in Australia. On many days, I spent two to three hours at different times with him. We all celebrated when he passed his IELTS.

During the first four weeks of my stay, group conversational sessions were arranged mornings (for those who didn't have classes that day), afternoons and evenings. In order to



Scholastics on the cook's day off

generate conversation, I showed them pictures of our family, house, area, countryside, sports activities, etc. There were often one-on-one sessions as well. The rest of the time, we would chat on a stairwell, in the courtyard or at meal time. (I tried many different dishes and the great variety of fresh fruits that was always available). Over time, once the scholastics overcame their initial shyness or fear of mispronouncing, they were quick to say hi or to stop for a quick chat, or to sit down for a half hour and talk.

It would take a whole edition of the *Oblate Spirit* magazine to describe the experiences I had, the opportunities to tour and visit people in their homes, to engage with people I met, the young children and young adults after Sunday mass who would gather round to practice their English. Of the warmth and friendliness of the Vietnamese people, these few words are insufficient. I can't thank enough all the scholastics, Fr Phillippe, Fr. Minh (the director – also with whom I spent many hours speaking English), Fr. Hien (the Director of the orphanage), Fr. Duy (a mission parish priest) and Fr. Jacques for their warm and generous hospitality.

Suffice to say that if anyone is interested in volunteering as I did, if only for two or three weeks, please do not hesitate to contact me as I would be happy to speak with you and to forward Fr. Jacques Nguyen's contact info. I hope to be able to return to Vietnam again, if not this year, then next.



Motor bikes  
parked  
inside the  
house for  
security



# Kenya

## NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

### MAY 25

NAIROBI – *Oh, happy days.* We have had a wonderful week of celebrations spread over the globe, and the rain continues to fall, helping many of the locals, although some areas are still dry.

On Tuesday, we had a great celebration at Kisaju OMI Postulancy. We were joined by members of the Karen community, parishioners, local nuns and even some youth from next door training to be teachers. Fr. Praveen led the mass and for the first time I heard our Deacon Cosmas preach, linking the readings with the focus of St. Eugene for unity among Oblates.

Our new parish, St. Eugene de Mazenod, Irinda, in Méru, celebrated its first feast of St. Eugene as a new community.

On Sunday our Nairobi youth had an outing to the retreat

Fr. John Shalongo visits with the Nairobi youth group at the Komarock Shrine on the site where the first church collapsed



Gerry Conlan, OMI





Celebrating the feast of St. Eugene

centre/shrine at Komarock. The explanation was in Kiswahili so I didn't get most of it. I was happy John Shalongo, OMI, came with us to share the day.

Fr. Shalongo shared his fascinating story. His family escaped over the northern border of Namibia into Angola around 1980. Apparently the South African government welcomed the Namibian people back to Angola as a trick in the 1980s. Once they returned they attacked and slaughtered many of them. So, after they escaped a second time, people didn't trust coming back after Apartheid ended in the 1990s.

Fr. Shalongo was not a Catholic but after attending Catholic primary school, he requested to be baptised and later confirmed. So, like St. Eugene, he started life as a refugee.

## JUNE 2

Our youth have once again inspired us by their generosity. On Saturday the Nairobi youth visited the Umbrella Children's Home in Kahawa West. These visits really encourage the staff and bring a welcome message of love, as well as entertainment, to the children.



On Saturday evening I attended a meeting at Kisaju where nine former Oblate students met for a second time to further their desire to become a united and formal group connected with OMI Kenya Mission.

There was a lot of discussion about whether they join the Oblate Associates or create MAMI, but they see themselves as unique. They are formed to various degrees in Oblate spirituality and they appreciate that they would not be the men they are now, if it had not been for the formation they received from the Oblates.

I found all this to be very encouraging and the fruits of all the hard work of our founding mission members from Canada. Last night they decided on their name: "Sons of Mazenod." Please pray for them as they discern all the issues related to establishing a group and pray that they will be able to persevere.

## JUNE 9

Well, the rain continues to fall around the nation... we thank God. The rains were like a sign or a blessing that was actualized in the ordination of Cosmas Kithinji, OMI, on June 8. It was a good finish to a week that saw a priest stabbed to death at a hotel car park in Méru.

There were eight deacons at the ordination. Bishop Salesius

Sons of Mazenod gather





Mugambi stressed in his homily the need to simplicity in lifestyles and remembering that we use what we need and share the rest. It was a gentle attack on the comfortable priests among us. Some of the sisters were saying how priests often change at ordination, and they prayed that Fr. Cosmas would remain very humble as he has always been.

On Monday evening, we were very happy to receive Provincial-elect Ken Thorson, OMI. He has been busy visiting Karen, Kisaju, Méru and Kionyo. It was a good chance to see some of our project proposals in the flesh and thrash out ideas and approaches that might be needed.

I moved a female cow to Kiirua and a small male bull to Nairobi. Fr. Constant also had a donated bull for the Oblates, so I moved that from Kionyo to Marimba.



Farm manager Euticus  
with an orphaned calf



Our farm at Kiirua is doing well and very fertile with the good rains. Farm manager Euticus is still doing well, but struggles to balance his own family and look after his little brother who has a learning disability, and his mother who is not well and unable to work much, plus he has another brother who is struggling financially.

Farm manager Euticus with  
wife Anne and baby Joycelyn



Kenyan Oblate community on retreat in Mombasa

## JUNE 16

This week was a bit of a slowdown as the mission members went on annual retreat to Mombasa. Newly-ordained Fr. Cosmas stayed in Méru to enjoy a bit of family time and de-stress after all the ordination preparations and events. Fr. Dio stayed in Kisaju, insisting he needed to write his thesis to finish and graduate from Tanagaza University College.

## JUNE 23

We took the main photocopier to town for its first service in 18 months. It is a very good machine and low cost to operate. We are grateful to one of our supporters in Vancouver. It's nice to have that personal connection so we think of our supporters often as we use various items around the mission.

## JUNE 30

It was a mixed bag for the week with the sad event being the funeral for Sam, younger brother to our Br. Elias Mwangi. Sam, 25, committed suicide after going into depression as a drug user.

Another loss to the mission was Fr. Bright travelling home

to Zambia for a year of special leave to assist his family after the death of his mother in February. This will put a bit of pressure on Fr. Constant but we hope to get some extra support from somewhere for him in the next couple of months.

## JULY 6

It was nice to welcome Fr. Cosmas back to Karen on Monday.

He is fully rested after a couple of weeks with family following his ordination. He was then off again to Nyeri to attend a funeral.



Elias Mwangi, OMI, and his brother lay flowers at their brother's grave

## JULY 13

It's been a week of ups and downs around the mission as we continue to experience mild weather but, thankfully, with enough sun to warm my shower water.

Please pray for our young people here as we mourn another two suicides in our Kionyo parish.

## JULY 20

We welcomed Fr. Võng Nguyen, OMI, from Vietnam. He has come for one year of high level studies and will return in May, 2020. After picking him up at 6:30 a.m. we dashed to Kisaju for mass, breakfast and to meet the community. He was definitely ready for a sleep by 10:30 a.m.

Fr. Cosmas is popular and in demand by many groups around Nairobi and Kisaju. He was also requested to come

to Kionyo for celebration of mass so he chose this weekend before the students return to Karen. I invited him to take Fr. Vông for a visit and the experience before Fr. Vông starts his studies.

## **JULY 27**

Fr. Constant and his team at Kionyo must be doing something positive because we have received yet another bull calf as a gift from some parishioners. I think this is the fourth one over two years.

I purchased some bull-calf fattener and supplements for the farm at Kiirua. The farm is OK, but we need to retire the old cows and get a decent cow or two to produce more milk. The trees are doing well, and farm manager Euticus gave me a sack of avocados, the first crop from our tree at the farm. It's taken five years.

On Thursday, I was robbed on the way home. Luckily I had just deposited some money for Kisaju Parish, so I only lost US\$300 cash and they stole my phone. But we thank God I'm okay. Much time was wasted reporting to the police, who were not very interested. It's my first "incident" in Kenya since arriving in 2010, so I think I've had a pretty good run.

## **AUG. 3**

I attended the Langata Prison Remand Centre and celebrated mass for the women there. Our youth, and the prison chapel youth group, joined me in celebrating with the women. The women sang beautifully, and our youth appreciated them with many words of praise. A few of the women on remand gave the youth some advice about moving forward in life and avoiding trouble with the law.

On Monday I spent some time with the police about the theft last week, and applied for a replacement licence.

We started digging a septic at our Jacaranda property – a small plot on the coast. We have been told we have to build



Ken Thorson, OMI, meets the founders of the Irembene Prayer House

something to ensure ownership stays with us. We figured this was small and necessary, so at the end of August I'll do a final inspection and approve the small concrete slab on top.

## AUG. 10

This week we shared in the joyful celebration of final vows for Br. Joseph Nzioka, OMI, at our scholasticate in South Africa. Fr. Cornelius Ngoka, OMI, came from Rome to lead the mass and receive the perpetual vows of four young men.

Meanwhile, on Friday, I was shepherding Stefan, our Canadian volunteer, around the wilds of the Pajeta Conservatory. The highlight was seeing a beautiful lioness with four baby cubs hiding under a tree surrounded by thick bush. The guard told us to drive closer in, but when the lioness started to snarl, it was enough to keep us away. We continued on to see the chimps and Baraka, the blind black rhino, before Stefan brought us some lunch at the Morani Rhino Centre.

My little God moments continue each week (I often forget to tell you). Just giving people a lift for a few kilometres whenever I'm out and about makes them happy and also helps me realize how blessed I am.





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