

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



April 2020

Faith in action



The spirit of an Oblate



Two years ago we featured Italian Oblate Vincenzo Bordo with the Olympic torch prior to the South Korea Summer Olympics. Those were happy and exciting times.

How times have changed, not only in Seoul, South Korea. COVID-19 has changed the world.

"Things have plunged terrifyingly," wrote Fr. Bordo, who was asked to "close the soup kitchen for the common good.

"It is easy to close gyms; without sport you can live," he said. "It is easy to forbid concerts; without music life goes on. Schools and universities can be closed for a period of time, without having scruples of knowledge. You can lock churches; you can pray at home. But close a canteen that serves 550 meals for the most needy? In 70 per cent of cases that is the only meal they can eat.



Vincenzo
Bordo, OMI

"It's a dramatic moment. Without good and nutritious food, they cannot survive in this difficult situation. Yesterday I spent a sleepless night trying to figure out what we can do and how to do it.

"I ask you for a prayer. It is not fair and we cannot abandon and turn our back on these friends and brothers in times of greatest need."

Those are the heart-felt words and the spirit of an Oblate. That is why we continue to offer them our support, and especially our prayers, as they work with those on the fringes of our society.

God bless them!

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Faith on the street

BY FAUSTIN LITANDA, OMI

NAKURU DIOCESE, Kenya – In Saint Joseph's Parish in Kenya, we start the Lenten season with the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday. Those who are physically strong attended the celebration, but the sick and elderly could not attend.

As a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, our tradition is working close to the people we serve, especially the poor. We decided to take the ashes and Holy Communion to elderly and sick people at their homes.

Faustin Litanda, OMI





What surprised us is the joy and happiness of those people during our visit.

The heart-felt event came when an old woman stopped us on our way back to the parish and requested the ashes and Holy Communion. I stopped the car and served her. She showed that she is a woman of great faith.

Nothing can stop our promptness to God's service and the poor continue to evangelize us in different ways. St. Eugene de Mazenod, our founder, would be happy to see how his sons are continuing with his mission.

An eye-opening visit to Kenya

BY RICHARD BEAUDETTE, OMI

OTTAWA – The year 2020 began with my arrival in Nairobi with Ken Thorson, OMI, for my first visit to the Kenya Mission.

As I began to travel around the various parishes our members serve, the mental images I carried from National Geographic and other sources were all brought to life – the vast savannah plains, the herds of cattle, sheep and goats on the plains, the Maasai herders with their herds and flocks, the vegetation, the landscape, the tea plantations and the wild animals.

All of that was secondary, however, as I began to spend time in the Oblate communities and to meet members of the various small Christian communities, outstations and prayer houses.

Oblates Richard Beaudette and Greg Oszust



At provincial council meetings we often discussed the various communities, often in the context of requests for matching donations. There were many names of people and places in my head that were just that – names, without faces, images or context.

Meeting the Oblates I had not met before and deepening ties with the ones I had met previously was the first and greatest gift of this visit. I had an opportunity to listen to each Oblate in the mission reflect on his life and ministry. This provided a lot of insight into the mission as well as the issues the men face as they minister.

Travelling around to the various outstations and meeting the leaders of the various communities was also an eye-opening experience. In each place the people who gathered shared their stories, their hopes and dreams for their particular community, but most importantly, shared their faith. I was deeply touched by the faith of the people we encountered as well as their generous welcome.

Often the people expressed their gratitude for the ministry of the Oblates. In one place people stated that before the Oblates came, they often went many months without Eucharist, but now they can celebrate regularly, at least three times a month.

In one outstation of Kisaju Parish we met with five young adults and two children. The community there is very small, because the railroad closed their maintenance station and another employer left the area. The adults were all away on business or with their herds, leaving these few young people who were preparing to go back to school the following week. They shared their commitment to living their faith as well as the struggles they face in doing so while away at school or college.

Celebrating Eucharist on Sunday was simply breathtaking. Whether it was a community of 150 or 20, the enthusiasm, participation and joy overflowed. In Kionyo we celebrated

Eucharist with the Oblate associates. It was a moving celebration in which the current associates renewed their commitments and those who are beginning the journey committed themselves to the formation process.

I also had an opportunity to spend time with the Oblate pre-novices. Meeting the young men who have begun their journey of discernment was a very hopeful experience.

They are committed to their journey and have a deep sense of the internationality of the congregation. There is much hope for the future of the mission knowing how many men we have in the formation process.

The last days of the visit were spent with all the members of the mission during their annual gathering. The presenters gave a lot of input for reflection and it was good to be part of the discussion groups as the members reflected on the input and looked at future directions for the mission.

When I returned to Canada it was with a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to visit the men and to become somewhat familiar with their ministry. They are deeply committed to serving the communities where they are present and truly making the Good News a reality in those communities.

(Richard Beaudette, OMI, Vicar of OMI Lacombe Canada)



Fr. Richard inspects a washed out road

Is Reconciliation Dead?

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – Canadians are troubled and divided.

Extreme polarizations have been incited around energy politics. Although sparked by opposition from hereditary Indigenous leaders to a gas pipeline in northern British Columbia, protests and blockades disrupted business and travel nationally. Counter-protests emerged, too – creating conditions for physical confrontations. Some politicians supported such direct citizen responses. Others encouraged firmer action by police or even the military, while politicians advocating restraint have suffered in popular opinion polls.

It seems like there are only unsavoury choices before us – jobs and the economy versus protecting the environment versus promoting Indigenous rights.

What is a Christian to think – and do?

On Feb. 20, as tension rose, Ken Thorson, OMI, wrote to the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. His letter encouraged the federal government to “respond in a spirit of deep reconciliation as you take steps to peacefully resolve the on-going conflict on Wet’suwet’en territory.”

While predictable that the leader of a religious congregation would advocate for non-violent responses to the current conflicts, Fr. Ken, the OMI Lacombe Provincial Superior, also encouraged government towards measured reactions that



Joe Gunn

place the hard work of reconciliation in the frame of a long-term but not easily achieved priority. The letter went on to state:

“We are aware that government authorities are under intense pressure to end the accompanying blockades and protests. These events, and the various responses of Canadians to them, are manifestations of how hard it is for Canadians to come to grips with centuries-old structural injustices in our treatment of Indigenous peoples. This is especially evident now with conflicting views being held not only within the wider Canadian community but also within Indigenous communities.”

Yet, wrote the Oblate letter, “How Canadians respond to the Wet’suwet’en concerns will illustrate our commitment to justice and peace in the creation of necessary new relationships of reconciliation.”

The Oblates were not the only religious organization to speak out in February. Letters were also circulated by the Anglican, Presbyterian and United churches – as well as from the Jesuits, the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph and the Canadian Religious Conference.

Senator Justice Murray Sinclair, former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has said in reference to Indian Residential Schools, that since “it was education that got us into this mess, it is education that will get us out.”

The Oblate letter was significant in that it recognized not only our past complicity, but our commitment to conversion. “Fully aware of the Oblates’ historical participation in the larger project of colonization, our stated commitment to truth and reconciliation oblige us today to move from words to action. The ways in which we act will transmit how profoundly we accept these challenges to change.”

Fr. Thorson’s letter is available at <https://omilacombe.ca/letter-minister-crown-indigenous-relations-2/>

(Joe Gunn is director of Le Centre Oblat: A Voice for Justice)



QHP ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Qu'Appelle House of Prayer, near Fort Qu'Appelle, SK, will be celebrating its 25th anniversary this summer. Planning is underway for a week-long vigil of prayer and one day public celebration in mid-August this summer. More information about the celebration will be available in the next Oblate Spirit.

NACORRC MEETING

Eight Oblate retreat and renewal centres from North America and one from England, comprising 35-40 people, will gather for the North American Conference of Oblate Retreat and Renewal Centres (NACORRC) May 24-28 at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre outside Toronto.

Guests will include two Oblate bishops and Oblate provincials from Canada and the U.S. as well as congregational leadership from Rome, signaling the importance of this ministry within the Oblate community.

The five-day event is an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to better understand the core missionary of Oblate spirituality at the heart of these centres in all their diversity.

SUPERIOR OF KENYA MISSION

Fr. Fidel Munkiele, OMI, has been appointed to a second term of three years as Superior of the Kenya Mission. The Provincial Council supported this appointment unanimously. We are grateful to Fr. Fidel for accepting this position.

A helping hand

BY KEN FORSTER, OMI

Hello to all my fellow supporters of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI).

We are partners with the poor of the world as they plan and collaborate with one another to engage in community projects that benefit their social and family life. We need to commit ourselves to pray that God bless their generosity to one another. There is a prayer that I say daily and would encourage you to

Ken Forster, OMI



say as well. It ends with three invocations to St. Eugene de Mazenod: Share with us your love for Christ/ Help us to stand firm in goodness/ Be with us in all our efforts. Let us make this prayer for our friends we support in various countries of the world and for ourselves, OMI and MAMI members.

I know you have a desire to make an impact upon the well-being of the poor. We make a commitment to use your sacrifice well. I can assure you that the poor work very hard to have the basics of life. In Kenya, the mission with which I am most familiar, the local people plan the most essential community project and contribute from their meagre resources to make it happen. MAMI then matches shilling for shilling from your donation. What better way to encourage development!

They take great pride in the success of their collaboration, be it a renovation or new school, a bore hole for fresh water, a new medical clinic in a village, worship centres, etc. They claim it as theirs for they initiated it and invested in it. There are other needs that are 100 per cent supported by you: orphans and widows, youth sport equipment, women's prison ministry, formation of OMI seminarians, Santa Clotilde Hospital, Bro. Blaise's ministry in Peru and so on.

It is my happy duty, as I join the MAMI office, to inform you of the good you have accomplished, to speak to groups or church communities, to re-engage MAMI members who have become distracted over the years and seek new partners to join us in this way of responding to the Gospel call. The office would appreciate receiving your e-mail address, if you use Internet.

Perhaps there are some of you who would like to work with me to encourage more MAMI members to give publicly traded securities or list MAMI among their bequests. More members are donating monthly by pre-authorized debit or credit card, which helps everyone be more faithful and regular in their giving. Perhaps, if you are not presently active, you might consider \$20 a month in pre-authorized giving. The office will assist you in setting that up.

Last year 1,561 active members donated an annual average of \$521.40 each. Over the past 13 years MAMI has distributed an average of \$1,134,313 annually to our partners in mission. Thank you. There is no better way you could have donated your money. These donations have gone to Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Pakistan, Peru and some others.

I hope to meet you or be in touch with you in these coming years, that we might encourage one another in this very important work for God's Kingdom.

Blessings, Fr. Ken

PRAYER FOR MISSION

God our Father, we thank you for having called St. Eugene de Mazenod to follow Christ the Saviour and Evangelizer. Passionately in love with your Son Jesus and sharing in his compassion for humanity, Eugene put himself unconditionally at the service of your Church for the Evangelization of those most in need.

Through His intercession help us to reach out with the healing hand of Christ who calls us to holiness and to mission.

May we build communities which are signs of your presence.

And share the Good News of Salvation with all peoples.

For this we dedicate ourselves through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Eugene de Mazenod

Share with us your love for Christ.

St. Eugene de Mazenod

Help us to stand firm in goodness.

St. Eugene de Mazenod

Be with us in all our efforts.

Lost and found

BY JOE JACEK, OMI

SASKATOON – Upon returning to school in September many decades ago, I remember the teacher asking us to tell the class about what we did on our summer holidays. Much to my surprise and chagrin, I recently received a similar request. So here I sit in my wheelchair, with my knees knocking, complying with that request.

An Oblate colleague, Fr. Nestor Silva, was going on a short overseas holiday and asked me to join him. I had never been on an overseas holiday with a fellow Oblate. After making tentative arrangements for my absence (I am chaplain at St. Ann's Senior Citizens Village in Saskatoon) I agreed to go.

We were to leave for Portugal on Oct. 2 and return on Oct. 12. Our first destination was Santiago de Compostella in northwest Spain on the edge of Portugal. It is known as the final destination of the famous Camino de Santiago (road of St. James) pilgrimage route, and the alleged burial site of the Biblical apostle St. James.

Many people over eight centuries have walked the route over various distances, but due to shortness of time our pilgrimage was by plane and bus.

We then took the bus for a long trip to the famous Shrine of Fatima, where we intended to stay for three days. Fatima is where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared several times from May to October, 1917, to three shepherd children. Millions of people visit there every year and thousands were there at this time.

On our third afternoon at Fatima, I decided to take a walk to the site where the shepherd children had lived, which was south of the Sanctuary of Fatima, the site of the apparitions. To make a longer story short I made some wrong turns and unknowingly ended up going west. I finally decided that I was



Upon his arrival home, Fr. Joe is greeted by his brothers, Richard and John, and Corrine Pambrun

not going to reach my intended destination and that I had to return to the sanctuary.

It got dark and I continued in the wrong direction. I reached a highway that I thought I had to cross, misjudged the speed of the traffic I saw approaching around a curve and was struck by one of the oncoming cars. In a few minutes a couple of men appeared, probably from the car that hit me, quickly grabbed me by the shoulders, dragged me to a safer location in the ditch, and promptly disappeared. (The police called it a hit-and-run.)

I lay there for what seemed a long time. I knew I was seriously injured because I could not get up and I was in much pain, especially on my left side and leg. I did not think I was dying. I cannot recall much of my thoughts during that time, but I remember praying especially for my niece, Carla, who was dying of cancer. The day prior I had bought rosaries for her and others, which were now in my pockets. But I could not move enough to reach them.

I could hear the traffic and hoped that someone would notice me, and after a long time a vehicle stopped. They seemed to be emergency responders of some kind because they took my pulse and blood pressure and insisted I not move.

They were able to speak some English when they realized I did not understand Portuguese. It was another half hour before the ambulance arrived, then a long ride to Hospital de Santo Andre at Leiria, north of Fatima.

My leg was put into a cast. I had two stress fractures in my left pelvis, multiple compound fractures between the knee and ankle of my left leg, along with serious soft tissue damage and a minor skin tear on the crown of my head. Eight days later a long surgery resulted in a plate and about a dozen screws to keep the many bone fragments together.

I told the police that Fr. Nestor and I were staying at the Domus Pacis Fatima Hotel, and a shocked Fr. Nestor arrived while I was still in emergency. I was in hospital for almost four weeks before I could return to Saskatoon.

Fr. Nestor transferred to hotels closer to the hospital and visited me often, attending to my non-medical needs. I am very grateful to him for changing his holiday plans and ministering to me. He had to cancel many appointments, and get other priests to cover for him during his unplanned extended holiday.

I had much pain during the first days, especially when I had to be moved during the daily bed change and the daily bed bath. Besides learning to say Por favor (please), Obrigado (thank you), Buen dia (good morning/day), the word I used most frequently was Devagar (go slowly) to lessen the pain involved when I had to be moved or turned. The hospital care was very good. Many of the nurses and other staff understood some English, although only a couple of them were fluent.

I was in a three-bed ward, and none of my several bed mates over my time there knew any English, though we did communicate minimally by signs and gestures. One of them,

Manuel da Silva Ferreira, had a 90th birthday shortly before his discharge and had many visitors. His grandson kept looking at me and finally asked in fluent English (he works for an American company), "Are you that Canadian priest we read about in the papers?" His wife quickly Googled the story in two papers and he translated them for me. So, I was famous in Portugal. Thankfully my name was not mentioned.

One of the first things Fr. Nestor did was buy me an inexpensive phone so I could communicate with Oblates and family, and I received many calls. I would have been very lonely otherwise. I learned that there were very many praying for me, individually, at St. Ann's Home and in some Saskatoon diocese parishes. That was a great comfort to me and certainly speeded my recovery.

One of the surgeons told me that a typical hospital stay after my kind of surgery was 3-4 days. These were patients who lived close, could be transported home by ambulance, could be looked after by family, and could be brought back quickly if necessary.

Because I did not have these advantages and later on because of misunderstandings/disagreements between my surgeons and the insurance people about conditions for my transportation (not about finances), I was in hospital there for 26 days. A positive side effect was that because of the extra healing time my travel home was more comfortable.

We left the hospital on Nov. 4, and 25 hours later I arrived at the Saskatoon Airport where I was met by Fr. Mark Blom, OMI, and Corrine Pambrun, family members and two members of MD Ambulance waiting to transport me to Royal University Hospital where I stayed for a week before reaching my temporary convalescent home at Trinity Manor, where there are no stairs for me to climb and nursing care is available as needed.

My orthopedic surgeon here insisted I put no weight on the injured leg. Finally, on Jan. 30, after 114 days without walking,

he lifted that restriction.

Wow! Now I thought I could quickly retire my trusty wheelchair and graduate to a walker. Well, reality hit when I tried the walker. I had to re-learn how to walk, how to put full weight on that leg. With small careful steps my first excursion was to walk out of my room, cross the corridor, come back and gratefully sit back in my familiar wheelchair. Little by little I increased my stride and

distance. A recently-discovered infection is of concern now. If antibiotics are not effective due to the location of the root of the infection (perhaps the hardware in the leg), more surgery may be necessary.

As February drew to a close I continued to enjoy the community life here at Trinity Manor, the good meals and being waited on by more abled persons, which was a bit hard to get used to at first.

I continue to be grateful for the many prayers said for me and my recovery.

Someone asked me what I learned from this experience. I had to think about that. I think I learned patience. I learned to be dependent on others, to accept help to do what I used to easily do myself. I learned how kind and considerate people are.

I learned to trust more in the Lord and not to have to always understand why He allows things to happen.



Fr. Joe is accompanied by
nurse Francine Jones



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

JAN. 4

NAIROBI – Fr. Greg Oszust, OMI, has been a big help at Karen with the new house. The small technical jobs of sorting out the two fingerprint locks saved me a lot of time. Recently arrived from Canada, he is now driving around Nairobi comfortably, so that is also a great help. There are still a number of small jobs to complete on electrical matters and a lot of external painting to do at the new Karen residence.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

JAN. 18

We are busy preparing for the 2020 mission gathering where all members of the Kenya Mission come together for a three-day period for input, reflection and making recommendations to the mission council and province.

Fr. Greg and I went to Kisaju for mass, followed by the opening celebration/party for the Oblate youth in Nairobi who

Fr. Greg Oszust visits a local school



joined with the Kisaju youth at our residence in Kisaju. Along the way we picked up John Wotherspoon, an Australian Oblate. He is visiting from Hong Kong to promote the anti-drug message, trying to prevent people from becoming drug mules.

It was great to see Fr. Ken Thorson, our provincial, and Fr. Richard Beaudette, our vicar. They met individually with all the members over the last two weeks and there was good sharing and community time during our three-day mission gathering.

There was a day of input by the former provincial of the Consolata Missionaries, who have been in Kenya since 1902. He offered brilliant insights and encouragement about the reality of being a missionary in Kenya today.

The second day was another input day with the current provincial of the Spiritan Missionaries (Holy Ghost Fathers). He's a bit of an expert on self-reliance and motivating religious to give all contributions to the mission instead of helping themselves. We spent the afternoon in four small groups trying to identify where we are at, and where we need to go in the next five years.

JAN. 25

We had a nice little celebration for our 204th birthday of the congregation – the day that St. Eugene and Fr. Tempier took their first vows in 1816.

FEB. 1

We are thinking of all the people north of Nairobi suffering from the locust plague and also the victims of the coronavirus.



Official opening of the
Karen residence



Karen residence

We have many Chinese workers and business people here so everyone is quite concerned about transmission, and screening at the airport is very tight. We pray for those suffering and also for those working hard to find a solution and care for the victims.

The locusts apparently came from the Sahara Desert. Two swarms developed due to the heavy rains there, and one swarm came down through Ethiopia.

Sadly for us, our youth chairman Kenrod is now working full time as a surveyor so he's asking for someone else to take his role. We are happy for him.

On Sunday, at Nyumbani Children's Home, many members of the international boards that support Nyumbani from afar, were present for mass. They took time to sit with the alumni of Nyumbani, trying to understand the challenges of life after

Left to right: Fr. Greg Oszust, Fr. Daquin Iyo, Fr. Gerry Conlan, Joseph Kyuli (Deacon), Fr. Ken Thorson, Fr. Fidel Munkiele, Collins Masinde (Pre-Novice)





Left to right: Fr. Ken Thorson, Br. Joseph Magambo, Geoffrey Mwirigi (Architect)

Nyumbani, and how they can assist. It's an extraordinary network of people supporting the Nyumbani program. They have boards of dedicated people organizing fund-raising in several countries.

I was on my way to visit John Gitonga, a

Kionyo parish friend who was in hospital. When I approached the Aga Khan Hospital near Westlands, we were told to turn around and go back because of a bomb threat at Doctors Plaza. There was no bomb, we thank God.

FEB. 8

Well, the sun might be shining in Nairobi, but the locusts have done a lot of damage around the country; eventually moving into Somalia as well.

Sadly, the coronavirus has reached Kenya. The airport screening can't identify people who have it, but are not yet displaying symptoms. Some people were identified and sent directly to the hospital. It's not on the news, but according to one of our Oblates in touch with the Vietnamese community, three people died (one from China and two Kenyans). I've been encouraging our youth to be very hygienic. We pray for all affected. I'm glad I'm not travelling anywhere at the moment.

FEB. 15

The locust plague doesn't seem to get much attention in the press here. Sr. Mary at Nyumbani said all the children at their school in Kitui were ordered outside to make as much noise as possible to scare the locusts away – and it worked!



Ash Wednesday at Resurrection Gardens with the Dominican Sisters

The locusts moved across the river and spared their large crop of maize. Not sure whether the people across the river were impressed, but the children now have food for the next few months.

FEB. 22

Fr. Fidel went to Méru to fill in for Fr. Daquin, who will be in Rome for a few weeks getting JPIC (justice, peace and integrity of creation) training and representing the African region.

MARCH 1

We had a great meeting with the Nairobi youth. We did not elect new leaders but made plans for the next few weeks. Elections will be in March, giving people time to prepare.

Ash Wednesday was a busy pastoral day with two masses at Resurrection Gardens, and later a talk and confessions for the enclosed Dominican Sisters.



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