


# Oblate Spirit



AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

June 2020



Annual  
Report

# Providing hope for those in need



Our world has undergone such profound change in such a short time, it is difficult to keep up with new information on a daily basis, let alone with trying to gather current information for a publication that arrives in your mailbox five times a year.

Thus, this annual report has been prepared in a time like no other in our lifetime. What happened in 2019 is the old normal. We have no idea what the new normal will look like, but we do know one thing for certain: the people that have been helped by AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI have not changed. They are still here, probably now in much larger numbers than we could even speculate, and in much greater need

Those living on the fringes of society, desperately needing love and help, have not gone anywhere. Whether in Kenya, Peru or Canada, whether in Bangladesh, Madagascar, Pakistan or Sri Lanka, there has been a need to which MAMI has responded in 2019.

Thanks to your open and gracious hearts, MAMI received \$1,548,048.71 in donations in 2019. During that same year, MAMI provided \$1,877,361.46 in funding for projects in the seven countries named above, projects that answered the physical, educational, housing and spiritual needs for so many who needed help. Some of those needs were met on a 50-50 basis, where our assistance was matched by those in need, particularly in projects such as water, housing, education, health and spirituality.

In other cases there were desperate needs that required immediate responses/assistance. Those required gifts of the heart, no-strings-attached assistance, and MAMI was able to respond, thanks to your gracious support.

The numbers you read above (money raised vs money distributed) do not correspond. We gave away much more than we received last year, but were able to do that because funds were still available and were not required in previous years.



Thank you MAMI supporters

When you factor into this picture the administration costs faced by MAMI in 2019 (\$295,690.98), one can see that this is not a sustainable model going forward. MAMI was able to reduce the administration costs, which include the production and mailing of *Oblate Spirit*, MAMI office rent, office equipment, promotion and meeting costs, accounting and legal fees, etc., by \$24,843.24 in 2019.

On a positive note, there were countless people around the world that our supporters can say they have helped ... those on the fringes to whom the Oblates are so attached.

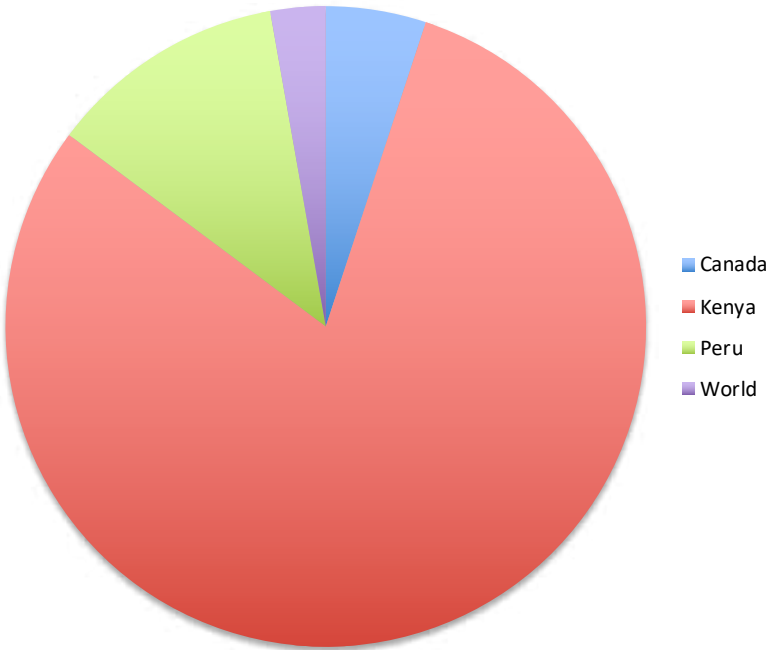
When we move to the new world after COVID-19, the Oblates will still be there to offer those in need a consoling hand, a prayer, a bowl of soup, and a large heaping of humanity. And for that we can only thank you, our partners and supporters.

We will come out of this difficult time, and we will come out of it together. We will make this world a better place for one and all. For praying and staying with us during this trying journey, all we can say is THANKYOU and MAY GOD BLESS YOU.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

# 2019 Projects Funded

\$1,877,361.46



Canada	\$95,038.05
Kenya	\$1,504,500.00
Peru	\$225,581.71
World	\$52,241.70

### CARE OF THE MISSION

MAMI contributes to the cost of formation for young men studying and discerning to be Missionary Oblates. MAMI also supports the Oblate team with living expenses.

### CHILD PROTECTION CAMPAIGN

Child abuse in families, at schools and on the streets, is becoming rampant in Kenya in general and in Méru in particular. This Oblate project mobilizes school teachers, leaders, youth and parents around Méru to work against child abuse. The campaign helps create awareness and invites stakeholders to work on child protection at all levels: family, church and school.

### DAY SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

Many children go to school hungry because their parents are not able to provide food. MAMI provides funds for food in Irinda Parish, Langata Women's Prison and Kisaju Parish to encourage these children to remain in school.

Kenyan school children



## EDUCATION

A number of female university students with physical challenges were provided with funds from MAMI to assist them in continuing their studies.

### Kisaju Parish

Most of the parents are struggling to pay school fees. As a result, this results in early marriages for girls and drug and substance abuse for frustrated boys. Education is the most important gift we can give them in order to break the cycle of poverty. MAMI funds pay for school fees.

### Langata Women's Prison, Nairobi

Some prisoners have children with no one to care for them outside the prison. If the children's education is not assured, they will be exposed to all kinds of misconducts that may also

Children at Langata  
women's prison



bring them to prison. Poverty is one of the main causes for women to commit offences. Helping educate their children can break the cycle of poverty and empower them to have a brighter future.

### St. Eugene Parish, Irinda, Méru

This is the new Oblate parish in Méru. The parish covers the outskirts of the town, an area populated by low income people. There is a slum close to the parish with poor children whose parents are unable to pay school fees. Children who don't have access to education are often inclined to join street life



and therefore become exposed to all kinds of evil and abuse. MAMI funds help pay for school fees.

### **St. Stephen's Parish**

Many children are motivated to study but their social context does not give them an opportunity. MAMI funds assist poor children with fees. Education is such a precious gift to poor children!

### **HIV/AIDS CHILDREN**

This project helps children in Kitui under the guidance of the Ursulian Sisters. MAMI funds help with purchasing food, providing money for transportation and for a gathering twice a year for 200 children.

### **KAREN RESIDENCE**

The newly-built Karen Residence was blessed by Fr. Ken Thorson in January during his visit to Kenya. Permanent residents are Fr. Fidel Munkiele (mission superior) and Fr. Gerry Conlan, treasurer.

The new building facilitates the administration of Kenya Mission, providing secure offices, storage of documents and accommodation for the mission leaders to host Oblate mission gatherings and meetings, and to provide hospitality for visiting Oblates from around Africa and the world.

Fr. Petrus Kambanda  
blesses the tabernacle  
at the Karen residence





Irimbene prayer house

## KIONYO PARISH

### Education

Many children in the Kionyo parish have no support because their parents are poor and unable to find employment. Some of the children are orphans. MAMI funds pay for school fees for these children.

### Irimbene Prayer House

Kionyo parish is growing and expanding. The Irimbene church is being built to serve the local people of the Irimbene area. Children and old people find it difficult to walk to a more distant church; having a local church contributes to building community. The local community is committed to assist in finishing the church



### St. Stephen's Parish

The current church in Kionyo parish is too small and does not serve the people well. The local people started a new building and are trying to contribute though their finances are

Prayer house in Kionyo parish



limited. MAMI contributed funds to boost their effort, as well as funding the cost of a metal and steel roof.

### **Wathine Prayer House**

Wathine is a small Christian community surrounded by many other Christian denominations. Through their faith and effort, they committed to build a small church. They are now working on finishing the church, which they will furnish. MAMI provided funds to help them finish and complete the church.

St. Stephen's parish church  
construction



## **KISAJU PARISH**

### **Korompoi Prayer Centre**

There are an increasing number of members in the Korompoi area with the need for a new Prayer Centre. The number of members is expected to rise even more because of the proximity to a new residential village. The people in this area are able to contribute more to financing parish needs. MAMI committed to purchasing one acre of land for the purpose of constructing a Prayer House.

## **Parish Centre**

The Kisaju Parish Centre community was forced out of the small classroom that acted as their church. An ongoing land issue has delayed construction of the main church. A temporary church was constructed to accommodate 500 people. This will contribute to building a strong community. At a later date, if a permanent church is built, this facility can be used as a parish hall or training centre.

## **Education**

Kisaju is a dry area and families are struggling for water and other basic needs. Most of the parents are struggling to pay school fees. Education is the most important gift in order to break the cycle of poverty. Assisting in the education of students from poor families will empower the students and hopefully secure a brighter future for them. MAMI funds help pay for school fees.

## **St. Mark's Prayer House**

St. Mark's Prayer House, Ilpolosat, in Maasai land had no toilets; local people and visiting Oblates had no access to a toilet while ministering there. The small Christian community was not able to raise funds for it so MAMI provided the funds for the toilet block.

## **Jamii Bora Prayer House**

Jamii Bora is an outstation of Kisaju parish in Maasai land. The Christian community is growing in its faith and commitment. The community was celebrating masses in a classroom until the management of the school told them to find another location. The community found land and has put up a temporary church structure for their celebrations and for their meetings. MAMI funds contributed to the structure.

## LANGATA PRISON – PRISONER’S WELFARE

Located in Nairobi, this is the major prison for women in Kenya. Since 2013 the Oblates have assisted with spiritual and religious support, counselling and social assistance. The pre-novices provide part of the pastoral service. The prisoners face many difficulties including lack of medication, transportation to their homes when they are released and basic items for their integration back into their homes.

## MAASAI GIFTS

Funds were provided for some of the Massai to create pieces of cultural art/craft they could sell locally to support their families.



Fr. Gideon with Maasai women

## MÉRU

### Irinda – Gachanka Rectory

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were given a new parish in Méru Diocese. The parish is populated with a majority of low-income people from Méru and a minority of middle-class people. The new parish was undergoing a

period of transition. One of the priorities was a residence for the Oblates who are ministering there. A house nearby was renovated to accommodate the Oblates before the building of the permanent rectory is done. This enables the Oblates to be near the people they serve.

### St. Eugene Parish

Located in Méru, the construction of the church needed to be completed before the official establishment of the parish by the Bishop of Méru in May 2020. MAMI funds assisted with the completion of the church.

### Women's empowerment

This small-scale project was initiated by women from Gachanka Prayer House. They each made a small contribution and bought 100 chicks. MAMI funds supported the women in improving their farming knowledge and skills and increasing the number of chickens to 1,000. This will also improve the lives of their families.

#### **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.

### FIRST NATIONS

Our Lady of Guadalupe Circle, in Ontario, is a Catholic coalition of Indigenous people, bishops, lay movements, clergy and institutes of consecrated life, engaging in renewing and fostering relationships between the Catholic Church and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. MAMI provided funds to assist in the development of educational materials to aid faith communities in understanding and engaging in the process of reconciliation.

### HOME MISSIONS

#### Olive Branch

MAMI provided funds to start a mediation ministry responding to couples who have decided to separate or divorce. The service ensures the church's presence in what is a difficult time in a couple's life and assists the couple in achieving an amicable divorce.

#### Parish Missions and Outreach

Funds are used for parish outreach programs such as RCIA, Alpha Program and Catechist Training in general for poor parishes. Pastoral visits and anointing of the sick, especially the poor, are also supported

### PRAYER & RETREAT HOUSES

#### Galilee Centre

The Galilee Centre in Arnprior, ON, has been working closely with Kateri Native Ministries of the Archdiocese of Ottawa to help build a culture of encounter with Indigenous



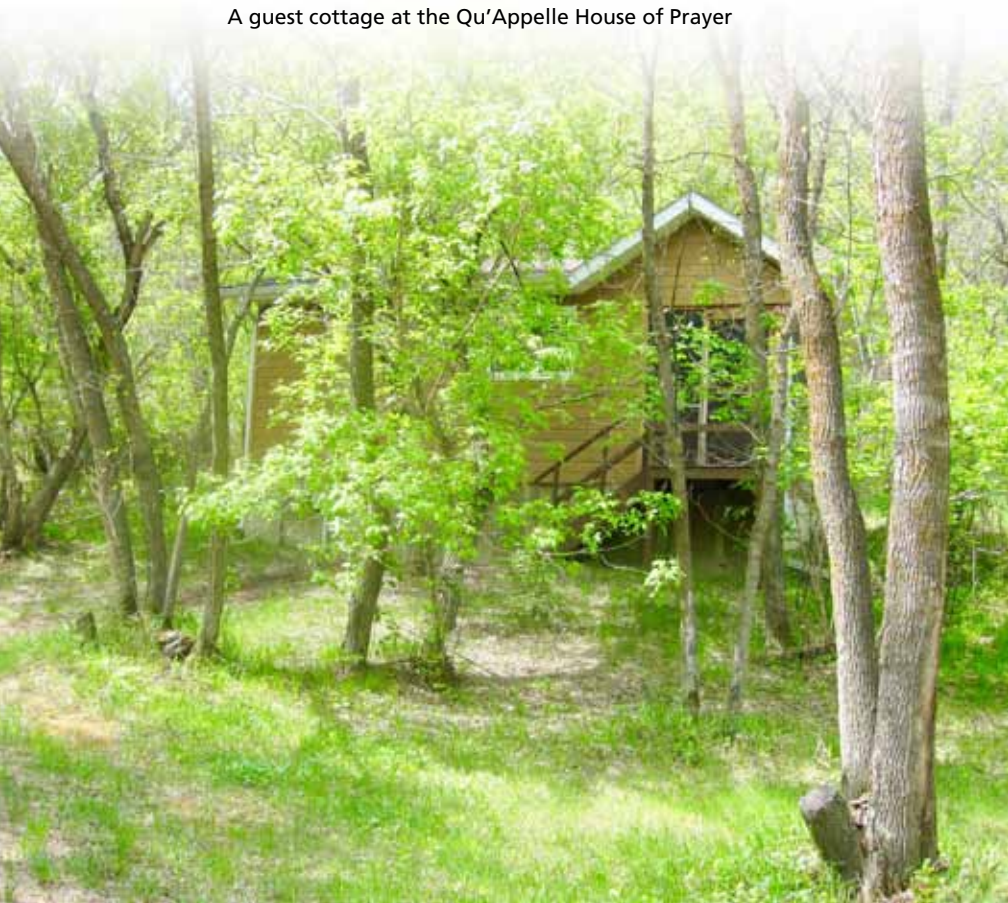
Peoples. The Kendasawin project is an important part of this broader initiative focused on renewed relations.

Kendasawin is a weekend of prayer, ceremony and teaching set on the land at Galilee Centre. It is designed and facilitated by Indigenous elders and includes sharing from Indigenous youth, ceremonial leaders and elders. Kendasawin is designed to introduce non-Indigenous learners to the teachings within the context of traditional sharings and to promote a deeper capacity for understanding and cross-cultural dialogue.

### **Qu'Appelle House of Prayer**

MAMI provided funds to the Qu'Appelle House of Prayer to support the travel costs of committed volunteers who assist in the operation of the House for a committed period of time.

A guest cottage at the Qu'Appelle House of Prayer



### FOSTER PARENTS

This year the parish school of San José has 761 students. MAMI funds support the children in their educational needs. The school year runs for 10 months from March to December. The cost per student per month is two hundred Peruvian Soles, approximately \$80 Canadian. MAMI contributes \$20,000 to the school.

### BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

Blaise continues his many projects, from providing homes and building churches and retreat centres, to ministering to people in the prisons, and providing recreational opportunities for children. Funds were provided for construction materials, food, truck repairs and tools, as well as beds, blankets, mattresses and chairs.

### MEDICAL FRIENDS OF PERU/SANTA CLOTILDE HOSPITAL

Santa Clotilde hospital, in the Peruvian Amazon, maintains a patient house in Lima for patients referred for medical treatment not avail-

able in Santa Clotilde or Iquitos. MAMI provides funds for food, lodging (also for accompanying family member),



Beds and blankets

transportation, medicines, and guidance through the complicated urban and governmental systems.

The medical program of the Santa Clotilde Hospital regularly detects malnourished infants and children who require supplementary milk for their recovery. MAMI provides funds for the purchase of milk.

## We Need Your Help

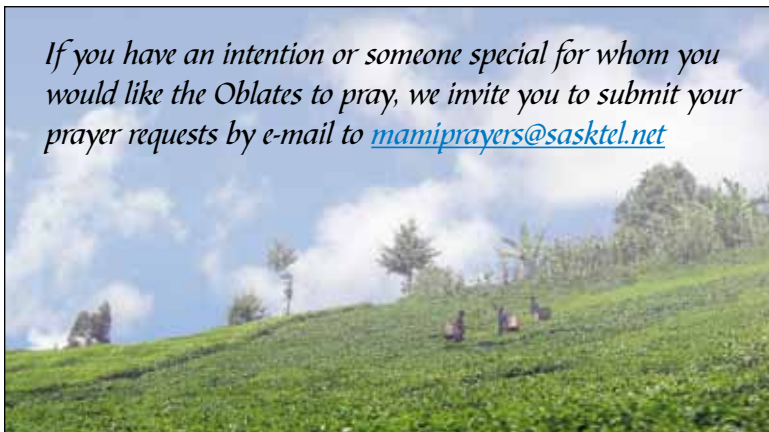
We have designed a simple survey for our readers to help us refocus and restructure as we move forward in a rapidly-changing and uncertain world because of COVID-19. Included in this mailing is the survey we would like our readers to complete because we greatly value your input.

The survey can also be found on our website at [omilacombe.ca/help-mami-plan-future](https://omilacombe.ca/help-mami-plan-future).

Or if you prefer, give us a call at 1-866-432-MAMI (6264) as we would welcome talking with you by phone. You can also reach us by email: [lacombemami@sasktel.net](mailto:lacombemami@sasktel.net).



*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 by e-mail to [mamiprayers@sasktel.net](mailto:mamiprayers@sasktel.net)*



### BANGLADESH

Funds were provided for incidentals at the Oblate Juniorate.

### MADAGASCAR

This year celebrates 40 years of Oblates in Madagascar. In expectation of guests for the anniversary celebration, new mattresses and bedding were purchased. MAMI also provided funds for a new printer and purchasing rice for the scholastics.

The Scholasticate of St. Eugene de Mazenod is a formation house for young religious scholastics of the OMI Congregation in Madagascar. These young religious are our future priests and are studying philosophy and theology at the major seminary in Fianarantsoa. This year six deacons were ordained as priests and four seminarians were ordained as deacons.

Bicycles were purchased so the scholastics can cycle the six kilometres to school and to the parishes for pastoral work.

### PAKISTAN

#### Education

The Oblates in Pakistan have been entrusted with the pastoral care of the Derekabad Parish situated in the middle of the desert in the Diocese of Multan. Oblates have been serving this parish since 1982. There are more than 2,000 Catholic families in the whole parish with 23 substations spreading over two districts. People are extremely poor, struggling to cultivate the desert land that does not produce much due to lack of rain, salty ground water and unaffordability to buy fertilizer. The present focus for the Oblates is on the education of children in the parishes by using MAMI funds to help pay for school fees, transportation, and school and classroom maintenance.



St. Anthony's Primary School in Pakistan

## Vehicle

Six priests service the parish and outstations in the Vicariate. A vehicle was provided to assist the priests in their pastoral mission visits to Catholic families in more remote areas. MAMI also assists in formation costs.

## **SRI LANKA**

### Scholarships

The Oblates from the Province of Jaffna in Sri Lanka offer scholarships for students below the poverty line who are affected by racial/district quota policies on state-sponsored university admissions in Sri Lanka. The cost is approximately \$400 per student.



# Stranded in Tanzania

Fr. Greg Oszust, an Oblate from Canada, recently joined the Kenyan Oblate Mission. Fr. Greg spent a few months in 2019 in Kenya. Now, with a visitor's visa, he is studying Swahili in Tanzania and may be stranded in that country because of the coronavirus and visa complications.

After two months of Swahili, Fr. Greg tells us he can introduce himself and "explain a little bit but not much." His course was scheduled to end June 2, at which time his Tanzanian tourist visa was to expire. He has just received a working permit for Kenya, but because Nairobi is in lockdown, he may be stranded.

"I was left alone in the class because all the students left, scared off by the Covid-19 threat, but my teacher and I decided to continue," he wrote.

"If the situation in Tanzania gets worse ... I could be stranded. I wish I was right now with some Oblates, especially at this time of isolation.

"Thank you for your prayers and support. Always tell MAMI members that I pray for them."

If you would like to send Fr. Greg a message of support, you can reach him by e-mail at [greg.oszust@oblates.co.ke](mailto:greg.oszust@oblates.co.ke)

Fr. Greg  
celebrating  
mass during  
the Novena  
of Prayer



# COVID-19: How are Christians responding?

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – By now, many of us have learned a totally new lingo of pandemics.

We must “flatten the curve.” (And thankfully, in many instances, we have.)

We’re constantly reminded to practice “physical distancing.” (And we’re learning new ways to make this happen.)

“We’re in this together,” we’re told.

Ooops! Not so. Some of us carry a heavier burden, some of us are more likely to suffer ill health, and some of us are far more capable of responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

This pandemic has infected thousands of Canadians, but we’ve seen a terrible toll among the frail elderly in long-term care homes. While about one third of those infected are over 60 years of age, the percentage of mortalities among this age group is regrettably several times higher.

It’s no secret that the workers who labour in meat-packing plants and care homes are most likely to be newcomers to Canada. (I clearly recall, when I worked as a nursing assistant, I was the only male on shift, and my co-workers were almost all from the Caribbean or the Philippines.) We’ve asked them to provide “essential services,” for essentially low recompense.



Joe Gunn

There are reasons why economists refer to this as a “she-cession.” Even as the economic damage of the pandemic has been felt by almost all of us, women represented 63 per cent of job losses in March, and those women still working lost more hours than men. Back in 2018, Canadian women only earned 87 cents for every dollar earned by men.

But woe for those facing the pandemic’s impact in refugee camps or countries of the “Two-Thirds World.” On the days I’m suffering “Zoom fatigue” or can’t find a decent show on Netflix, I recall the Central American friend who lives in cramped quarters among many extended family members and no running water. He enquired how I was surviving home isolation in my “Disneylandia.”

COVID-19 has laid bare the societal divisions we’ve built and left to fester. If we realize we were never “in this together,” let’s acknowledge the harm that division entails. Let’s invent new avenues to show how we could emerge closer than ever.

OMI Lacombe has created a COVID-19 Response Working Group, which offers a weekly digest of stories of how Oblates and associates are reaching out to create social and economic togetherness even at a time of our distancing. It can be found on the OMI Main page (<https://omilacombe.ca/>), in the section entitled *New Needs, New Means: OMI Lacombe Canada Responds*.

It’s inspiring to hear of those who not only bang their pots and pans at 7 p.m. in solidarity with front-line workers, but who are also sharing the food that’s in those pots and pans with the hungry. Oblates invite us all to join in repairing relationships through weekly invitations to advocacy. Let’s reach out in solidarity to Kenyans struggling with floods and plagues of locusts. And join in repairing the environmental ruin to which we must never return.

*Dynamic distancing*, we are told, will help us emerge from the crisis. A Gospel-based *dynamic togetherness* is surely a more desirable path forward.

# 'We are not history's rubble'

BY HARLEY MAPES, OMI

"Who lived here? Was it a family with kids? What was their life like in this place? What were their names? Whatever happened to them?"

Standing, pensively, alongside my bike, questions eddied about as I looked over the abandoned farmhouse and yard. Leaving our house on Eastport Drive, I had gone in search of quiet bike trails around Orléans ... a place with a path wandering through trees would be perfect. With no clear location in mind, desultory meandering ended in a new subdivision filled with identical plastic homes, seemingly extruded on-site with the latest in 3D printing technology; I laughed at the image of a homeowner arriving after a late-night party, stumbling about for hours trying to identify his own house in this clonal colony.

A short distance away, through mounds of gravel and



building materials, at the end of Laporte Lane, an apple tree, its boughs pendulous with the season's burden of fruit, an abundance of which had escaped its arms and lay on the ground, fermenting in the warm autumn sun, drew me forward, the air heavy with their cloying, heady scent. Just yesterday, I had purchased a basket of apples, proudly marked "Product of Ontario", and now bushels of them hung ripe for the picking.

A sharp crunch, the sweet, tangy taste of apple, the core tossed on the ground ... it all begged for another and then another. Even when they're free, there's a limit to how many apples one can eat and so, satiated and with unknown destinations in mind, I turned to go.

A branch caught my sweater, tugged my arm; a house glimpsed intermittently through the interstices of dusty leaves. The wind, sibilant in the swaying, desiccated grass, pressed me to stay.

Drawn forward into the quiet, enclosed yard of the deserted house, I again mused on those who had lived here. Where did they come from? Was it a single family or was it a home for generations of children and grandchildren? There were no answers, but they undoubtedly did as all people do: they laughed, cried, argued, made plans, felt the sting of failure and celebrated success. Whoever they were, whatever they were like, they had dreams that grew into a solid, brick house and faith enough in the future to plant trees from which one day they counted on harvesting fruit. Did they ever imagine this place of life and dreams, abandoned and left to the rambling questions of a stranger?

Several weeks earlier, I had been through the Museum of Canadian History in Gatineau, QC. It's an impressive, multi-story building instantly recognizable, with its sinuous lines, as a Douglas Cardinal creation. The museum website describes the complex as hosting more than 1.2 million visitors a year in its 25,000 square metres of display space with a mandate "To enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding and



appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures." (Canadian Museum of History Act) A noble purpose indeed! The day I was there, the building was bustling, filled with visitors of every possible ethnicity – adults, in a multiplicity of languages, conversing with quiet murmurs, stopping to contemplate each display; boisterous young people, phone in hand, chattered excitedly – an argot of multiple "... and like..." followed by incomprehensible syllables – wove their way amongst their stodgy seniors.

Twenty-five thousand square metres of display space is easier said than walked! Tortuous pathways led from one era of Canadian history to another, highlighting significant contributions made by various groups to the tapestry of Canadian culture – everything from thousands of years of pre-contact Native culture on through the baneful effects of colonization, Quebec's unique place in Confederation, European settlement of the West, effects of the world wars and, in latter years, the strides made in recognizing the rights and contributions of a wide variety of formerly marginalized groups. For out-of-country visitors and the newly immigrated, this may have been their first introduction to Canadian history. At the end, however, I was left wondering, "So where were the Oblates in all that?"

In 1841, Missionary Oblates arrived in Canada, made their way to St. Boniface, MB, in 1844, northern Saskatchewan a year later and thence to the Arctic coast within 10 years. They learned Indigenous tongues, developed written languages, translated works, and gave their hearts and lives to the people with whom they lived ... admittedly a chequered relationship, peopled by both saints and sinners. The University of Ottawa, St. Paul University, School of Social Work (Carlton University), Faculté St. Jean (Edmonton), St. Patrick's College, St. Thomas College ... a string of facilities sprang up in the Oblate's wake,



each meeting the educational needs of various populations – each a concretized expression of the Oblate mission to serve the poor and a commitment to the people to whom they had been sent. Leduc, Lacombe, Grouard, Vegreville, Father Gamache, Hector Thiboutot, Father Megret ... towns and schools were named in honour of Oblates who ministered to people. Particularly in western and northern Canada, Canadian history – extending far beyond that of the Catholic Church – is inextricably interwoven with the Missionary Oblates.

Now, however, looking at the greying, weathered edifice we have become, I'm left wondering ... will others – besides historians – know we were here? Are we fated to be glimpses caught through the interstices of time and fading memories? Will wandering travellers muse on the origin of village names or the ineradicable crosses and Oblate coat of arms on our former institutions, now become public buildings? Will they wonder who we were, what our lives were like, and what happened to us?

Perhaps we are destined to become detritus left behind by history; perhaps our future is to be an ever-dwindling number of grey hairs reminiscing about faded glory. If we are, that

will be an unfortunate choice – and only one amongst many possibilities. Sr. Joan Chittister's 1995 "The Fire in These Ashes" encouraged religious men and women to look past the faded glory, to look past gray ash covering tepid coals to the embers still burning within.

Doing so is something that comes naturally to Missionary Oblates of OMI Lacombe Canada. At our last convocation, it was heartening to hear the desire to reach out to the most abandoned that still flames within the hearts of even the oldest province members. Like retired war horses stamping their feet and lifting their heads at hearing the trumpet's call to battle, even the eldest were ready to volunteer for the missions as they heard stories shared by confreres working amongst the poorest of the poor in Kenya, Vancouver's East Hasting Street, Edmonton's Sacred Heart parish, St. Patrick's, Hamilton...

For the 194th anniversary of the approval of our Rules and Constitutions, Superior General Fr. Louis Lougen writes in his letter to Missionary Oblates ministering around the world:

"This vision [of our founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod] drives Oblate missionaries today. Like de Mazenod, we burn



with the desire to bring the Good News of the Reign of God to those who are poor, forgotten, tossed away and rejected. We know well the faces of the poor of our societies, the immigrants and refugees; the women, children and men who are commodities to be trafficked for exploitation of various kinds. In missions around the world, we work to combat the continued destruction of the environment, caused by economic exploitation.”

The Museum of Canadian History notwithstanding, the Oblate farmyard isn't abandoned; we aren't history's rubble. While much reduced from what we once were, the mission remains and the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod is still relevant to a wounded world.

Are we ready to leave what has been behind and respond with unreasonable hope to the directive “let down your nets”?

# 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)**





Oblate community volunteers at work at *The Bridge Fellowship Center*

# Responding to a need

BY JIM & ADELE LONGSTAFF, HONORARY OMI

SASKATOON - Like all other communities, our city has the moral obligation to pay attention to the neediest of our sisters and brothers. We need to do what we can to “have an option for the poor” and alleviate as much suffering as we can.

One of the initiatives to do this is called *The Bridge on 20th Fellowship Center*. Located in one of the poorest areas of Saskatoon, The Bridge serves the homeless and needy. I quote excerpts from their website to describe this wonderful street ministry and their history:

*“Linda Walker’s heart was transformed by God’s grace. The Lord led her from depression, anger and addiction to her calling to share His word and love. With every little step of faith taken, the Lord was faithful and The Bridge on 20th opened its doors on March 3, 1999, with a \$120 investment and a handful of people who believed in the vision.*

*“The ministry operated out of a very rundown, small building. With a budget of \$900 per month and a ministry team that worked on a completely volunteer basis, much was accomplished. Eventually bursting at the seams in*



*this makeshift facility, The Bridge served approximately 125 visitors six days per week for four hours per day. The hungry were served bowls of soup, visitors were clothed through the give-away corner and ministered to through weekly Bible studies and Sunday services. In September 2000, The Bridge's Board of Directors was formed.*

*"After four years of operation, the team at The Bridge believed the Lord said: "Because you are faithful with a little, you will now be given much."*

*In October 2014, The Bridge purchased its new property ... and officially opened (its) new building on Oct. 2, 2016."*

In 2011 Bishop Don Bolan, then bishop of the Saskatoon Diocese, came to recognize the good works being done at *The Bridge*. There were a number of Protestant churches supporting them but the Catholic community had yet to become actively involved. He approached St. Philip Neri Parish, asking if we would take on this ministry. St. Philips was more than happy to do so. We began by doing things such as donating clothes and toiletries to them plus donating our Holy Thursday collection. This was always "topped up" to a \$10,000.00 annual donation.

Every Tuesday *The Bridge* hosts men's night. It is a time when men can gather for a meal, for prayer and for some educational opportunities. Different organizations take on the responsibility of purchasing food, making a meal and serving it to these men. In 2017 the Parish Pastoral Council at St. Philip Neri made the decision to get more involved and begin serving supper once a month. This proved to be much appreciated by the men attending. They always looked forward to a St. Philip's supper.

In July of 2018 St. Philip Neri became an Oblate parish when Mike Dechant, OMI, and Bill Stang, OMI, were assigned as pastor and co-pastor. The Potter's House Oblate Community has a number of active Oblates and associates, some of whom belong to St. Philip Neri. Added to this, we like to think St. Philip Neri has "an Oblate heart." After some discussion at one

of our community gatherings a year ago, we decided to take on this ministry with the assistance of the parishioners of St. Philip Neri.

Our role is to develop a menu, purchase the food, then make and serve the meal. Every month we have up to 30 hungry street people ready to eat by 6 p.m. We quickly learned that when we are serving these many hungry men, some of whom are likely having their first or only meal of the day, we need to make an abundance of food. A typical meal might include 18-20 pounds of cooked ham, three or four trays of potatoes, coleslaw with up to nine pounds of cabbage and seven pounds of cooked carrots. Then there is the dessert.

We always have a chance to visit with the fellows who are attending and hear their stories. We enjoy serving the meal and our pastors often spend some of the time visiting with the men who very much seem to enjoy this contact. We all feel blessed to be part of this outreach.

This ministry is becoming better known in our parish and more people are stepping forward to offer their help. The members of the Potter's House community feel united in this ministry. We are grateful for this opportunity to live out the charism of St. Eugene in this very concrete way.

*(In this time of Covid-19, The Bridge has suspended many of its programs including the supper gatherings. In April rather than serving supper we were able to provide them with some essentials they needed such as sugar, coffee whitener and toiletries for their clients. We will continue to be in contact with them and will endeavor to provide any assistance we can.)*

**Oblate community volunteers at work at The Bridge Fellowship Center**



# A silver lining

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – When the coronavirus struck, our Oblate community here in Pueblo took 15 days confined to the house.

There were three other men with me: Fr. Leonardo, Fr. Justo and Br. Gerson.

These 15 days have helped us to get to know each other much better. We have stayed much longer at the table, until our “curfew.”

Taking turns cooking and washing the dishes have come secondary to the conversations at the table, where telling our stories has resulted in much less stress and much more tranquility.

While Fr. Justo made the soup, the other members of the community took care of the garden and cleaning the kitchen. Thank God for this kitchen cleaning, because the walls had enough grease that could have sustained a fire for a long time.

One day, when I was in my room, Br. Gerson brought me a glass of juice. What is going on? This virus has helped us to become more of a community, with more affection, love and respect for our brothers, more attentive to the needs of others, and more interested in the person and their roles in life.

I never had this experience of living in a community with time to pray, to meditate, reflect and give thanks to God for life.



Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI



# Kenya

## NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

### MARCH 7

NAIROBI, Kenya – We are worried about Fr. Daquin who is in Italy for a meeting. He decided to have a little holiday after the meeting in Rome to visit Congolese Oblates in Southern Italy. We are trying to encourage him to come home early to avoid getting caught up in the coronavirus. As it is, he may have to self-isolate when he returns, which will strain provision of proper ministry to our Méru parish. So, we pray all will be well.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

We did some shopping for the new administration house, mainly laundry and toiletry items and some kitchen consumables. It takes more time and money than you think, especially with 16 bedrooms.



Our new cook started on March 3, causing the usual flurry of paperwork for new employees. His name is Dancan so we call him Dan. He's a young chap and we are his first guinea pigs since he completed his course.

Dancan Oyuma Abwon,  
the new cook



Community life begins in the Chapel with the first community mass

So, maybe pray that we are not too hard on him during his three-month probation. He spent the first week cleaning and washing.

The guard dogs purchased three months ago (three-month old German Shepherd pups) have grown quite big, and are receiving obedience training. They are just outside my office and very noisy at times. And, of course, they never quit barking when I tell them to!

Fr. Gerry's new office and home



I'm not sure why snacks and drinks seem more appealing when you promise not to have them! I gave up drinks and chips at home during Lent, so I always appreciate when I'm called for pastoral duties where I should have a drink to be sociable!

It was interesting talking to the Mercy Sisters who work mainly in the slum areas of Nairobi. One of them said the economic and unemployment situation at the moment is the worst she has seen in her 40 years of service here in Kenya, making it very tough for the poorer people. As a result there is much opportunity for our Oblates to develop some creative outreach ministry to help them. Now we need some of our young men to hurry up and finish training!

## MARCH 14

Like most of the world, Kenya has now officially joined the Coronavirus Club. This had the immediate effect of long lineups at the supermarkets as people rushed to buy hand sanitizers and soap. Some shops had sold out by the time Fr. Cosmas and Fr. Fidel went shopping. The new government rules have cancelled many events, including a youth reflection day in Nairobi at which I was asked to assist with confessions and a talk.

Dancan, our new cook, suddenly came down with malaria, so we joined the upper community for lunch and supper. After I took him to the doctor he went home and rested.

I kidnapped a bust of St. Eugene from Kisaju and know a man who will make a rubber mould so we can produce some extra images of



St. Eugene hitches a ride



St. Eugene for around the Mission and even export a few around Africa. Fr. Gideon also asked if I could help the man make a “nicer face” on Jesus for the four-foot crucifixes needed for Kisaju and Kionyo.



Replicated St. Eugene

## MARCH 21

Around the mission all seems well with many instructions now being issued by the various dioceses. There are fewer than 10 cases of the virus and no official deaths. Thankfully, Fr. Daquin managed to return from Rome to Nairobi and is in strict quarantine at Karen Residence for two weeks.

## MARCH 28

Some of you might be worried about us over here in Kenya, but truly we are fine. No cases among our communities, although Fr. Daquin is still in quarantine after returning from

OMI associates in Kionyo parish



Italy. He is very fit and healthy and getting restless stuck in his couple of rooms.

The Kenyan Government is doing quite a good job. Even though the economy will suffer, they have taken extraordinary measures to limit the spread. I think we are at 38 cases and another 1,000 under observation. Unfortunately the wet season has started so temperatures have dropped and the virus likes lower temps. Kenya initiated a curfew from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. to help reduce parties and drunkenness where people don't care about behaviour.

During the week I made two small outings to take Holy Communion to two congregations of sisters at Resurrection Gardens and they were begging me for mass. But we have strict instructions not to say mass. Even today at Nyumbani, the sisters there will celebrate a Communion service instead of mass because those orphaned children are especially vulnerable due to the underlying HIV status.

## APRIL 5

All of the Oblates, our staff and parishioners are well, so far. The youth are still upbeat and not sick. We thank God. The

Holy Thursday community mass



Fr. Freeborn assists with house cleaning





Adoration of the cross on Good Friday

great stress here in Kenya at present is the loss of employment for thousands of casual employees of the flower farms. The market in Europe has died a sudden death. If things don't improve soon the permanent employees of the flower farms will also be laid off.

It's a great challenge to know how we should respond to the crisis here. We shall see how our parishioners bear up and try to respond in our local communities. It's frustrating. As elsewhere in the world, all masses are cancelled.

We realise what a privilege it is to have mass. I'm sure many of you are worried. Whatever happens, trust that God is with us either in life or in death. Live your lives well: be cautious and careful, but always bring a smile to others and our hearts will also be singing.

## APRIL 12

We are a very quiet lot this week, semi-locked down. In general, all is well and everyone is well. We are worried about Fr. Daquin (ha, ha) ... three weeks now in self-quarantine and he won't come out! We're worried he is becoming a monk! He looks and feels fine.

Everyone around the Mission says they are OK. I still believe the government is doing a reasonable job. We just need co-operation by the people, but that is not easy when people are hungry.



Celebrating the Easter vigil with the new fire and Easter candle

Around Nairobi everything seems peaceful and quiet. Our friends, the Mercy Sisters from Australia and Ireland, are busy preparing and giving out food packs in kwa Ruben Slum.

## APRIL 19

There is much to be concerned about around Kenya as there is also the locust plague threatening to start again.

At our residences, we have no problem helping people who come to our door, two or three or even 10. But if we help 10 today there will be 100 tomorrow and then 1,000 the next day. It just becomes unsustainable, and people then become angry because we can't cope with demand. The government has promised US\$80 million to help feed the poorer people. More than 60 per cent of Nairobi lives in a slum, which is about three million people.

I must say, I've been so impressed with the young pre-nov-





ices here in Karen. They are working the garden, working the kitchen and still preparing for exams and doing assignments. We discussed the possibility of getting our cook to live-in permanently for the lockdown, but we are still thinking about it.

A certain uncle of mine in Australia will be happy to hear that I was on my hands and knees scrubbing parts of the laundry and kitchen floors on Saturday as the priests in residence continue to clean the house each week.

We were concerned about Fr. Greg Oszust who is studying Kiswahili in Tanzania. He is unable to cross the Kenyan Border due to lockdowns, so he is making enquiries about where to go if he starts getting symptoms. He is staying with some nuns but is not sure of their ability to provide an isolation area for a sick person.

After our nice Easter celebrations last weekend, most of the week disappeared working on reports and catching up on issues and ploughing through bank statements for the Karen House project trying to do reconciliations.

Then we had a little nightmare of an ant invasion. There were millions of them, and they covered the huge dining/lounge area, the whole chapel, front veranda, internal corridors, and part of the kitchen. We used two large cans of ant poison to terminate their presence.

## **APRIL 26**

Our cook in the pre-novitiate came back on Tuesday to live-in. She is confined to the TV room and bedroom for a few days to isolate in case she is positive. The pre-novices are doing a great job feeding us and maintaining the property.

## **MAY 3**

Still in lockdown, still alive and well. All Oblates are well and no parishioners have been affected yet.

I was happy to have a meeting with Fr. Fidel and come up with a concrete support package to help our parish Oblates

and people there. It will support the workers, the most needy families in the parish, and keep the Oblates fed. Also, I heard Fr. Constant did a food delivery to our brothers in Méru.

The big news is that Euticus, our farm manager, is a dad for the second time. The little boy was reluctant to enter the world but finally braved it on Kenya's labour day, about a week overdue. He probably heard about coronavirus and was in lockdown! Ha, ha.



Kiirua farm manager Euticus and his wife have a new son

I spent nearly two days helping some of our parishes organize M-pesa numbers (for mobile money transfer) so parishioners and benefactors can send donations to the parish over the mobile phone. It was a tedious process the first time around, but now we have a template so we can do others in one or two hours. Our bank has been very helpful, but I sure didn't expect it to take that much time.

We also applied for two numbers for the mission, so we can start creating a platform for local supporters to send donations. Is it the beginning of a local MAMI? Every journey starts with a small step.

On Sunday I dropped off my homily and reflection notes to the three communities of nuns that we usually serve and the Nyumbani children's home (with a big bag of chocolate treats for the young and old). This is the best I can do working in isolation.



## MAY 10

Welcome back to Nairobi for another week of lockdown from where we managed to escape occasionally. The rain eased off quite a lot this week. Three days of some sunshine equals hot water once again. Little things are important!

There is great sadness in Western Kenya where floods displaced hundreds of people who are now living in makeshift shanties on the side of a river. Of course, everyone is talking about COVID-19 and everything else is less important. Sad. Never hear about the locust plague.

## MAY 17

The president disappointed many people by extending the lockdown. He had promised to talk about other emergencies in the country but failed to do so, creating a storm of unhappy social media posts. There are thousands of families displaced by floods in Western Kenya. The locusts have destroyed many crops and no one is talking about it. There were many families displaced by demolitions in Nairobi – probably legitimate demolitions, but seriously poor timing with the weather and coronavirus situation.

Due to excessive COVID-19 cases at the Tanzania border crossing (Namanga near Kisaju), the border crossing has been closed – except to trucks to keep products moving.

There are indications that there will be food shortages in the coming months, so please pray the leaders stop worrying about the 2022 elections and start running the country with more attention.

We haven't heard of any cases of COVID-19 in our communities or parishes, yet and we thank God for that. Fr. Greg is continuing his studies in Tanzania and can't return now even if he wanted to. We were happy to hear that Fr. Fidel and Fr. Greg both received their work permits this week.

# St. Kateri Tekakwitha Rosary

The St. Kateri Tekakwitha Rosary features brown beads with a special Kateri centerpiece that highlights her devotion to the cross. The silver-plated crucifix is a replica of St. John Paul II's papal crucifix.

Please see the enclosed gift form to indicate your request for this lovely rosary.



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We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed, visit our website at [www.omilacombe.ca/mami/donations/](http://www.omilacombe.ca/mami/donations/) to give on-line, or call our office toll free: 1-866-432-6264 and we will be pleased to assist you in facilitating your donation to the Oblate missions.



# *Remembering*

*We remember the following Oblates who died in 2019:*

February 5	Thomas Bilodeau (1927)
August 10	Oscar Delanghe (1925)
November 23	Lawrence MacLennan (1929)
December 22	Jean-Paul Vantroys (1925)



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