

Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



Christmas 2020



COVID Christmas

A year like no other



Because of the COVID pandemic, this Christmas season is going to be one unlike any we have ever experienced. So much changes from day to day that by the time you read this we may again be living in yet another alternative universe.

It has been hard on all of us, yet for the most part we in Canada are fortunate to do more than just survive. We live good lives.

Now look at the next page. There are four young children pictured from the Mathare Slum in Nairobi. They have just been provided with food by two young men who are trying their best to improve the lives of their (our) neighbours.

It is difficult to imagine what life is like for these four children. Poverty has likely been their life since the day they were born. Do they play? Do they experience joy?

To what do they aspire? To go to school? To have a bed in which to sleep. To have their own room? To know from where their next meal is coming. And will that be today? Tomorrow?

The Oblate missionaries we support in Kenya, Peru and Canada do their best to reach out to those on the fringes of society. With our help, the pains of hunger will diminish for children like those pictured. We can't save the whole world, but we can plant seeds of hope.

In these trying times, our prayer is that you may find in your Oblate hearts a small space untainted by the difficulties of the last year . . . a place of love, peace and joy.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



Christmas Wish List

*"He who is generous will be blessed,
For he gives some of his food to the poor."*

Proverbs 22:9

CANADA OUTREACH

- ~ De Mazenod Door\$25
- ~ Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples\$25

KENYA

- ~ School fees for children\$25
- ~ Medical care for prisoners\$25
- ~ Small food parcels/blankets
for needy families in slum/parish.....\$50

PERU

- ~ Building chapels/building homes\$50
- ~ School supplies.....\$25
- ~ St. Clotilde Hospital\$25

If you are making a donation as a gift for someone, please note on the gift form how many Christmas cards you would like to receive.

DE MAZENOD DOOR OUTREACH

BY DIANE DOWNEY

HAMILTON – The decision was made from the onset to keep the ‘Door’ open and continue to serve our community’s poor, marginalized, homeless and most vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As you can imagine, De Mazenod Door Outreach, which already had a busy daily hot meal program, serving upwards of 400 meals a day, 7 days a week, became a hubbub of activity, literally making changes overnight. A good number of our volunteers needed to take a step back, but new volunteers, many of whom were teachers and off while schools were closed, stepped up to help.

They serve a ‘meal to go’ out of our Door while smiling and interacting. Staff and volunteers, masked and wearing a face shield and gloves, handed out their meals through a window. To those we serve, it was a Godsend. So many other outreach programs were closed or are on hold, giving the poorest of the poor nowhere to go.

During our most challenging times, since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, we still managed to serve more than 63,000 meals. Donations are down, as to be expected, but we continue to practice faith over fear and pray for improvement.



Volunteers at
De Mazenod
Door

SACRED HEART CHURCH OF THE FIRST PEOPLES

BY SUSAI JESU, OMI, AND
MARK BLOM, OMI

EDMONTION – With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in the early part of the year, 2020 has been challenging for all of us and particularly for Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples.

Because gatherings were not allowed by all levels of governments, we found it even more difficult to clothe the less fortunate through our garage sales and to provide meals through our dinners in St. Tekakwitha Hall. Accordingly, changes were needed in order to respond to these programs.

To replace the meals, a daily Outreach Lunch Program was started where those in need could come to the door of the office to receive a healthy bagged lunch. More people began to come to our door, as many other sheltered places stopped giving food to those in need.

This outreach program was extended to those in need of clothing. People in need can receive shirts, pants, socks, sweaters, dresses and shoes. Some blankets and quilts are also available. These programs are in addition to our ongoing “mini-hamper” food bank program. These outreach programs are totally funded through donations of money, food and clothing to the church and are completely staffed through our volunteers at Sacred Heart Church.

Creating more challenges for Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, our beloved Church suffered a fire on Aug. 30. Masses had to be moved to another facility until the church is restored. It is unclear whether we will have the church building back for our Christmas ministry programs. If not, a hall may have to be rented in order to support these much-needed ministries.



Preparing food for the
outreach lunch program



Fire damage in the church

These include the children's Christmas party where we provide gifts and a small party for 600 – 800 children who would not otherwise receive a

gift at Christmas; the Christmas hamper program where we provide Christmas Day food including a turkey, potatoes, tea, coffee and canned goods. A total of nearly 600 hampers are given out; and the Christmas Day dinner of turkey and all the trimmings is provided for 600 to 800 people on Christmas Day.

In excess of 3,000 people were given assistance during the 2019 Christmas season. In all, the costs for these ministries range from \$5,000 for the Outreach Server programs to \$30,000 for the Christmas ministries. They are staffed by up to 150 volunteers of Sacred Heart Church. With the emergence of Covid-19, the need for these services has grown and has never been needed more.

Last year, we received C\$3,062.51 from AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI of the \$5,000 required for our Outreach Program. Your continued support of this program for 2020 will be directed to the Outreach Server Program.

Thank you for all your support to this outreach ministry.



GIFT PAYMENT OPTION



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/ 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.

Kenya

PRISON MINISTRY

Langata Women's Prison is the major women's prison in Kenya. The majority of the prisoners are women 18 to 30 years old. Many are single mothers and are generally poor with a low standard of education. Others are married and separated from their families. The Oblate ministry provides spiritual and pastoral care, as well as funding some of their personal needs.



Margaret

Dear Father,

I thank you very much for your gift you gave through our teacher. Since I came to Langata Prison I have never experienced such kindness. I am glad that you have started my journey as a reformed and determined woman in Christ.

May God continue to make you a blessing to many, not only in material things, but also through the Word of God. May God shine His grace upon you and bless your kind heart. Keep Well, Father.

Margaret

A letter of thanks to
Fr. Fidele

SCHOOL FEES FOR CHILDREN

COVID-19 has been devastating for so many people. Many parents have been laid off from their menial jobs and are struggling to keep food on the table. Despite some government funding, many of the children in the parish schools come from vulnerable families who are unable to pay for school fees and uniforms at the best of times. Now, in the time of COVID, this has become even more difficult.



A family struggling in the Mathare Slums

OUTREACH TO THE SLUMS

The effects of the pandemic in Kenya as a country has resulted in a very painful impact on the livelihood of all people to whom the Oblates minister: small scale farmers, self-employed and employees, but especially for the very poor people living in our slums. Two youth group members, Collins and George, are doing a great job distributing food and blankets to the more desperate mothers and children in the Mathare Slums.



One of the chapels Br. Blaise has built

Peru

CHAPELS

The huge parish of Chinchá Alta has some 20 active communities and all but two do not have chapels. Chapels are most necessary because that is where people celebrate mass, teach catechism and gather as a community. To help pay for the chapel it is divided into three parts – the community, the parish, and the funds from MAMI. The chapel can be built in one month. It is 20 metres in length, eight metres wide and four metres high.

SCHOOL ITEMS

Because of Covid-19 many parents have not worked in more than seven months. They have a hard time feeding their family and their bills grow. The parents do not have the funds to buy even simple school items.

THE HOMELESS

Br. Blaise continues to build little houses along with the homeless and also the Parish Retreat Centre where work is still

needed. The Oblates have the Gravel Pit, so the cost of building is much less as they make their own bricks. The Gravel Pit provides gravel, sand (both fine and coarse), earth for the making of adobe bricks and rocks for the base of buildings. Br. Blaise says: "We have been working in the pit since 1982, and yes, the hole is much deeper as you can imagine!"

SANTA CLOTILDE HOSPITAL

Santa Clotilde Hospital is always in need of supplements like powdered milk for the malnourished newborns, medicine, and upgraded hospital equipment. Located along the Napo River in the jungles of the Peruvian Amazon, it also maintains an out-patient care house in Lima.

(Br. Blaise would like people to know he and his community are doing well despite the number of Covid cases in Peru, but there has been no movement of mail in Peru for the last seven months. He has a pile of letters waiting to be mailed to his supporters.)

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. To view an excellent instructive tutorial on how you can increase the value of your donation of securities and earn a tax credit at the same time: <https://omilacombe.ca/powerful-way-leave-legacy-2/>

In a heartbeat

BY HARLEY MAPES, OMI

OTTAWA – “C’mon, Richard. The light’s green. Let’s go. I don’t know what you’re daydreaming about.”

Sitting in the car at the intersection of Laurier and Nelson, on our way to the office, the thought is unspoken, but the words are forming in my mind.

Tick, tick, tick, tick ...

Seemingly, another minute passes – but it’s only been a few more seconds – even as I’m opening my mouth to say something, Richard has noticed the green light, and the car starts to move forward.

“Whoa! Holy lightning!”

A large, red SUV flashes by, a distracted driver focusing on the road ahead, oblivious that a tragic novel remains unwritten because of someone else’s momentary pause.

How many times in life are we blithely unaware that, seconds earlier or later, everything could have changed irrevocably,

when the difference between life and death was a breath. Yet, occasionally, we glance to the side and glimpse hooded Death standing in the shadowed doorway as we pass, and sudden comprehension shatters complacency.

The occurrence at Laurier and Nelson was several weeks ago. I would like to say I underwent an epiphany, a St. Paul on his way to Damascus experience, that my life can be divided into a “pre-” and “post-” period. Actually, little has changed. I haven’t embarked on an Oblate version of Eat Pray Love. I



haven't abandoned my job as treasurer, set off for adventures, discovering new meaning in life. I haven't even stopped getting into the car with Fr. Richard! So much of life is a daily routine: get up, shower, have breakfast, pray, go to work, come home from work, eat, pray, read and go to bed. The next day, do it all over again. Life generally flows onward with very ordinary events that leave me saying, "I don't know what I did all day, but it took me all day to do it." Should it be different? Should every day be filled with excitement and memorable adventures?

Working with teenagers, I would ask how they were doing and came to expect the almost inevitable response, "I'm bored." I would laugh and say, "When I was growing up, I only said once in my life to my parents that I was bored; they cured my boredom."

"Cured it? What do you mean, Brother?"

"With a big smile, they pulled out a list of about three hundred things that needed to be done, starting with getting the basement cleaned up, and told me that should fix my boredom.

It did. I learned to keep myself busy ... and never to say I was bored!" I think they were more inspired by me surviving my home life than they were by the lesson I learned.

Even the occasions we count as being memorable too quickly lose their edge. Several years after I started teaching in Sandy Bay, Brent took me for a boat ride on the Churchill



Brent Morin in Sandy Bay

River. I was mesmerized by the endless water, rock, trees and scents of the boreal forest.

A nudge on my shoulder ... "Brother, look, an eagle."

"Wow! A bald eagle ... I've never seen one so close.

Isn't that something!" I grab the binoculars and track the majestic bird until it circles higher and higher out of sight.

More trees, more water, more droning of the outboard motor.

Another nudge on the shoulder, "An eagle, Brother. Over there, on top of the tree."

"Oh, wow! There are two of them. And a nest! I've never seen an eagle's nest."

More droning motor, more overhanging trees reflected in the still water until fractured by the wake of our passing boat.

"Another eagle ... no, there are three over there, Brother."

Pause ... "Aren't there any other birds here? Are there just eagles?"

How quickly mesmerizing morphs into monotonous; thrill transitions into tedium.

Perhaps the idea that being close enough to count the teeth of a distracted SUV driver should be a life-changing event is our distraction. Maybe, it's the daily rhythm of enjoying the morning shower, the well-trodden words of the psalter's four-week cycle, the morning walk to work, the 'doing whatever it is you do as treasurer' every day, ordinary conversations around the supper table and an evening once again immersed in familiar literature, the everyday things of life, where meaning is found.



William Wordsworth pensively reflects, in Tintern Abbey, how the bucolic beauty of the River Wye, experienced five years earlier, changed him.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: – feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love.

No wild spectacles, no once-in-a lifetime-events ... just secluded landscapes, quiet skies, and wreaths of smoke rising amidst the copses, he muses, might be the impetus for us to become better people.

There's something to be said for eagles on the Churchill River and SUVs in Ottawa. The invitation is to find as much meaning in the unassuming concrete as there is in the skyscrapers it builds.

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



Closing the book on pieces of history

BY MIKE DECHANT OMI

SASKATOON – Harley Mapes, OMI, informed the membership of OMI Lacombe Canada that the purchase of the property at Battleford, SK (now St. Mary's Residence) was completed by the Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation on Aug. 20.

I hear this announcement with this image in mind: *When one is reading a book and you come to the last page, one must eventually close the back cover.*

As Bro. Harley reflected, "This is the end of an era in our Province history – turning the last page of the last chapter and the closing of the back cover. Loved or reviled, Battleford was nonetheless central to our identity as the former St. Mary's Province.

Oblate cemetery in Battleford



“There is a long roll call of brothers and priests who, over the past 90 years, poured out their hearts and lives into the various ministries hosted at the site, including St. Charles Scholasticate, Batschol Farm, Raema Communications and the Marion Press (which printed the Our Family Magazine), and God’s Farm, where Oblates and laity lived together in community, with an outreach to the poor.

“It’s not possible to say “thank you” enough to the Oblates, Oblate Associates and co-workers who contributed to those many ministries and those who worked at bringing this sale to a close. For the many, many individuals who lived and worked and studied on this extensive property, this closure likely comes as a bittersweet moment. The timing of this closure seems providential as Aug. 25 was the anniversary of the death of Fr. Harold Kaufmann, OMI. He certainly had a vested interest in the property and ministries of St. Charles Scholasticate and Batschol Farm. May God bless him with the gift of eternal life.”

Yet, life goes on! With the sale of the property to the Nakoda Peoples, the legacy of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate will continue to be reflected in new and different ways. Several years ago, Fr. Al Hubenig, OMI, designed a beautiful mural of Our Lady of the Snows, depicting Our Lady



Our Lady of the Snows
mural

as an InnuIt mother. The Nakoda Peoples have an endearing image of the “Snow Lady” reminiscent of their love and respect for the mother of Jesus. The original work of art of the “Snow Lady” now hangs in the chapel. A replica of this image will be placed at the entrance of the property, protected in the entrance of a teepee.

Fr. Maurice Schroeder, OMI, has been instrumental in the visioning and collaboration between the Oblates and the leadership of the Mosquito Reserve, as they envision and plan for a new Mosquito Interpretive Centre. Fr. Moe’s involvement in this venture is in the spiritual, historical and cultural development of the past, as well as its implication within the intercultural dialogue of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

His presence and love for our Indigenous brothers and sisters is most appreciated. I believe that it also assures that our Oblate past will continue to be lived in their vision and presence. In the house, the chapel area will continue to be a place of quiet, mediation and prayer. The Oblate cemetery will continue to be honoured and protected. As our need for funerals arises, we will have a welcome access and hospitality to the cemetery.

Fr. Moe has now acquired a small apartment in South Battleford. He will maintain an office space in the Interpretive centre but will reside in town. To maintain the security of the premises each evening, two individuals from the Mosquito Reserve will be in residence.

We also close the back cover on another Oblate story, Potter’s House. With the closure of St. Thomas College in 1983, the Oblates purchased ‘Potter’s House’, situated in a quiet neighborhood in Saskatoon, in an area aptly named Potter Crescent. This house served many Oblate ventures and initiatives: as a pre-novitiate and residence for prospective Oblates, a residence for various aging and retired Oblates, youth ministries and a house of hospitality.

As we close the back cover to this story, its legacy continues as a community home for L'Arche. Our archivist affectionately noted that an Oblate house in San Paulo, Brazil, also became a new home for a L'Arche Community. What a coincidence? Or just another "God moment"!

To reiterate the sentiment of the prophet Isaiah, yes, it is time to close the back cover of two of the "Good Books" of our collective lives. But take heart, new and exciting opportunities can arise, for nothing is impossible with God. As our creative and generous God continues to assure us: "I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

May we continue to live the dictum: **Wherever you go, go with God. Whenever you go, go make a difference.**

We may be aging (and down-sizing), but we're not dead!

St. Eugene de Mazenod, pray for us. Keep us bold and daring.

Praise be Jesus Christ, and Mary Immaculate.



*Check out
our Facebook
page*



Lacombe Canada MAMI

*... and
website*



<https://www.omilacombe.ca/mami/>

A change in direction

BY RON ROLHEISER, OMI

SAN ANTONIA, Texas – For the past 15 years, I have had both the privilege and the responsibility of being the president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. I stepped down from that position in September, handing the keys of office to my successor, Dr. Scott Woodward.



Ron Rolheiser, OMI

I leave this office with a feeling of gratitude. The 15 years here have been good years. I am proud of where the school has grown, and I am happy with what those 15 years have brought into my own life in terms of Oblate community, Oblate ministry, friendships, opportunities for growth, and graces of every kind. I'm deeply grateful.

What's next for me? The word on the street is that I "have retired." Not exactly, and not even close! I have stepped down as president, but not into retirement. I will still be working, full-time, except no longer in administration. I will remain at the Oblate School of Theology as a full-time faculty member and will continue to teach within all three levels of our Spirituality Institute, particularly in our PhD program where I will also be directing theses.

The freedom from administrative tasks will also afford me much more quality time to write and I have started to work on a book on what is asked of us in our autumn years and how, in the end, we are asked "to give our deaths away". The book will complete the trilogy of *The Holy Longing* and *Sacred Fire*. I will, of course, continue to write my weekly column and plan a series of articles for *The Tableton* "Chastity as our Lost Virtue".

The plan is to stay at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, as long as my health permits me to be productive. I am a two-time cancer survivor, still undergoing ongoing chemotherapy, so I leave it to God and the wonderful cancer specialists in South Texas to determine how long that will be. In discerning what I should do after stepping down as president here a number of signs converged to suggest that I stay here and continue to work at the Oblate School of Theology.

What conspired to suggest that decision? i) Given my age and my ongoing treatment for cancer, this is probably not a good time to launch out into a new mission; ii) my ministry and work for the past 15 years has been here so what makes the most practical sense is to simply continue here; iii) the programs I most want to teach are here in our Spirituality Institute; iv) I am better resourced as a writer and theologian when I am in an academic milieu and being on faculty here provides that; v) I am already directing a number of students in their PhD theses and do not want to abandon them; vi) I am very much still responsible for our Forest-Dwelling program here which I believe is an important program and which I want to help thrive and grow; vii) finally, and not least, I am living within a good Oblate community and working at a school which is doing important Oblate work. I am not sure I would find as valuable a ministry for me elsewhere at this stage of my life.

So, I have moved offices, but not residences or ministry.

Now that I am free of most administrative duties, I am looking forward to having some less-pressured time for prayer, for study, for teaching, and for writing ... and especially for friendship and family.

Thank you all for your friendship, prayers, and support these past years – and for your forgiveness for the many times I found myself too busy to be present to you as I should.

Peace

Ron Rolheiser, OMI



Small youth group gathering

CONSTANT ILOMBUN, OMI, KIONYO PARISH: Our parishioners were also affected spiritually by the pandemic. They are missing our Sunday celebrations, they missed the Triduum and other Easter celebrations, a great distress for all of us. Funeral Masses are allowed, but with a small group of 20 people, and this is highly unusual for the local people. We were, however, able to baptise a five-month old baby in our Community Chapel

Our parishioners are mostly farmers, who can still do some work on their farms. Tea picking is ongoing, but not as intense as usual because the tea buying centres receive them just once a day, to avoid congestion, instead of twice per day. This means that the quantity and revenue is lower.

We are grateful to our small Christian communities for supporting us with food and some money. Following the spirit of our founder, we also share with some poor families whatever we receive from our parishioners. It is common nowadays to have needy people knocking at our doors and many phone calls from parishioners asking for any kind of assistance.

GIDEON RIMBERIA, OMI, KISAJU PARISH: I was taking a walk when I met with a young boy, aged 10 or 11, with a bag full of second-hand clothes. He approached and begged me

to support him by at least buying a shirt so that they may be able to raise something for their upkeep. As our conversation continued, I discovered that his younger sister took a different direction to try her luck. They were children of a single mother. God knows what direction the mother had taken to try her luck to make ends meet for that day.

DIONISIUS MWANDIKI, OMI, KISAJU PARISH: During lockdown, and for the first two months, there were no public youth meetings due to the lockdown measures. However, the youth were encouraged to meet in small groups within their localities, to pray and talk about the effects of coronavirus among themselves.

FAUSTIN LITANDA, OMI, ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER PARISH: Many of our people are having difficulty finding even a temporary job. Many business and shops have closed. Those who are farmers can't sell their products since there are no buyers.

Old people in the parish don't have support and can't work. The sick people can't go to the hospital because of lack of money and fear of the virus.

Some couples and families are experiencing serious problems, and some are almost broken because of lack of finances. People have become stressed and some women have gone back to their parents' homes since they can no longer sustain their children. We pray that this pandemic may end soon, that we may go back to normal life.

DAQUIN IYO, OMI, IRINDA PARISH: Our situation is always changing. The pandemic has had a painful impact on the livelihood of all our people: small-scale farmers, the self-employed and employees, and especially the very poor people

living in our slums. Those depending on family members and relatives who have been working in other places and now have lost their jobs or businesses, are facing hard times.

The pandemic has generated other forms of suffering: widespread fear, concerns, daily stress, anxiety, the restriction of movement and lack of basic needs. Social distancing has disrupted the normal interaction between people, forcing them to avoid each other, cancel family gatherings, and cancel worship and other social events.

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



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

AUG. 15

NAIROBI, Kenya! – It seems strange to start off each week by saying we are still OK health-wise, but that's the world we live in. Our parishes are slowly getting back to the new normal, where people come back together with restrictions and guidelines.

Our youth – Collins and George – continue to distribute food to the more desperate mothers and children in the Mathare Slums. They are



Gerry Conlan, OMI

so enthusiastic about it, and I'm happy for them. They are doing something worthwhile, something to build hope in the people and the other youth. We hope they can keep going.



Collins and George making a difference in the Mathare Slums

AUG. 22

We are still alive and kicking and the parishes are operating OK. Projects are ticking along at Méru parish, with plans for a presbytery and a church.

Collins and George are doing a great job distributing small amounts of food in Mathare Slum. This week they concentrated on a food program for kids that happens every Sunday. If you can help out the families and children in Mathare Slum, feel free to make a small donation through the Christmas request.

AUG. 29

It was a very up and down week, lots of pressure with COVID-19 and some Oblates leaving Kenya.

One of our brothers went for a test so he could fly home. We were all shocked when the result was positive. We were all tested, and relieved when the results were all negative, even for the brother who tested positive.

The test initially came back positive because the hospital used the anti-body test which is not specifically for COV-19, but they never explained that. It's the lower-cost test. Public Health did both anti-body and TSR, which is COV-19 specific, and everyone was negative.

Then came a mad scramble to book tickets and try again for three departing Oblates: Friday afternoon to Vietnam, Friday evening to Zambia and Saturday morning to Cameroon.

With a bit of stress and great help from Fr. Cosmas driving people to the airport and picking up the test certificates in town, we succeeded. Fr. Cosmas was very generous getting up again at 4 a.m. Saturday morning to get one brother

to the airport on time, and then waited for a new priest, Morgan Muselela, OMI, to arrive from Zambia at 6 a.m.

To avoid evictions in Mathare Slum, Collins and George helped out 15 families with a month's rent assistance.

Fr. Tim is tested for COVID



Rent assistance in the Mathare Slum



When we had the positive case in the community, we all practised greater social distancing and I skipped mass at Nyumbani Children's Home in case I was a threat. On Monday I started feeling funny, a bit tired and thought I might be positive, but I think I was just tired and someone else also had tummy problems. Monday night I slept for 10 hours and felt much better, and much relieved to be negative!

SEPT. 5

It's amazing how Kenya seems to be getting back to normal: traffic jams are everywhere. Not sure if the jobs have returned yet, but the restaurant in town is full of people 90 per cent of the time every day.

I was happy to connect with the Kenya Revenue Authority and learn about a number of Tax Law changes making life easier for the poorer people. Instead of taxes starting at 14,000

Kenya shillings per month, it now starts at 24,000 (US \$240). We thank God it has happened.

We were happy to hear that our three brothers who left last week arrived safely in Cameroon, Zambia and Vietnam. Fr. Vǒng sent a picture of himself in quarantine in Vietnam: looks like an astronaut.

Collins, our youth member helping people in Mathare Slum, received an admission letter from the University in Mombasa. We are very happy for him. On Saturday, he and George fed another 25 people in the slum.

Thank God the Kisaju com-



Fr. Vong in airport quarantine

munity located two missing water purifier straws donated by Grade 9 boys at Mazenod College in Melbourne. Fr. Praveen gave them to a family struggling with a dirty water supply. It was very kind of the boys to be concerned about the poor people here.



Fr. Praveen with water purifier straws

SEPT. 12

It is said COV-19 infections are heading downwards, but is that because test kits are in short supply? Very few deaths are ever reported. Tourists are slowly returning, and business is picking up. Of course, behind the scenes, many people are still struggling.



Oblates Benjamin Karani and Stephen Wekesa in Cameroon

It's that time of the year again where we have to produce formation reports for our postulants, pre-novices, novices and scholastics scattered around the world: Kenya (9), South Africa (6), Cameroon (2), Rome (1), Philippines (1) and USA (1). Compared to Australia and Canada, we are truly blessed with numbers, and pray the young men will slowly develop into committed and faithful Oblates.

SEPT. 19

I'm not sure what is happening all around Kenya, but if traffic jams are a sign of normalcy, then Nairobi is back to normal.

Congratulations to Fr. Dionisius, OMI, who successfully defended his thesis and will graduate later this year with a Masters in Youth Studies. His work will be published in the September Edition of the International Journal for Humanities and Social Studies. It's always a relief when these are finished.



People waiting for food distribution in the Mathare Slums

Fr. Gideon, Fr. Dio, Fr. Praveen and Br. Magambo continue to reach out to many communities in Kisaju, and gently push along the many projects there: St. Eugene Church, St. Paul's land title and permanent church, Jamii Bora Church and the water project at Olturuto centre.

SEPT. 26

Collins and George did their usual good work and distributed food to many families. This week they were set to give out some rent assistance, but our bank was having problems and I couldn't get the funds to them. They will do it in a few days.

At the end of the week, I was a conduit for funds from an Australian family in Hong Kong who wished to help a young woman here. This is the family that built a school in the slum area north of Nairobi centre. The young woman from poor circumstances had a large growth on her ear. The doctors removed it and did some plastic surgery to make a nice job, and she was discharged six hours later.



Food and soap distribution in the Mathare Slums

I went to visit Irembene's new church. They've done a good job, and Fr. Constant achieved a feat that the senior parishioners didn't believe possible: after the women did some volunteer work, the men were likewise challenged and, surprisingly, they stepped up and collected three truckloads of stone for the floor slab.

It saved them a large amount of money as they try to finish the church. They use the local school at the moment.

Buses are starting to run between Tanzania and Kenya, and we were happy to welcome home our lost brother Fr. Greg Oszust from his study of Kiswahili in Tanzania. Fr. Greg and I escaped isolation and went to Karen for a new phone SIM card and a bit of shopping. It's good to have him home.



Stones for the floor slab
at Irembene church

OCT. 3

We received the news of our new Mission Council: Fr. Fidele continues as Mission Superior, assisted by Fr. Greg Oszust, Fr. Constant Ilombun and Fr. Cosmas Kubai.



Having Fr. Greg around has been good. He repaired our printer last weekend, and this week my dash-cam. He's quietly enduring his required isolation in the house since returning from Tanzania.

Fr. Greg in Tanzania

OCT. 10

A busy week was capped by the ordination of Fr. Joseph Nzioka, OMI.

Bishop John Oballa Owaa, the bishop of Ngong Diocese where Kisaju Parish is located, officiated and allowed others

to give the speeches. A lovely meal was organized by Kisaju Parish with some help from the mission office.



Bishop Owaa gives Fr. Joseph the chalice

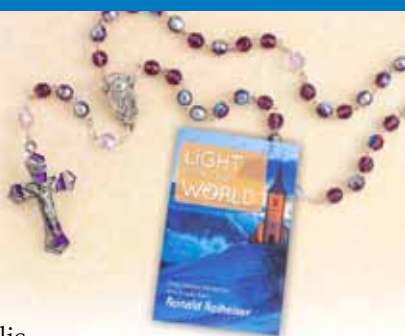
Fr. Joseph offers his mother communion

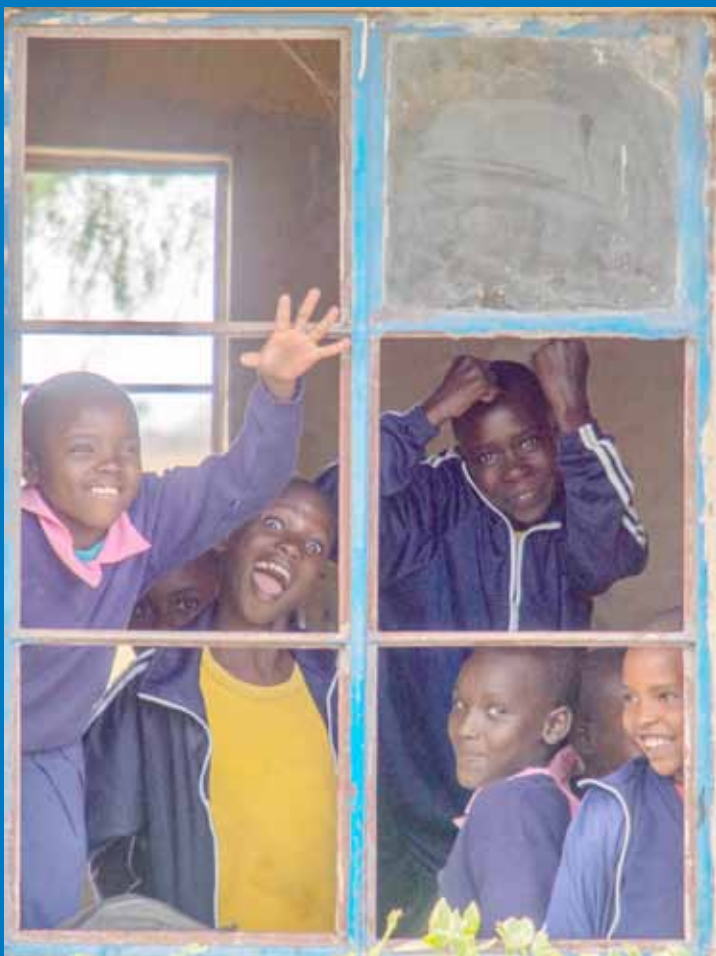
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