

Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



February 2021



Coping with COVID

Challenging Times



The year 2020 will go down as one of the most difficult in our lives. Most of us aren't old enough to remember the war years, or the Dirty 30s, or the pandemic of 1918 that killed families.

But we will never forget 2020 – the year of COVID and facemasks; travel restrictions and lockdowns; long lineups and empty shelves at grocery stores. It brought fear and panic.

Hopes and promises of a better future were dimmed, but gradually we have learned to cope. It hasn't been easy, but for our neighbours in places like Kenya and Peru, at missions supported by our Canadian Oblates, it has become even more difficult.

Life has become more insular for Br. Blaise MacQuarrie in Peru, yet he finds there is grace in his confinement. Our young Oblates in Kenya have been stretched to learn about new ways to reach out to the poor they serve. There are empty grocery shelves. There are empty churches. There are empty stomachs.

But there is also inspiration, care and concern for our neighbours. Many in need were safely fed at Oblate parishes in Hamilton and Edmonton. Br. Blaise finds ways to help the poor in Peru.

And then there are the youth group members in Nairobi, young fellows who weekly have gone to the Mathare Slum with food for the poorest of the poor (see Fr. Gerry Conlan's notebook). They are an inspiration for all of us. They are not Oblates. But they do have the hearts and souls of an Oblate. And for that, we should all be grateful!

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Who am I?

BY RICHARD BEAUDETTE, OMI

OTTAWA – During my novitiate year, we did several Rochais Sessions that are designed to help us understand ourselves and how we function in relationships. The first session was entitled “Who am I?” I have been pondering that question of late as we deal with the restrictions due to and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Richard Beaudette, OMI

For most of us our identity is intimately tied to our work, to what we do. Our jobs, careers, ministry, etc., often define who we are when we reflect on the question. However, in these days, that is not quite so easy to do. Ministry has changed drastically. As a member of the leadership team for OMI Lacombe Canada Province, for example, a major focus of my ministry was being present in the districts and communities, spending time with the members (vowed Oblates and Associates). This meant that much of my time was spent away from the office and away from Ottawa.

However, I have not left Ottawa since I returned from a meeting in Quebec City on March 16, except for a couple of days away to relax and a day in Montreal for a cousin's funeral. So without the “work”, the travel entailed with the ministry of leadership, I have been feeling a bit at loose ends and that somehow I am not doing what I should be doing. In some ways, I have lost some of the identity that is dependent on my ministry.

Our lives have changed, drastically for some. This is an opportunity to seek answers to the question “Who am I” at a deeper level, going beyond career, ministry and other markers we once used.

Given the slower pace and the increased time alone or in small bubbles, it is a perfect time to reflect on my identity in relationship with God, with my Oblate community on Nelson Street as well as the broader Oblate community, the community at large and with creation. It is a prime opportunity to reflect on my attitudes toward and responses to the needs of the poor around me, the poor who have become much more visible as jobless and homeless rates increase.

I wouldn't say that I have had momentous revelations but there have been small insights and new understandings and hopefully some growth along the way.


Given the slower pace, I have been focused on spending more time in quiet prayer, reflection on the Word and reading, especially the various writings of Pope Francis.

Having had more time to spend gardening, at home and with a friend, as well as spending time outdoors, has drawn me into a deeper appreciation of the gifts of creation. While I always enjoyed and appreciated the outdoors, I recognize that I often took that gift for granted and did not cherish and nurture it as I am called to do.

The same goes for relationships. It is easy to take friends and community for granted if one is not intentional about nurturing those relationships. Again, no momentous advances, but a growing appreciation and deeper effort at nurturing those relationships.

The list could go on, but suffice it to say that the current situation, difficult though it is in so many ways, is a golden opportunity to pause and ask some of the important questions. I pray that I will always be open to the prompting of the Spirit as we continue to live this unique time in our own history.

*(Richard Beaudette, OMI, is OMI Provincial Vicar
and a member of the MAMI Board of Directors)*

A photograph showing three men from behind as they walk along a path through a lush tea plantation. The man in the foreground is wearing a dark maroon and grey polo shirt and khaki pants. The man in the middle is wearing a light blue polo shirt and jeans. The man in the background is wearing a white polo shirt. They are surrounded by dense green tea bushes and tall trees in the background.

I pray that I will always be open to the prompting of the Spirit as we continue to live this unique time in our own history.

– RICHARD BEAUDETTE, OMI

Fr. Richard, pictured recently in Kenya, is open to his next step

A time to reflect

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – We are now close to a year in this lockdown and there are no signs of hope to seeing the ending of COVID-19. As for the country of Peru, it is a big mess. There is a shortage of just about everything needed to help the sick with the virus, but no shortage of patients.



Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI

There is now a lack of doctors and nurses and these people are really overworked. There is a great lack of order and self-discipline. I do believe the worst is yet to come.

As for my community, there are some positives. Being locked in, we got to know each other better. There was a lot of sharing and we four had our duties to carry out. Our patio was set up as a chapel and during the week, 18 to 21 masses were celebrated. And at each mass there was a list of names to be mentioned and thanks to Facebook many people were tuned in for the masses from distant places.

In the late evening we would watch movies with spiritual values. There is lots of time to meditate and read sensible stuff, and the parishioners really took good care of us as food goes. The corner store still gives us free bread and so much food that we began to donate it to those in need.

I can't speak for others, but I used this precious time as a retreat, more praying, studying and looking at daily life in a more spiritual way. In our small community I noticed how much we laughed and, in a way, enjoyed life as a true gift from God.

Our neighbourhood is still very quiet except for the noise coming from the streets. I could fire a machine gun in the street and not even hit a dog. In the centre of the city people are still going about buying or selling something. However, it is really the poor who suffer the most as they have no back-up. Many say it is better to die quickly from COVID-19 than to starve to a slow death.

We now have a new type of virus that is related to COVID-19. Now that we are in 2021 and with the virus hanging over us, no one can say what to expect but we can't close our eyes to reality.

Our building construction work was completely halted, and we just started work on a few housing projects with men wearing masks and working at a distance. We still work in the gravel pit and there is lots of space there to move about.

All in all, I see this as a special time. I pray that many will draw closer to God and that the world will be a much better place when COVID is defeated.

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



From the heart

EDMONTON – On behalf of Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples and all those we serve, we want to thank you for your generous financial and material support for this year's Christmas programs and activities.

Because of the fire at Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples and the COVID pandemic, we could not host a party for the children or a meal on Christmas day, but we found new venues and means to extend comfort and care to the poor and struggling in our neighbourhood.

Toys were donated for distribution to families with children for whom gifts at Christmas are not always received.

Organizing food distribution



Though we did not have a children's party, Fr. Mark Blom did dress as Santa when families arrived at the rectory at scheduled times to collect gifts. Toys for children were included for the families receiving hampers. We wrapped and distributed 1,280 gifts to those in need.

This year 400 food hampers were assembled by volunteers in the hall of St. Albert

Parish. Because our hall was unavailable this was a perfect solution and a beautiful moment of collaboration between two Oblate parishes.

Fr. Susai, Fr. Ignacy and Archbishop Smith were on hand to bless all the hampers and the 44 delivery teams on Dec. 19.

We continue to give prepared lunch bags to those who come to our door at any time of day as well as gloves, warm hats, coats, and boots to people who need them. We gave out 25 hot meals at our front door on Christmas day.

We offer a sincere and special thanks to all our committed and dedicated friends who spent many hours co-ordinating the whole process and many hours on the phone, at the desk and in the stores picking up all that was needed. Thanks also to the St. Vincent de Paul Society who loaned us their two trucks for storing and delivering the hampers.

Please know that your generous donations were put back into the lives of the needy in the Edmonton area. On behalf of all those we assisted, thank you very, very much.





The drama of the Christmas story can be understood best in terms of hospitality or welcome to the stranger. Elizabeth and Zechariah welcomed the strange gift of a baby in their old age. Mary and Joseph welcomed a baby that came in an even stranger way. In their material need

the Holy Family felt the poverty that many today know all too well.

But in the poverty of an outdoor childbirth in a rude shelter for livestock the angels summon the working poor, the shepherds to welcome the Savior. What this drama reveals is the age-old struggle for humanity to welcome the love of God and the strange forms it takes in approaching us. But the strangeness of God's love wears off the more that we receive it into our lives. Then the strangeness of how we have chosen to live our lives without it becomes more apparent.

Thank you for your generosity in helping Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples reverse the estrangement between people in our society and through the humble means of our parish and volunteers. Any funds that we have received but not yet spent will continue to be used to meet the needs of the poor who approach the parish for help.

Blessings to you,

***Fr. Susai Jesu, OMI, Ron Martineau
and Fr. Mark Blom, OMI***

Coping

BY JOE JACEK, OMI

SASKATOON –

At St. Anne's Seniors Complex where I am

chaplain, we are coping with the current restrictions due to the coronavirus.

Instead of using the chapel for all services because the health powers-that-be do not want the different groups here to intermingle, I also celebrate with small numbers in two other locations.

So far there has been only one case of COVID and that is in the nursing-home section, where I am allowed only rarely for end-of-life ministry. It was a new resident coming from a hospital where she was tested twice, both times negative, before being allowed to come.

Then soon after she moved in, she tested positive and then that stage protocol swung into effect. Staff working in that corridor were only allowed to work there, and there were extra strict hygiene measures. Fortunately she remained non-symptomatic and after a safe period everything is back to new normal there.

I am almost fully recovered from the October 2019 Portugal accident.* I can function quite well with my duties here, as well as go outside the complex to shop. I still use a walker or cane sometimes, and have one not-so-serious surgery to remove the plate and a dozen screws to come sometime in 2021.

** Oblate Spirit April 2020 shared Fr. Joe's story. During a visit to Portugal to visit Santiago de Compostela and the Shrine at Fatima, Fr. Joe was hit by a car and spent almost a month in hospital in Portugal before he could be transferred to Saskatoon.*



Fr. Joe Jacek



Filling a need

BY DIANE DOWNEY

HAMILTON – In the midst of the pandemic in 2020, De Mazenod Door Housing was opened with both a congregate living house for men dealing with homelessness and mental health issues and those in crisis, as well as an apartment for families new to Canada. We currently house four individuals living at ‘Eugene’s Place’ and a family from the Philippines at ‘Eugene’s Pad.’ What an incredible venture for us all!

In the midst of a ‘grey zone lockdown’ here, the true sense of community was shining brilliantly at the De Mazenod Door Outreach. Fr. Jarek Pachocki, OMI, spoke during his homily over Christmas about noticing the stars around us who are shining brightly. We have some true gems all around us, both inside and outside the De Mazenod Door.

It would take an entire page just to acknowledge everyone who stepped up to the plate to make this Christmas and

New Year's Day extra special for everyone at the De Mazenod Door. Whether volunteers were inside prepping meals for the day or out in the cold greeting each individual with a friendly smile, the atmosphere was that of 'hope'. We know that there is a dark cloud of COVID-19 lurking around us, but we will not live in fear! We will choose not to forget those who are struggling.

Our many guests (literally hundreds of them daily) were very appreciative and expressed gratitude and kindness toward our volunteers, staff and other guests, with comments of "God Bless You" and "thank you." One gentleman commented by saying "I began my 2021 with a full belly, it's going to be a good year."

During 2020 we served meals to well over 116,000 individuals. Hunger knows no virus!

(De Mazenod Door Outreach, a CRA registered non-profit, is an outreach ministry of St. Patrick Parish, in Hamilton ON. The Door officially opened in 2016 under the guidance of both Fr. Tony O'Dell, OMI, and Fr. Jarek Pachocki, OMI, and with a blessing by Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI, Bishop of Hamilton. It became officially registered as a not-for-profit charity in May of 2018. It has been a blessing for the poor and the marginalized since the onset. We are here to fill their bellies and their need.)



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.

Spirit of brotherhood

BY COSMAS KITHINJI, OMI

KENYA – As I came to the end of my initial formation in 2018, and discerned my preferences for my First Obedience, one of the activities I wanted to do was to work in collaboration with other consecrated men and women in Kenya. So, as I wrote to the superior general for my first obedience (a requirement at the end of initial formation), I had this to explain my preference to serve in Kenya:

“Following my academic training in spiritual theology I also hope to help the Kenyan Church, especially in areas pertaining to consecrated life, as she (the church) continues to strive to establish her Kenyan roots and identity within our universal church and as she strives to actualize her vocation to grow holistically and to reach out to God’s people.”

Our superior general granted me the opportunity to serve as a Missionary Oblate in Kenya. Following the start of my ministry here in Kenya in 2019, my wish to work with other consecrated people has been actualized.

Fr. Cosmas facilitates a retreat



Providentially, my formation ministry has allowed me the opportunity to do this. I have given one (long) retreat, numerous (short) recollections, talks, masses, and sacraments of



Oblates Cosmas Kithinji
and Fidele Munkiele

Reconciliation and the Eucharist. I have also had an opportunity to preside at one First Profession and three Renewal of Vows.

In all these ministries I see myself offering support to other ministers of the Gospel. At the same time as I minister to them, they minister to me with their unique and rich charisms, spiritualities, and ministries. Through these ministries, I have had opportunities to read different congregational constitutions and directories, especially when preparing for retreats and recollections. It's always enriching to pick new inspirations and to encounter new articulations of things that we have in our own constitutions and rules.

All of this has gone a long way to not only enriching my outlook on missionary and religious life, but also enriching my knowledge of consecrated life that I'm passing on to the novices in my care.

I always tell the other religious that I minister to: *"that as long as there is no good reason to decline an invitation to help, there is no reason for me to fail to reach out to them, since they are striving to build the same Kingdom of Jesus that I am also striving to establish."* In helping them, Jesus always gains.

Recently I was offered an opportunity to teach at *Consolata Institute of Philosophy* (where our students attend), in their Department of Religious Studies. So, I began in January of this new year. I see this as another opportunity to help prepare ministers of the Gospel for Kenya and beyond.



Women at work in the tea nursery

An inspirational boost

BY S.M. PRAVEEN, OMI

(Director, OMI Lay Associates)

KENYA – Formation is one of the most inspiring ministries that has motivated me as an Oblate priest in God’s vineyard, because the formation of lay associates does, and will, energize the Oblate spirit. Formation always brings a good impact on the life of the Oblates as we try to understand the charism and spirituality of our founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod.

Our constitution recognizes the need for our lay associates in the ministry of the Oblates, not only for prayer and spiritual activities, but to be co-workers in our Oblate ministries. As I engage in the formation of lay people in the Kenya mission, it is like returning to the source of my formation as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

COVID-19 prevented us from our regular meetings and sharing of experiences in 2020. So, after eight months, it was with enthusiasm and joy that I visited the lay associates in September. I experienced that sense of a family bond as I stayed with them in Kionyo for three days. Engaging in the normal routine of the lay associates has inspired and energized me again.

However, even during COVID-19, nothing could prevent them from coming together in groups (of course, taking the necessary precautions), to be involved in their responsibilities. Here I recall the words of Fr. Constant, OMI, while discussing the lay associates with him: “they are very busy in their work,” making me proud to hear of their commitment and service.

Each group took its turn, seriously, to come and join in prayer, spend time preparing the tea nursery to increase from 4,000 to 10,000 plants, and sharing their stories of happiness

and difficulties. The tea nursery is a small project they do to become financially stable to help the group and their services to the poor.

As the Oblate responsible for them, I feel inspired by their dedication to the good cause of the Kenya Mission and, at large, the whole congregation.

We will continue to be united by the spirit of St. Eugene de Mazenod to make the Kingdom of God more real around us.

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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/>



Learning assistance during COVID

A changing world

BY CONSTANT ILOMBUN, OMI

KIONYO, Kenya – The Coronavirus pandemic has affected the world in many ways. At the beginning of 2020 COVID-19 was not a reality in Africa, but the atmosphere started to change in March when a few countries in Africa announced their first cases of the coronavirus, including Nairobi.

Life in general was changed, and the usual routines interrupted by the closure of businesses, churches, learning institutions and other big offices. The consequences of this change are psychological, emotional, social and economic.

What is our experience in Kionyo? How do we cope with the situation, how does it affect our parishioners and our pastoral efforts?

We thank God that no case of coronavirus has been reported in our parish. We are doing well as Oblates and our parishioners are safe from coronavirus.

The government issued several measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus: social distancing, sanitizing, staying home, reduced movements, no big gatherings, no church gathering, etc.

The government encouraged people to work from home. This was a change without a good transition. As businesses closed, no activities and no resources were available for the common citizens. This created panic, fear, sadness and anxiety. It took time for people to adjust to the context of COVID-19.

Our parishioners were affected spiritually. Missing our Sunday celebrations and missing the Triduum and other Easter celebrations was a great distress for them. Funeral masses are allowed, but with a small group of 20 people, which is very unusual for the local people. It brought great joy to the family of the Kionyo water project manager when we were able to baptise their five-month-old baby in our community chapel.

Following the directives of the diocese, we limited our contact with the parishioners. But we keep in touch with our Christians and we assure them of our prayers. On some Sundays we try to check on and encourage our parishioners, and bring Holy Communion to the sick and elderly.

Our parishioners are mostly farmers and their only consolation is to do some work on the farm. Tea picking continues, but not as intensely as usual because the tea purchasing centres receive them just once a day to avoid congestion. This means that the quantity sold is reduced, as is their revenue.

The revenue of the parish came largely from Sunday collections, but since there are no masses, the parish is struggling to survive financially. The construction work on the main church and the Irimbene Prayer House is ongoing.

Our parishioners are concerned about our life as Oblates. We are grateful for their generosity. Some small communities brought food items that we shared with the Méru Oblate community.

It is not everyone who understands that coronavirus is real

and serious. Because there is no local case yet, some people think the virus is meant for those living in towns. We are therefore trying to inform our parishioners about the transmission of the virus, its effects, and how to prevent and protect themselves.

In our Kionyo community, three of our employees were given leave while two are remaining to take care of our cows and the compound.

Schools and other learning institutions have been closed. The government has created an e-learning platform through social media. Despite these efforts, it's still a big challenge for students from poor families who are not able to access a television, radio or the Internet.

However, we found a new way of assisting them by printing government-provided materials. We have organized learning for a few students three times per week, hoping it helps their studies at home.

We are grateful to our small Christian communities for supporting us with food and some money via mobile phone transfers.

Following the spirit of St. Eugene, our founder, we also share whatever we receive from our parishioners with some poor families. It is common now to have needy people knocking at our doors, and we get many phone calls from parishioners asking for any kind of assistance.

On another positive note, the value of family life, solidarity and generosity among people has emerged from COVID-19, as has the opportunity to better discover ourselves. We have learned that by protecting ourselves, we protect others.



Constant Ilombun, OMI
at a funeral

In your words

BY JOAN BLAIS

EDMONTON – My name is Joan (Schuster) Blais. As a child I thought that all priests were Oblates. I was a member of St. Jude's Parish in Leross, SK, a poor branch of Lestock, SK, where Fr. Menard lived. He was the first saint I met. His big heart was failing but he gave his all to ministering to rich and poor alike.

On many Fridays my parents would fill his old Ford with potatoes, carrots, chickens and other food, yet by Monday he often went hungry because "the children on the reservation needed the food more." He'd go 'threadbare' to help everyone.

When the load became too great, Fr. Ryley arrived with youthful enthusiasm. Despite being a no-nonsense person, he soon befriended Catholics and Protestants alike. For example, it was the principal of the public school who approached Fr. Riley about Catholic devotions such as First Friday. The principal said "they (students) can be late because they are my best students anyway."

Every summer we looked forward to two weeks of catechism with seminarians like Brothers Durocher and Richer. They stayed with my family and prepared us for first Communion and Confirmation. Despite our restless spirits they were able to capture our attention and were showing us a loving Father.

At age 15 my family moved to Fort Saskatchewan, AB. There our parish was Our Lady of the Angels, an appropriate name since it sat on the edge of jail property. Here we were blessed with Fr. Roland, who pastored two parishes and was the chaplain at the local jail. His concern for teenagers had him start a youth program and he trained mass sacristans, saying the rule was "Don't touch the Chalice."

Upon graduation from nursing with Grey Nuns, I met a



Ken Forster,
OMI



Jack Herklotz,
OMI



Bernie McCosham,
OMI

handsome Quebecois at mass, married him and travelled to Duncan, BC, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Portage and Mont Laurier in Quebec. Most churches needed pledges to build and we learned that God rewards a cheerful giver!

Upon returning to Edmonton we met Fr. Myles Power, who held masses in Saint Francis Xavier High School. Then came Fr. Jim Carroll, who struggled in the Jasper Place Muskeg to finish Annunciation Church. It opened in 1963 and was where my niece was baptised and my brother Al married, as were my three sons many years later. All were officiated by Fr. Joe MacNeil.

I previously mentioned Saint Francis Xavier High School, built by Fr. MacNeil and named after FX University. He was a life-long friend of my parents, myself and my offspring.

The Ranch, a home for seminarians, opened across from the church and was a great influence on west-end teens. For example, New Year's Eve began with a one-hour prayer and meditation, then mass, and ended with a celebration.

Annunciation flourished under Fr. Joe Rossiter, Fr. John Doetzel, Fr. Bernie McCosham, and others like Fr. Ken Forster, until he left for Kenya. Now the only Oblate parish is Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples. Even St. Charles doesn't have Fr. Jack Herklotz at the helm. Despite this, many of us still support foster children in Peru and Kenya.

After retirement from Misericordia Hospital I received my Pastoral Certificate from Bishop Collins and did lay ministry in the west end. Then I moved to St. Andrew's Centre for Seniors, attached to the church and under the auspices of the bishop. What a great place!

As my time on earth is winding down I am grateful for the privilege of knowing and being guided by Oblates. My adult children, who are doctors, a lawyer, engineer, sociologist and artist, express similar sentiments.

This COVID lockdown has affected my memory but be assured I'll remember you in my prayers. Please remember to pray for faith for myself and children.

Yes, Fr. Ken. I'm a dinosaur. I am not on-line!

God bless you all.

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

A time of transition

BY PETER OLIVER

SASKATOON – New inklings, seedlings and babies are ever so small and ever so fragile. After working for 13 years in our prisons and fostering a restorative approach to former inmates, it was time to try something new.



Peter and Madeline Oliver

People had been telling me, “you’d make an excellent mediator” and Brian Zimmer, a good friend and mentor, agreed. Mediators work with people in conflict, the kind of conflict experienced during marital crisis. At about that time, Pope Francis’s Pastoral Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, was in the headlines and people were talking about a new approach to families who are experiencing marital crisis.

Pondering these things, I turned to my wife Madeline. “Maybe we could do something together.” She had been working in pastoral ministry for years, our children were growing up and she was also asking how best to put her gifts at the service of the church.

We thought, when it comes to new and daring, talk to the Oblates. The provincial council was in Saskatoon and we asked to share our dream with them.

What we shared was that there is a gap in the church’s pastoral response to marital crisis. While the church is comfortable with rescuing marriages that are in trouble and helping people to grieve once a separation has happened, it really has not developed a capacity to walk with families as they are going through the experience of separation and divorce.

This, we noted, is a significant concern because we are abandoning people during one of the most difficult periods of their lives. The Oblates understood the need and responded by supporting us. We established an office at Queen's House of Renewal and Retreats in Saskatoon and started *Olive Branch Marriage and Family Ministry*. It is hard going but we are getting somewhere.

COVID-19 put things on pause but it didn't shut us down completely. With the help of the *Ex Corde Foundation* I was able to continue my training as a mediator and Madeline began a program called *ReStart* that focuses on resilience during the period of separation and divorce.

At the beginning of Advent this year, I also started a blog that brings issues of separation and divorce into dialogue with the Sunday readings. It is titled *100 Words*. Each post is exactly 100 words and our goal is to have it featured on as many parish and diocese websites as possible.

Amoris Laetitia is getting a boost too. At his first Angelus address of 2021, Pope Francis announced that the Catholic Church will devote the next 14 months to mine the treasures of this extraordinary call to renewal.

What are we called to? Cardinal Kevin Farrell, head of the *Dicastery for the Laity*, will guide the process. On a YouTube video on the dicastery website, Farrell described this as "a year to work toward new ideas, new ways of doing things, and new practical applications of this great Apostolic Exhortation."

We are excited about helping make this happen!

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI

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

YouTube channel:

Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions



Kenya

N O T E B O O K

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

OCT. 17

NAIROBI – Welcome to Nairobi, Kenya, for another exciting week of action!

Unfortunately the COVID-19 cases are reportedly increasing but I hear very little about it. Our great youth members, Collins and George, provided assistance (food) to 50 people at Mathare Slum on Saturday – much to the peoples' relief. Thanks to the generous people who have donated a little to help and others who have prayed.

Our fledgling group, the *Sons of Mazenod*, gave a nice donation to help with Fr. Nzioka's



Gerry Conlan, OMI



Collins facilitates food distribution in the Mathare Slum

People waiting for food distribution in the Mathare Slum



ordination expenses in October. This is a group of former Oblate students who were training to become Oblate missionaries/priests. Now they want their group to give back to the Oblates as a way of saying thanks for the training they received. These are small steps and encouraging for all of you who have supported the mission since it started in 1997. Thank you.

OCT. 24

Well, the COVID numbers are going up, but we are not sure if this is really true. Some are saying there are no reagents in the country, so how can they do the tests? Rather than dwell on matters above my paygrade, let's focus on matters where we can make a difference and boost people's ability to grow.

Collins and George once again did wonders at Mathare Slum last Sunday – thanks to the donors who chipped in this week.

I took Fr. Greg Oszust to visit the Ruben Centre, a good eye opener for him. He was much impressed by the place, especially the urban garden training and the “professional” orchestra made up of kids from Ruben Slum. It is such an inspiration to see the kids being given a chance to do something great!

Fr. Bill Stang, OMI, gets an honourable mention this week as he celebrated his 54th anniversary of ordination back in

The Rueben Centre slum kids' orchestra performs William Tell after only six days of practice



Canada. He is one of the first Oblate founders of the Kenya Mission in 1996-97. We all take a bow to those early men who laid a foundation and created so many positive attitudes of respect and trust in the Oblates by the local people, bishop and clergy.

We thank God for our friends here in the Kenya Mission. Julia, who works at the Education Office for Teachers, helped Br. Zachary's retired mother receive her pension that was held up in the bureaucratic system. It's all she has on which to survive. So I was happy to hear from Julia that it has all been sorted out. It has taken more than six months.



Fr. Joseph offers a blessing after his first mass at Kisaju

OCT. 31

Collins and George assisted another 35 families in the slum on Saturday and the people were very grateful. We hope the economy really picks up. After Mass at Nyumbani last Sunday, four of the youth came for a small "meeting" at the restaurant just to encourage each other.

George organizes food for distribution





Women in the Mathare Slum waiting for food distribution

NOV. 7

It sounds like the virus cases are really going up, with some mentioning people they know who have died. Also, just heard from a trusted source that 100 people have tested positive in Kisii, all linked with the Mashujaa Day celebrations hosted by the president on Oct. 20.

Collins and George did the food handout again on Saturday and assisted 30 families, plus some of the women present took food for half a dozen other elderly women who could not come to the meeting place. They are always so grateful.

Next week Collins moves to Mombasa to start university. He ran out of money organizing accommodation, so I helped him out with a transport and food for a week. His parents helped a lot but the low tea bonus in Kionyo means they are also struggling. I'll have to get another youth to continue working with George in the slums.

NOV. 14

George and Stephen, two of our Nairobi/Kionyo youth, had the sadness of their paternal grandmother dying at the age of 120. Amazing! Many of the youth made small donations to the family to help with the funeral expenses. It's inspiring when they give at a time when they are struggling.

George continued with the Mathare slum food handout, and called on another youth member, David, to help out. Another 30 odd families were assisted.

All the Kionyo Parish Prayer Houses are having one-day fund-raising events so we pray they will get something. These are hard times.



The grandmother of George and Stephen dies at the amazing age of 120

NOV. 21

On Sunday I joined a few of the youth for a meeting at a restaurant to boost morale among the youth.

With Collins in Mombasa and George away for his grandmother's funeral, there was no charity handout at Mathare over the weekend. And the funds are practically diminished.

So we can't give what we don't have. Let's pray there is more work coming for all.



Sons of Mazenod donate a lecturn to the church in Kisaju

NOV. 28

After mass at the Children's Home on Sunday, I went to Kenyatta Hospital and anointed Erick Mwenda, who was struck by a hit-and-run car. His fiancé is expecting their second child in January. He died three days later and his funeral was in Kionyo.

I was impressed with the ICU ward – very clean, lots of medical machines, doctors and nurses. But I was shocked by the reception area on the ground floor where more than 100 people gathered, sitting side by side, or standing in line close together, waiting for a piece of paper to visit relatives.

The Hospital bill was US\$2,500. Thankfully, the National Health Fund (NHIF) picked up most of the bill because he was a member. There is something seriously unjust about innocent bystanders causing families to go bankrupt. Hit-and-run accidents should be picked up by the community, not the individual.

DEC. 5

Happily, we saw the youth help more people in Mathare Slum, about 30 women and all their children. I was happy to learn that each week they distribute food, they seek out different people.

Fr. Gerry celebrates mass with the Gitonga family



Sadly, another Nairobi youth member, Lucy, shared how her cousin died of COVID and left a huge hospital bill. We are all contributing something small and pray all goes well. She was very touched our youth members made sacrifices for her cousin, even though they are also struggling.

Fr. Fidele continues with his prison ministry to good effect. A woman, now 44, was released last week after 18 years in prison. Fr. Fidele's ministry supports her integration back to her village.



Associates celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception at Kisaju

DEC. 12

On Wednesday, after our celebration of the Immaculate Conception Feast at Kisaju, the pre-novices went home for their first holiday in 2020. Today (Dec. 12) we all sent blessings to Fr. Faustin for his birthday at Larmudiac.

DEC. 19

It was a dry week with no rain, the same as most of the country, so we are a little concerned about the trees at Kiirua. It seems there might be some drama developing between Kenya and Somalia as all our diplomats were given seven days' notice to leave Somalia. And all Somali diplomats left Kenya. The Somali government got upset when our President Uhuru met with the self-declared leader of an area of Somalia called Somaliland. Let's pray for peace and a good outcome.

DEC. 26

We were happy to hear that a good downpour of rain fell at Kiirua farm to give the new tree seedlings a much-needed boost. At Karen we had a nice overnight shower on Wednesday

to help the grass and veggies. As a Mission we sent out Christmas bonuses to all our workers, those still on unpaid leave at home received more than those back at work. They are all okay but are struggling due to the lack of work.



A Kisaju
parishioner



Transporting an Oblate cross to the Nakuru parish

The youth in Nairobi continued their outreach to help some poor families in Mathare Slum. George even celebrated his birthday while there. The people appreciated the help for Christmas.

We were happy to receive Fr. Daquin and Br. Moses from Méru on Christmas evening. Then Fr. Fidele took Br. Moses to the bus station early Saturday morning to go home for a short rest. Our cook Dancan left early Wednesday morning to go home for Christmas in Kisumu. We are happy for Dancan because he has been in lockdown at our house since late July.

JAN. 2

The youth are starting to trickle back to Nairobi for university and some for boarding school. There are many struggles for them in this depressed economic situation, but they seem to cope somehow. George and Andrew were busy on New Year's Day, handing out food parcels to some of the poorest families in the Mathare Slum. The people are so grateful, and our youth are also moved by the work they do.

Fr. Fidele visited Kisaju and checked the four-acre property, then greeted the community. Fr. Greg Oszust took up his official leadership duties in Kisaju on New Year's Day.

We've been celebrating masses faithfully for the sisters at Resurrection Gardens and they have been very kind with cakes and tiramisu. I'm not sure much will remain when the others return!

Over the last few days I've enjoyed wonderful silence and peaceful absence of people around the house. Fr. Fidele comes for meals but is still in the process of moving. While he's not here I usually have the TV running in the background in my room (either classical music when I have to think or curiosity

St. Eugene safely strapped in for transport to Nakuru parish



Farm manager Euticus and his wife Ann with their children



channel when it's boring work). It's amazing the interesting science, wildlife/nature and engineering info I've picked up over the last six months.

JAN. 9

The Nairobi youth are stepping up to meet the new year: they've decided to contribute \$1 per month each to build a fund for activities and helping needy causes like orphanage visits or when a funeral affects one of the group.

Euticus, our farm manager at Kiirua, recently had a baby boy and they had him baptised as Gerard Mugambi. I'm not sure who they named him after, but it seems like a pretty good name!

Our Kiirua farm received a nice shower of rain for the tree seedlings and things look hopeful. Our four bulls are growing bigger day by day and will bring a good income over the next 12 months.

Fr. Greg helped Fr. Dionisius move his personal effects from Kisaju Parish to Karen, where he will be undertaking some special studies until May.

Healing Prayers book



We invite you to receive a copy of our Healing Prayers book that can be used daily to pray for healing in your life, in the world, local community, family or for special intentions of healing the body, mind and spirit.

Please indicate on the enclosed gift form if you wish to receive the Healing Prayers book.

MAMI now has a YouTube channel

Would you like to know more about our Oblate mission in Kenya?

To have a taste of the history and projects funded through MAMI, check out our YouTube channel under the name of **Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions**.

Also, view the list of names commemorated by Fr. Ken Forster, OMI, who celebrated an All Souls' Day Mass Nov. 2, 2020, to commemorate all deceased MAMI members and their deceased loved ones.



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