

# Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



February 2022



*Life in the Missions*

# The adventures of Fr. Greg



If you were to make a movie about an Oblate priest, you might want to check out the life of Fr. Grzegorz (Greg) Oszust, pictured on the front cover. He came to Canada from Poland and served in the Northern Canada Missions.

Too cold? Try the equator. Next stop ... Kenya! Must learn Swahili, so a little language schooling in Tanzania, where he was stranded when COVID hit. Back to Kenya. A dangerous encounter with bees left his face ballooned with bites. There was the pregnant woman who needed a ride to the hospital, only to have her water break in his vehicle shortly after she got in. (It was a boy!).

That done, it was off to visit the rural mission stations. On the next few pages, Fr. Greg vividly describes those harrowing journeys on roads (using the term loosely) that reminded us of back-country Saskatchewan adventures in the mid 1950s. (We are of that vintage!)

The next Indiana Jones? Hmmm. He even looks a little like Harrison Ford.

Ahhh. Oblate life. The Spirit is at work.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

Fr. Greg in Tanzania





# Roads to the remote missions

BY GRZEGORZ [GREG] OSZUST, OMI

KISAJU, Kenya – I started my Sunday at 5:30 a.m. with prayer and breakfast before going to the outstations. I travelled with Br. Joseph Magambo, OMI, to StonyAthi and, later, to Embuyangat. Both mission stations are in the middle of nowhere, with only a small church and a couple of buildings around it. Most of the people come out from the bushes of savanna-like land: they are mostly herders of cows, sheep or goats or a combination. They are the *Maasai* people.

We started our journey at 7:30 a.m. My spine already started to hurt because the roads are very bad. It feels like you are driving with square wheels! So the trip usually is very slow



and bumpy, with a couple of rivers to cross. Most of the rivers are dry right now but during the rainy season it's impossible to cross them; sometimes the missions do not have a priest for a month or more.

Despite these inconveniences, I always look forward to seeing the people, to pray with them and have tea with them afterwards. Another incentive is to see all the wildlife along the way. This area is sparsely populated, so we can see most of the animals with the exception of big predators, like the lions (probably a healthy thing for us!). After 45 minutes of *bumpiness*, we finally reach a small metal church. Only the cate-

chist was present but, far away, we could see some people coming. So we waited about 40 minutes before starting mass.

After mass that day, there was no time to hang around because of the delayed start. We had to move on to Embuyangat mission. The ride went through a river but, luckily, there'd been no rain for almost a month and the crossing was not a great



Road to Embuyangat  
Prayer House





Postulants playing volleyball

challenge. It was very dry and very dusty. Often, people wear a mask not for COVID, but because of the dust!

At Embuyangat, we had a lovely mass in the Maasai language with the help of the catechist. Usually, after mass there is tea and some mandazi (local doughnut). However, this time we couldn't stay because I needed to meet our postulants who were on a four-day retreat in Nairobi.

As we set out from Embuyangat to our Oblate House (postulancy), we passed some animals and stopped to take pictures, finally reaching the house about 2 p.m. (*shaken* but not *stirred*) and left for Nairobi at 3 p.m., arriving at our Oblate pre-novitiate about 4:30 p.m. However, the postulants and pre-novices were playing volleyball and I was forced to wait (I now feel more sympathy for all the parents!). We finally arrived home in Kisaju at 7:30 p.m. after a fruitful but very tiresome day. We gave thanks because there was no breakdown or accidents along the way!

## ONE WEEK LATER

Fr. Gideon, our parish priest, had scheduled me to go with Br. Joseph to Oltoruto village and, later, to Ilpolosat mission. The road to Oltoruto is relatively good (by Kenyan standards),

with the exception of one river crossing: there's a narrow kind of cement pathway "bridge", partially washed away at both ends by floods. Our old, squeaky, Toyota managed that with the superb driving of Br. Joseph.

We arrived at Oltoruto on time and started mass at 8 a.m. (we are training them in the discipline of time). Oltoruto is a small village about 20 minutes from Kisaju. What struck me most along the way was the number of different denominational churches (about four), and at least two, in the village, that I know about and, of course, our own Roman Catholic Church. It made me wonder just how many people live in the area, because there are not many houses around!

But I digress: *back to our "amazing" roads!* After finishing mass at Oltoruto, there is not much time to hang around. We drove on to Ilpolosat mission one hour away over a very rough road (the pictures give you some idea). By the time we arrived, I felt like I'd been working with a jackhammer!

Upon arrival, there was only the catechist and his wife. He was busy making phone calls to check if people were on the way. Some of the people walk for two to three hours through the bush to reach the church, so it was wise for us to wait a little longer, so their walk would not be in vain.



Catechist and Fr. Greg

We waited about one hour in really pleasant weather: 26 degrees, sunny with a little breeze and no dust (no roads)! I took a chair from the church and sat under the *acacia* tree. I could have stayed there forever, but the people came and reminded me why I was here.

We started mass by 11:45 a.m., followed by tea with the people and talked about their animal herds. They informed me there are many hyenas around, so the animals in the herd are guarded, very closely, all the time. Another concern is the thieves (rustlers). There is much theft, and the roads contribute to it. Better roads equals better access to animals equals better escape with the loot! We learn something new every day. But, in the back of my mind, I was thinking we'll never have a good road in this area because people still live the life of herders.

We left *Ilpolosat* at 2:30 p.m. and Br. Joseph changed the road back home to reduce that "shaky" feeling again. That was like going through a labyrinth of roads, and I don't know how he managed to remember the right way, but he's been here about five years. I was happy we changed course, because we saw zebra, wildebeest, and many small antelope, ostriches and colourful birds. Finally, we arrived home at 4 p.m.

To all of you, thanks for your support: every prayer counts (no accidents), and every penny counts, too (for the petrol and shock absorbers!). Without your prayers and financial support, we would not be able to reach the people, because they are not able to support us fully – maybe five per cent on a good day! Thank you for being a missionary with us.



# The Maasai ministry

BY JOSEPH MAGAMBO, OMI

KISAJU, Kenya – My ministry among the Maasai people is a real Oblate ministry! Our fundamental call as Oblates is to evangelize the most abandoned, the poor with many faces, marked with zeal for the salvation of their souls.

I've always relied on the Grace of God, which has assisted me in carrying out the ministry effectively, despite the challenges I do face. Scriptures, encouragement from my Oblate community members and my ongoing spiritual advancement have also aided me in my ministry to the pastoralist community of the Maasai.

The main challenges I have faced are the language barrier, the harsh climate and some elements of their culture. In the Maasai there are natural events that affect their pastoral lives negatively such as extreme drought, the wet season and, recently, the locust invasion. During the dry season it's hard to find the Maasai people because they migrate with their animals in search of pasture. As they move with their animals, I often accompany them for a while, encouraging them to have hope and trust in the Lord despite the challenges they are facing.

As I journey with them, I am touched by their sharing and their strong faith in their ENGAI (God). They also believe Engai will provide them with water and food for their animals. This migration leaves them in desolate places with nowhere to attend mass or other church functions during the drought period. On the other hand, in the wet season, some areas receive so much rain that the roads become impassable, making it impossible to reach those areas for ministry.

Some negative cultural practices like female genital mutilation, early marriage and polygamy among some of the Maasai is another challenge. Some of these practices are outlawed by



the government but some people are unwilling to let them go. Even the young people who have been exposed to other cultures (and some with higher education), whom we would expect to enlighten their communities about these negative cultural practices, are unwilling to do it. They obediently follow and live by all instructions and practices of their elders, despite the consequences they have in their lives or their community.

However, with the grace of God and my small efforts, I've noticed some positive changes in cultural values. This is only possible through personal sacrifice and collaborating with the Maasai, especially by participating in their much-valued cultural celebrations. In these celebrations, I sometimes gently point out issues they need to improve. Since the Maasai, as a community, appreciate me and my work among them, they always invite me to their celebrations. I honour these invitations whenever I'm available, or I send an apology.

My ministry among the Maasai is effective because I'm available to them, appreciate them and participate in their cultural celebrations. This has enhanced my relationship with them, leading to an ever-growing closeness.

**Maasai community migrating with their animals  
in search of water and pasture**



# It's time to move again!

BY GIDEON MBERIA, OMI

KISAJU, Kenya – In day-to-day life, people move from one point to another for different reasons. However, COVID-19 has caused many movements to be halted for people to stay safe. For the Maasai community, who are mainly pastoralists, this has not been an easy time. Generally, the Maasai are known for their movements, looking for green pastures for grazing their cattle and sheep.

These movements not only affect them socially, but also spiritually. At this writing in late autumn, they're experiencing heavy droughts in some parts, because the area is semi-arid. For several months there has been no rain, especially where our Oblate mission is located. Due to the lack of rain, many people have migrated to other areas looking for green pastures and water for their herds. Even those left behind, mostly mothers and children, will go grazing far from their homes, fetching firewood and water for domestic use. It's normal for women to leave by 4 a.m. and return late in the afternoon. Water is one of the greatest challenges in the Maasaine area.

When this period of the year arises, our churches are affected greatly because of these movements. You can imagine the church having 20 to 30 members in a normal time, reducing now to three or six members, or even just the Catechist! At times it calls us to visit them either in their homes at a convenient time, or sometimes we meet them at their new temporary settlements.



Maasai moving  
with their cattle

Recently, I was joined by Br. Joseph Magambo, OMI, and George Muthui (former chair of Oltoruto Catholic Church) to visit families. We only found children with their mothers. The



Joseph Magambo, OMI, in a traditional house

other family members had moved to new settlements. We could not do much this day, but the following was part of our experience.

We came across an empty Manyata, a traditional house. The owner had migrated to a new settlement. But because of our passion for our mission and love for our people, we are called to be with them in their joys and suffering. So, the following day Br. Joseph accompanied some of our parishioners as they moved to new settlements with their flocks. Now we'll plan how to reach out to them, especially to celebrate Holy Mass with them.

It's not an easy Oblate Mission in Kisaju. Such movements of the people make them difficult to reach, but we thank God for giving us the opportunity to serve such people, especially by walking with them for a time.

Our heartfelt thanks and prayers are extended to those who continue to support us in this mission in your different ways. May God bless you always!

*(Gideon Mberia is the parish priest in Kisaju Parish in the diocese of Ngong)*

# Gentle encouragement

**BY PRAVEEN MAHESAN SELVADURAI, OMI**

KIONYO, Kenya – The ministry to our youth is essential and requires time. Youth are like arrows in the bows of a community, which means that they need to be guided and directed towards the right target.

I'm engaged with the youth in Kionyo, and I've found that they need lot of guidance and support to bring them out of their comfort zones, to engage with other age groups in the community, and sometimes their own age-groups. We have many good young people, with lots of energy, but who are wandering around without a clear direction.

We're trying, these days, to bring them together so that they might be pulled with sufficient pressure to focus on the bigger picture of their lives. We have meetings, personal sharing and some activities.

Part of the pressure applied is the discipline of Adoration which we organize for them. This helps bring them closer to each other, and to God. The silence with companions is a different experience for them. If nothing else, it gives their hands and eyes a break from Facebook!

Youth gathered for adoration







Fr. Garry and Deacon Nahanee

# Mass celebrated in Squamish language for first time

BY AGNIESZKA RUCK

NORTH VANCOUVER, BC – It was a Mass that will make the history books, said Deacon Rennie Nahanee.

Mass was celebrated in the Squamish language for the first time at St. Paul's Indian Catholic Church in North Vancouver Sept. 26, just days before Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

"I see this as reconciliation between the Church and our Native people," said Deacon Nahanee, a member of the Squamish First Nation.

"I believe this will build our language up."

In many cases Indigenous children sent to residential schools were strictly forbidden to speak their languages of origin under pain of physical punishment, said Deacon Nahanee. That led to many of their languages going silent, underground, or dormant.



Thanks to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, Indigenous languages are enjoying more support and experiencing something of a revival, he said. To have the Squamish language embraced and spoken at Mass takes it to new heights.

"We have language teachers, and they are teaching social and descriptive speaking about places, events, and people, but when you talk the language of the Church, it's a whole different level."

Fr. Garry Laboucane, an Oblate priest with a First Nations heritage, celebrated the mass wearing a feathered war bonnet (a symbol of leadership) and vestments made of buckskin.

Deacon Nahanee said the pews at St. Paul's were full. Many non-Indigenous people attending were "full of respect" and eager to learn some new words, quickly catching on that "halth kwisti mas" means "Amen."

Deacon Nahanee said a woman approached him afterward and said it was the most profound mass she'd experienced in 17 years.

"She found the spirituality and the songs and the atmosphere very calming, very different from other churches. There seemed to be an 'aliveness' there," he said. "I think that was the best description."

The entire mass could not be offered in Squamish, since



Fr. Garry with parishioners

an approved translation doesn't exist. So while the songs and many prayers were done in the Squamish language, the readings were in English. Deacon Nahanee said it would take many years to translate the readings and prayers, such as the words of consecration, appropriately.

He said certain words are particularly difficult to translate. For example, there isn't a Squamish word that accurately portrays "church" as a building and as the body of Christ. "We're going to be improving and growing as we go along."

Still, he sees the mass as a strong step that the Squamish people and Catholics can take together toward full reconciliation.

*(Reprinted with permission from the BC Catholic)*

# 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)**







# Food for all

HAMILTON – De Mazenod Door Outreach in Hamilton served a bountiful lunch of turkey with all of the trimmings on Christmas day to the many ‘guests’ who donned our doorstep, braving the cold in need of sustenance and understanding.

They received not only a beautiful meal, but a stuffed gift bag given to each one by Santa Claus himself (aka Br. Dan Dionne, OMI). No one is forgotten on Christmas, not even those without a home to visit.

A roast beef luncheon and all of the delicious accompaniments was the menu for New Year’s day. The many that came for a meal left with not only full bellies, but with a sense of love and caring along with many blessings for better things to come in the year ahead.



Fr. Mike and students praying before exams

# On a crusade

**BY MIKE DECHANT, OMI**

SASKATOON – As the priest chaplain of Holy Cross High School, it has been a pleasure and constant affirmation to join in the spiritual, academic and physical life of the staff and students at the school.

Our motto, A Tradition of Excellence, is a constant reminder that “God is good ... all the time!” This little invocation regularly ends each prayer, whatever the activity or situation.

## **OUT-REACH:**

The Holy Cross Catholic Studies classes embarked on a Crusade Against Hunger to help support the Saskatoon Food Bank. Through the efforts of our students, they managed to collect 2,866 pounds of food. The spirit of volunteerism and a passion to help those in need is alive and well at Holy Cross.

## **“PRAY WITH FIRE”**

For the past years, each time the students prepare for their academic final exams, the Chaplaincy Team (me and Tom Saretsky) supports the students with Pray with Fire. Before the

students write their exam, they come to the chapel and light a candle. We pray God's blessings over them – to have a clear mind, good memory and energy, peace in their hearts. While they write ... we pray. Our motto is "We pray, you pass!" This prayer support is highly appreciated by the students. To highlight a delightful moment of gratitude, a former student of Holy Cross and now a student at the University of Saskatchewan shared, "Writing exams now at the university doesn't seem the same without a prayer candle burning for me."

## HEALING

Dravyn Tom, an Indigenous student at Holy Cross, contributed the following poem:

*Wear ORANGE because:*

*For the children who didn't go home to see family,*

*And for the ones who don't have marked graves.*

*Wear ORANGE because:*

*For those who made it to tell stories,*

*And who were stripped of their culture, identity, beliefs  
of their culture.*

*That's why we wear ORANGE*

*Because ... we are the first generation to learn, and feel, and  
watch, and hear the pain, for 100 years of generations  
lost, in the Residential Schools.*

Food collected for the Saskatoon Food Bank





Fr. Cosmas offers mass for MAMI members

# The good we do, comes back to us

**BY COSMAS KITHINJI KUBAI, OMI**

KAREN, Kenya – Last year some nuns called to see if I could spare some time to anoint and give Communion to the father of one of the sisters in their community. “We’ve been looking for a priest, and preferably one who can speak the language of her father, but none are available.”

After I accepted, they asked me the amount of stipend I needed, describing the situation of the family. “The man has been living in the city with his son, receiving treatment for a terminal illness. He lives on expensive medicine and visits the





Fr. Cosmas with nuns

clinic to see a specialist almost every week. The son who is taking care of him had to quit his regular low-income job, to get time to take him to the clinic (the employer couldn't tolerate his regular absences). The son now runs a small shop from which he pays rent for his family, his children's education, and his father's treatment."

After hearing the story, I told the sisters: "As missionaries, we are there for the people, and when you are struggling, we should reach out to you. After all, he has freely given his daughter to serve in the church as a sister. I feel sorry when people lack the sacraments, and in this case, even sadder when a sister who serves God's people spiritually every day, has no one

to serve her father spiritually!"

We set aside one Sunday afternoon and went to visit the father.



Fr. Cosmas with the family of a sick parent

He had gone four years without receiving Eucharist. I heard his confession, followed by the rite of anointing with Holy Communion. After this visit, I've returned several times with the sisters. Just like the first visit, the father always expresses his gratitude and says how much he misses going to church and receiving Eucharist. Whenever we visit, we connect with the daughter, the nun working in another part



Fr. Cosmas gets his first COVID vaccine

of the country, and she expresses gratitude to her fellow sisters.

Through our visits, the fraternity of the sisters has touched me deeply; those who live close make sure that the father of one of their own receives the spiritual care he needs. Do we care for our colleagues and friends this much?

Recently we connected with another group of nuns that live nearby and we went to visit the ailing father together. The idea was for these sisters to get to know him so that they can visit regularly and introduce him to the parish community. This became an opportunity to create new bonds.

During this visit, the man looked at all of us, from three congregations, and said: "When I look at you, I see I have worked, and my work was not in vain." He mentioned how he struggled to educate his children and at some point, to take care of his aged and dying father.

"Because of that I got a sister (nun) in my family and, through that, I now have all of you as my children." (By being

the father of a consecrated person, you become the father of all consecrated people.) “Because of my sacrifice for my father, now I have my son sacrificing for me. I believe, just as my father told me, that I will also be cared for,” he said.

I saw a very grateful and contented man. What a grace to come to that stage of life, with a sense of contentment and sense of achievement! There is not much material riches to show for his work, but he is content and grateful.

He also expressed his appreciation for his granddaughter, whom he said, “prays even more than her parents and prays with me! Thanks to the Catholic school she attends,” he said. “My Catholic faith will not die in the family.” The new sisters who had joined me that day also run the school the granddaughter attends. They received, first-hand, an appreciation for their ministry.

Experiences like this have led to these reflections:

1. The good we do, comes back to us.
2. A missionary’s territory and work are dictated by the people’s need and our concern about these needs.
3. Material gains and riches are not necessary for contentment and gratitude.
4. Fraternity: It’s worthwhile caring about our colleagues and friends. “It does them a lot of good.”

*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)*





# Unity in diversity

BY STEPHEN MAKORI MOSE, OMI

CEDARA, South Africa – *Heritage Day* (Sept. 24) in South Africa, particularly in our Oblate community, was an event unlike any other. Members from our 11 nationalities expressed themselves differently, and what an amazing day it was!

It began with the Eucharist, as usual, but this time the brothers in cassocks gave way to cultural and traditional attires. Some brothers vested like herdsmen in the fields. You might think they were bushmen from West Africa or the Maasai of Kenya. Our piano yielded to drums and marimbas.

In his homily, the superior echoed the words of unity that are expressed in different ways. As sons of St. Eugene, we are united with Oblate values and, above all, the love of Christ. After mass there was a photo session, and the brothers gathered in different groups with their attires.



Since it was a public holiday, the kitchen staff had a break, and the brothers prepared different types of meals. Chapatti was the hot-cake of the day, prepared by the Kenyan brothers, and now demand for chapatti in the community is being discussed.



Heritage Day in Cedara, South Africa

The brothers from the mountain kingdom of Lesotho and brothers of South Africa expressed themselves in native languages. This challenged many of us to get to know the language of the native people for better evangelization.

It was a relaxed day with different events, but with much richness to our growth as sons of St. Eugene. The Oblate values that unite us, especially charity among ourselves, was vividly displayed and will be embraced more in our communities.

Our senior Oblates encouraged us to always be Apostolic men and seek to build our community with our diverse gifts and talents. The things that divide the community were shunned and instead we embraced the love of Christ through our Oblate values as sons of St. Eugene.

**Check out our Facebook page:**



**Lacombe Canada MAMI**

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



**YouTube Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions**



# Community Life

BY DAVID OJIAMBO, OMI

CEDARA, South Africa – Part of community life calls every Oblate to willingly and generously participate in community projects. At Cedara we raise poultry, pigs and rabbits, as well as tend a garden.

These projects are not only for self-sustainability of the scholasticate, but are part of the formation process for scholastics. The projects are operated by the scholastics, under the guidance and supervision of the formators. The projects help to train and prepare Oblates for future project management and stewardship of the temporal goods of the congregation and church, and help train the scholastics in the spirit of self-reliance.

My personal responsibility is the poultry project: the larger section is for chicken layers for eggs, and the rest are chicken broilers for meat. The poultry project also supplies organic manure for our gardening project, showing us how each project adds value to other projects, and trains us to look at the bigger picture and think outside the box.

*(Br. David Ojiambo is studying theology at St. Joseph's Theological Institute in Cedara, South Africa.)*



David Ojiambo, OMI

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Manila slums

# Fear on the streets of Manila

BY SYLVESTER KAKUKU, OMI

MANILA – “Brother! Brother! *Kailangan natin ng pagkain! Gutom na Kami!*” (We need food! We are hungry!)

These words came from four street children near our scholasticate house. Bong, Juan, and their two younger brothers were born in Manila but, unfortunately, their family lives under a bridge. Their parents are very poor and move around the city selling peanuts, an *occupation* that has been seriously affected by the pandemic.

I met them a few months ago while doing the community shopping. I have been working with them and other street children for almost two years. They reminded me of one saying from Mother Teresa “I’m thirsty,” which touched me deeply.



Manila slums

I helped them with a little food I purchased from a nearby shop and although it wasn't much, it was enough to sustain them that day.

The pandemic has really affected families living on the streets. Their sources of income cannot generate anything, since everyone is afraid of the virus. As a community, we are helping them and other poor people in the slums with rice, as well as some processed goods, although it is never enough. Please pray for more generous local people here in Manila.

*(Br. Sylvester is a Kenyan scholastic who started his training in the Philippines in 2018 and took first vows in 2019. Part of his scholastic training is to work in the slums of Manila.)*

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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/>

# A role to play

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – In the Bible's Book of Wisdom (11: 25-26) we read, *"You love all that exists...all things are Yours, God, lover of life."* Those are lovely words, but aren't we Christians wantonly destroying God's creation?



Joe Gunn

Last year brought British Columbia unheralded heat domes, wildfires, and unprecedented flooding, convincing many that climate change impacts must be addressed. One Indigenous salmon fisher asked himself, "Is this the end of the world?" Teenaged climate activist Greta Thunberg termed the inadequate response of political leaders at November's UN climate conference "a global greenwashing festival" of more and more "blah, blah, blah." Canada has never met any target we have ever set to reduce our greenhouse gases emissions.

So, Pope Francis has invited Catholics to act.

The *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, launched around the world on Nov. 14, is a "journey that will see our communities committed in different ways to becoming totally sustainable, in the spirit of integral ecology," the pope said.

In his letter to Oblates on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Oblate Superior General Fr. Louis Lougen wrote: "Pope Francis has called us to an ecological conversion, and this Action Platform is meant to involve us in concrete ways of caring for our common home and for the poor. Provinces, delegations and missions are asked to initiate concrete steps to promote a healthy environment, thus caring for the gift of God's creation and for the poor. Parishes, small ecclesial com-

munities, schools and universities, youth groups, retreat centres, etc. are called upon to respond. Many Oblates are already engaged in this effort, and we are called to increase and widen our actions...”

Over the next seven years, the Action Platform will animate all sectors of the church to adopt actions to address several goals, including:

- Adopting renewable energy;
- Achieving carbon neutrality;
- Defending all life;
- Solidarity with Indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups;
- Adopting simpler lifestyles;
- Fostering ecological education and spirituality;
- Advocating for sustainable development;
- Following ethical investment guidelines, including divestment from fossil fuels and other industries that harm the planet.

We all have a role to play, individually and collectively. OMI Lacombe Canada has appointed Bro. Leonard Rego to lead this work. Feel free to contact him at [lrego@ustpaul.ca](mailto:lrego@ustpaul.ca)

*(Joe Gunn is the Executive Director of Le Centre Oblat – A Voice for Justice.)*



## 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/](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.





# Kenya

## NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

### OCT. 9

NAIROBI – This was a good week. Our annual retreat at Nakuru Diocese started on Monday and we returned home Saturday morning. The Bishop of Nakuru, Maurice Mahatia, celebrated mass for us. I was very impressed with the carved lectern, altar and tabernacle, all requiring extraordinary skill. The retreat was scheduled for June, but the lockdowns caused it to be delayed.



Gerry Conlan, OMI



Nakuru  
Retreat,  
Chapel  
altar



Nakuru  
Retreat,  
Chapel  
tabernacle



Nakuru  
Retreat,  
Chapel  
lectern

Br. Phelix was ordained a deacon this week in Cedara, South Africa. We were praying for him during the week on retreat.

## OCT. 16

For most of the week, I concentrated on the 2022 budget preparation. Meanwhile, Fr. Faustin came to Kisaju to interview the postulants and meet with the pre-novices. It's that time of year again, and reports have to be prepared for all our young men in formation.



Deacon Phelix Johya, OMI, ordination

## OCT. 23

I'm always amazed by our Nairobi youth group members who always seem to find something to chip in for the group, so the group can help some of the members when a crisis arises. Denis, our youth, has just one more project before graduating with a statistics degree. They now demand his final project be bound like a book. So we chipped in for that. Meanwhile, Jane, another youth member, is looking for a job for Denis because she also did statistics. I love the networking growing among our youth.

St. Stephens on the Move youth group celebrate Fr. Gerry's birthday





Kionyo lay associates help with church cleanup

## OCT. 30

I was sorry to hear that Martin, a youth member, lost his job at Toyota, so he needed a little short-term help to look after his dad's medication. So many great young people sacrifice much of their incomes to care for family members. He

said he'll pay back next month and I'm sure he will.

Fr. Praveen arranged for our wonderful Oblate lay associates to help clean up around the new Kionyo church area, and Fr. Jean-Pierre was entertaining the primary school children at Njogune Prayer House. Fr. Faustin was promoting infant baptism at Larmudiac Parish.



Fr. Jean-Pierre visits with school children

## NOV. 6

The country is slowly opening and coming back to normal. However, we are more cautious these days about driving at night because of less security. People are struggling financially and getting desperate.

Our finance meeting to begin reviewing the 2022 budgets went well and we finished earlier than expected. Meanwhile, we enjoyed a party here in Karen for Fr. Greg, who celebrated his 54th birthday.

## NOV. 13

I turn 60 this week. Dad told me to adjust my schedule according to my age. It might take a while but I guess it's good

advice. God has already started by slowing me down. I went for a run and when I jumped over a concrete road drain, I tore my calf muscle. It was terribly painful, and I could barely limp back to the house, only 40 metres away. I managed to get to Nyumbani for mass, and afterwards their nurse checked it out. It will take about six weeks to heal!

## **NOV. 20**

Although the Oblates around the country are well, many people are not. Environmental activists and World Food Program officials in Northern Kenya say extreme droughts caused by climate change have turned what used to be a “land of plenty” into one where people are struggling for food.

## **NOV. 27**

Fr. Cosmas chaired the inaugural meeting of the 25th Anniversary Committee to plan May celebrations of the arrival of the Canadian mission in 1997. There’s a lot to do and too many options at this stage.

My leg continued to improve a lot this week. After seeing the physiotherapist again, I’m now able to walk almost normally, but slowly and gently. The good news is that the swelling and blue colour is almost gone.

## **DEC. 4**

Serious drought continues in northern Kenya. Many head of livestock have perished. The Samburu and other Maasai groups are busy hand-feeding some livestock and lifting some up every few hours to keep their muscles working a bit when they get weak.

The most amazing news came earlier in the week when a woman stepped out of a shack on the side of the road and waved Fr. Greg Oszust to stop his vehicle. He almost didn’t stop because he was running late to go to the remote prayer houses for early morning Sunday masses.

The woman asked Fr. Greg to help her friend, who was heavily pregnant. So Fr. Greg got them in the car and drove towards the medical clinic. Before he went 100 metres, the woman's water broke! When they arrived at the medical clinic, Fr. Greg asked if there was anything he could do. "Pray and get out," said the attendant.

At 7:20 a.m., Fr. Greg got a text message. "Healthy baby boy!"

The woman who had the baby is from the International Teacher Training Centre next door to our postulancy. Sadly, there is a history of young women like her falling pregnant and going out into the bush, giving birth and letting the baby die. Thankfully, that has reduced in recent years because of more supervision.

Fr. Greg departed later in the week for a visit to Poland. When the border guard learned he was from Kenya, he insisted Fr. Greg quarantine for 14 days. Even some of his family members said they would not come to visit until after quarantine. People are now afraid of Africa! It's a bit silly, really, because the new strain Omicron is now in 41 countries, with only a few cases in Africa. Propaganda and fear are still powerful weapons, even if the world is more educated.

Meanwhile, Denis, a young man from Ciokaugu Prayer House in Kionyo Parish, is graduating from Kirinyaga University (halfway between Nairobi and Méru). I can't believe where the years have gone.

In 2011, the Ciokaugu community asked Fr. Daquin, the parish priest of Kionyo, if he could do something to help Denis, who was very bright and doing well in primary school. There was no father, and his mother was in another relationship where the husband didn't want previous children around. The grandmother was caring for him.



Fr. Gerry at Denis's graduation



The Catholic community was helping him at school. At that exact time in 2011, a family in Australia had asked if they could sponsor a child in our parish. Fr. Daquin suggested Denis and they agreed. He was supported to the end of primary school, and then awarded joint support with Equity Bank for four years of high school.

He then received a full sponsorship to university for four years. Thankfully, the government university fees were only about \$400 per year plus accommodation.

He wanted to have photos with me for his graduation, which is online because of COVID-19. Because I was quite busy, I asked him to come to Karen and I'd pay the transport. We took some photos and he was happy, but worried about finding a job. I suggested he spend a few hours writing thank-you letters to each of his lecturers. I said it's important to appreciate those who helped us, it helps build good relationships and they might be able to help him find work down the road.

Because Fr. Fidel is still in Méru, I was delegated to celebrate the closing mass for the postulancy. After mass, I met each postulant to give them the decision for 2022. Three were invited back, one was not. He took it well.

## **DEC. 11**

We were sad last week to learn that the husband of Caroline, one of our Nairobi Oblate youth members, had died. This week our youth group responded by raising funds to help with the funeral and final medical costs. Some youth members went to visit Caroline and met her beautiful baby. Caroline was most grateful for the support.

## **DEC. 18**

There was joy among the Australian Oblates when Br. Josh Nash was ordained a deacon in Melbourne, ending a 14-year drought in Australia. We pray he will be ordained a priest in

2022, becoming only the second Australian priest since my ordination in 2003.

Fr. Fidel found time for a short visit to a poor family in Kisaju, the family that donated four acres to us in Kisaju. They have land, but very little money. As a sign of appreciation, we are sponsoring the university tuition fees for their son.

## DEC. 25

Our youth made good use of the donations sent to help the parents and children in Mathare Slums. George and Andrew fed 40 families before Christmas, and another 40 the following week. At least we can help them over the two weeks of Christmas while the economy slows and jobs disappear.

Each family received two kilograms of rice, four kilograms of corn flour and two litres of cooking oil. The rest of the Oblate youth group were very proud of them for their sacrifice of time and energy.



George and Andrew helped feed 40 families in the Mathare Slum

We celebrated the Christmas Vigil for the children's home, where six boys and six girls celebrated their First Holy Communion (aged between 10 and 12). The girls looked beautiful in their white dresses, and the boys were very smart in their white shirts, black suits and red bow-ties. The sisters had done a great job preparing them and we hope it helps them in their future lives.



Baptism for Colleen Kinya

## JAN. 1

Apart from many road accidents over December, and mounting political rhetoric, the country seems peaceful, although there are still some violent clashes in the northwest with a security operation in progress. I was surprised to get an Australian gov-

ernment warning about the possibility of a terrorist attack anywhere in Kenya.

A good number of the Nairobi Oblate Youth gathered at Kionyo to have a post-Christmas party. We combined it with two baptisms. Leonard and Joy named their daughter Colleen Kinya, taking the name of my mother as a gesture of respect and appreciation for my mentorship to Leonard.

## JAN. 8

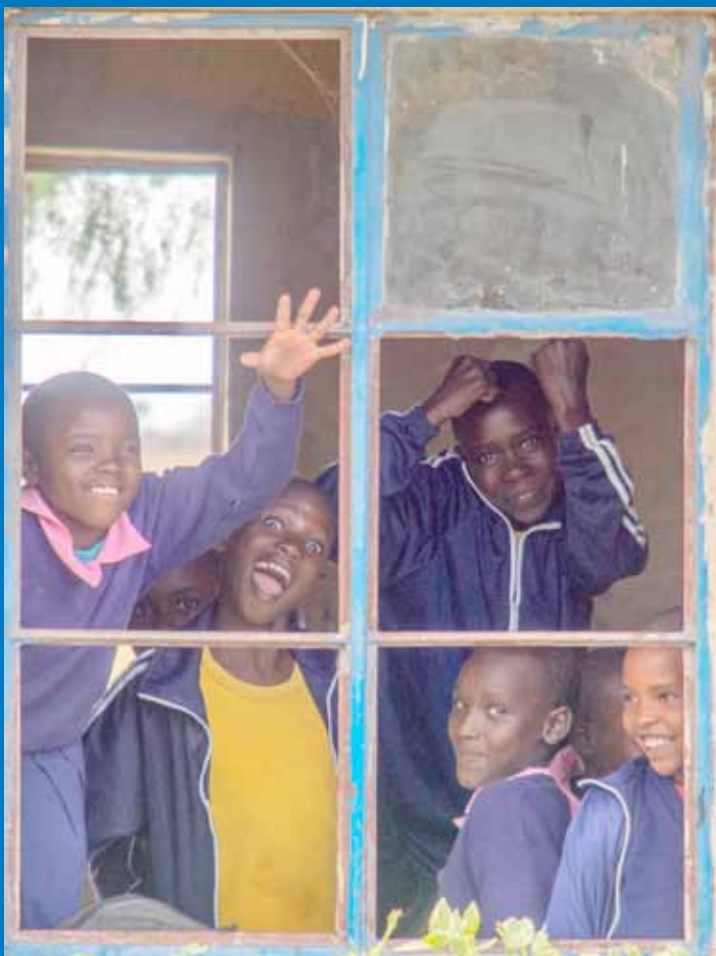
Fr. Didier, OMI, from D.R. Congo, has joined us for three months. When I collected him at the airport I found he couldn't speak English. He just said "tired." He'll improve his English, but he'll be very confused with the various English accents in the mission: Kenyan, Congolese, Sri Lankan, Polish, Canadian and Australian.

Kindly keep my dad in your prayers as he recovers from getting a pacemaker. So now, we can officially say, Gerry and the Pacemakers are back in business!

Thanks for all the prayers and know we remember you in our prayers. Try to be good and kind to others.

Fr. Didier Indibi Lutondo arrives in Kenya





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