

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit



September 2022

*Reflections*



# A time for reflection



It was probably just a few seconds for Pope Francis to sit quietly by the waters of Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta (cover picture) before his aides came and brought him back to the hectic reality of his historic trip to Canada in July.

We wondered what might have gone through his mind as he sat such a great distance away from his home at the Vatican. Was it a prayerful, peaceful moment? Was it a time to reflect on his life's journey? Was this the moment that the healing lake waters helped him make a personal decision?

Dr. Barry Adams faced his moment of decision the morning after Ash Wednesday when he woke with a persistent cough that took him to hospital. After 58 years of supporting the medical needs of the poor people in remote Peru, he had to step away.



Dr. Barrett Adams

A good portion of this issue pays tribute to Dr. Adams, who so generously presided over the Medical Friends of Peru that supports the remote Santa Clotilde Hospital, one of the cherished Oblate missions.

We all likely face times throughout our lives that require difficult or positive life-changing decisions. May we face them with the grace, courage and dignity exhibited by Dr. Barry Adams and Pope Francis.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*



Fr. Susai greets the Pope

# “Thank you for serving the poor”

BY SUSAI JESU, OMI

EDMONTON – I will never, ever forget those beautiful words our Holy Father Pope Francis said to me after he offered me the gift of a rosary, *“Thank you for serving the poor.”* What makes me happy is he recognized that our parish is a place for all, just as the Catholic Church should be.

Pope Francis later said “I am pleased to see that in this parish, where people of different communities of the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit come together with non-Indigenous people from the local area and many of our immigrant

Inside Sacred Heart Church  
of the First Peoples





brothers and sisters, this process has already begun. This place is a house for all, open and inclusive, just as the Church should be, for it is the family of the children of God, where hospitality and welcome, typical values of the Indigenous culture, are essential.”



Our Sacred Heart Church has always been known to be welcoming and inclusive. From my first days at Sacred Heart Church, I have tried my best to foster that spirit of being welcoming and inclusive. I extend my heart-felt thanks to all the members of our parish for maintaining this spirit of welcome and inclusivity, core values of our parish.

Although Jesus said that we will always have the poor with us until the end of time, he invites us to serve the poor and the needy. Over the past five years here at Sacred Heart, I have learned that serving the poor and the needy is not an option, nor is it my own personal choice. Rather, it is my spiritual duty, demanded of me as they are my own brothers and sisters.

At Lac Ste. Anne



Centuries ago, St. Gregory the Great taught that when we care for the needs of the poor, we are giving them what is theirs, not ours. We are not just performing works of mercy, rather we are paying a debt of justice. Life does not consist of possessions, but in sharing what we possess with others. The goods of the earth have been given to everyone. Thanks be to God for all the generous and committed volunteers who dedicate their valuable time and offer their true love to serve the poor, the needy, and the less fortunate at Sacred Heart Church.

Having acknowledged our service to the poor and the needy, Pope Francis has also called us all to practice the spirit of reconciliation among ourselves, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous. He has explained to us the true source of reconciliation is the cross of Jesus. As we pledged in our welcoming address to our Holy Father, we are committed to reconciliation in the coming months and years.

First, as we acknowledge the wrongs and abuse done to Indigenous peoples by some members of the Catholic Church,

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we need to open our hearts and seek forgiveness from one another. Second, we want to help restore the cultural traditions that express the core values of the Gospel: justice, love, and compassion. Third, with guidance from elders, we will foster language revitalization, and offer coaching for drummers and beadwork. Fourth, we will seek out people who are struggling with anger or stuck in grief and not able to move forward and offer healing workshops and companionship in their journey towards healing and reconciliation. Finally, we will strive to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as much as we can, for which we seek everyone's support and assistance.

As a parish, we will continue the ministry that Pope Francis has recognized, but also want to use the momentum and enthusiasm around his visit, to deepen and develop our outreach to the poor and needy, in a way that would honor his perception of us. We thank you all for your support and prayers.

*(Oblates Susai Jesu and Mark Blom serve the Sacred Heart Church of the First Nations in Edmonton, which Pope Francis visited during his recent trip to Canada.)*

# Dr. Barry Adams resigns

OTTAWA – This is a very difficult letter for me to write.

The morning after Ash Wednesday, I woke with a persistent cough, difficulty breathing and ended up in hospital with Influenza A Pneumonia

on top of my Pulmonary Fibrosis. I am much better but on continuous oxygen and still with breathing difficulties and decreased stamina.

After 58 years of supporting the medical needs of the Peruvians, initially in medical clinics in Comas and other missions, then the Santa Clotilde Hospital and associated clinics, I am unable to continue to serve as president of the Medical Friends of Peru.

I want to thank everyone for their generous continuing support over the years. Having seen first-hand the needs of the hospital and the people it serves, makes me (and I am sure you) proud of the support we have provided.

Thanks for supporting the Medical Friends of Peru, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and myself as your spokesperson.

Sincerely,

*Barry Adams, HOMI, MD*



Dr. Barrett Adams



Dear Barry,

You have been an important participant in our mutual mission in Peru since its beginning in 1963, as a founding member of Medical Friends of Peru (MFP) in 1964 under Fr. Joseph Birch and first president Dr. Nuyens.

In 1997 you, with retiring second president, Dr. Don McCunn, became Honorary Oblates and succeeded as third President of MFP since that year. The fact that MFP has functioned for 58 years is a great tribute to your perseverant guidance in its important role of medical mission support in Peru and especially now of the Santa Clotilde Hospital that continues in the Peruvian Amazon.

On behalf of the Oblate Congregation in Canada and Peru, I send my sincerest appreciation and gratitude for your faithful labours for the beneficiaries of them in Peru.

"What you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for Me".

Ken Thorson, OMI  
OMI Lacombe Canada Provincial

Dr. Barrett Adams:

Congratulations on your retirement as president and supporter of the organization that has assisted with the medical mission in Peru. In the name of the Norbertines of St. Norbert Abbey (Wisconsin), I express our deep gratitude for your dedication to this important mission.

We are committed to continuing our collaborative work with your successor. May God bless you and the continued support of the medical mission of the Napo River.

In Christ through Mary,  
Abbott Rt. Rev. Dane J. Radecki, O. Praem.  
St. Norbert Abbey

# Welcome Dr. Ledding

We are happy to present Dr. Dan Ledding and his wife Judy Ledding of Rosetown, SK, as president of the Medical Friends of Peru, succeeding Dr. Barrett Adams.

Dr. Ledding received a degree in science in 1966 and graduated from the University of Saskatchewan Medical School in 1970. He interned in St. Boniface, MB, and did post-graduate studies in internal medicine at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon.

His wife since 1970, Judy Scissons Ledding, is a graduate of St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon (1968) and has been a social worker in North Battleford, also with the United Way Service of Greater Winnipeg. She is a niece of former Oblate general treasurer and MFP director Fr. Anthony Hall, OMI, and of Chief Justice Emmett Hall.

They have four children and 15 grandchildren.

We sincerely thank Dr. and Mrs. Ledding for assuming this important role for the Medical Friends of Peru and its many beneficiaries in Peru.



Judy and Dr. Dan Ledding

*Check out our Facebook page:*



**Lacombe Canada MAMI**

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



**YouTube Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions**

# A fond farewell

BY MAURICE SCHROEDER, OMI

In this issue of Oblate Spirit, we pay tribute to Doctor Barrett Adams of Ottawa, who retires from the presidency of the Medical Friends of Peru (MFP), as well as welcome his successor in that role, Dr. Dan Ledding of Rosetown, SK.



Fr. Moe Schroeder

In the early 1960s Pope Pius XII asked all missionary orders to concentrate their works in the Latin American countries. Thus St. Peter's Province of the (then) English-speaking Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Canada in 1961 and 1962 sent its first missionaries to Peru, and in 1962 officially adopted the Peru mission as a delegation of St. Peter's Province.

In that same year Fr. Joseph Birch finished his term as General Administration Councillor and returned to Canada. Recognizing the immensity of the poverty and medical needs of the people of the Oblate missions in the 'barriadas' (shanty towns) surrounding Lima, in 1964 Fr. Birch (with the aid of Dr. Andreas J.J. Nuyens of Ottawa) founded an organization of the medical community of Ottawa called The Medical Friends of Peru (MFP).

For 58 years it has provided financial, medical equipment shipments and medical personnel assistance to the various medical missions that have always been an integral part of Oblate missions in Peru, first in the "pueblos juvenes" surrounding Lima on the coast, in the 'selva' (tropical rain forest of the Peruvian Amazon), and the highlands (sierra).

At its peak MFP had more than 350 active members in Ottawa, Alberta and Nova Scotia. Dr. Nuyens was the first president for many years, succeeded by Dr. Don McCunn and

in 1997 by Dr. Barrett Adams.

A history of the first 25 years of MFP was published in booklet form and is available on request from the MAMI office in Saskatoon. The MFP support in the last 25 years has been largely concentrated on Santa Clotilde Hospital on the Napo River in the Peruvian Amazon principally under priest-physicians Maurice Schroeder, OMI, and Jack MacCarthy of the Norbertine Abbey of De Pere, WI.

Dr. Barrett Adams had a career as a prominent Ottawa-based pediatrician from which he has recently retired.

In 2018 he travelled to the Santa Clotilde Hospital, about which he wrote to MFP members in the adjoining report.

In 1997, when he succeeded Dr. McCunn as president of MRPF, he was made an Honorary Oblate presented by the Oblates of Peru.

He will be succeeded as president of MFP by Dr. Dan Ledding of Rosetown, SK.

We bid farewell and ‘muchissimas gracias’ to Dr. Barrett Adams on behalf of the fellow Oblates and the innumerable beneficiaries in Peru of his untiring efforts on their behalf.

Thank you Doctor Barrett Adams, “Vaya con Dios’, and always remember, “what you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for Me.”



Dr. Barry and friends on the way to Santa Clotilde in 2018

# The gift of water

*Dr. Barry Adams, a retired pediatrician in Ottawa, has been president of the Medical Friends of Peru for several years. In June 2018, he made his first visit to Santa Clotilde in the Peruvian Amazon for the inauguration of the Water Mission Project at the Santa Clotilde Hospital. The following edited version is from his report of that event.*

**BY DR. BARRY ADAMS**

Until 2018, there was no potable water in the Santa Clotilde Hospital, convent or school, but that all changed with help from many generous sources.

I was fortunate to travel to Santa Clotilde for the official opening and blessings of the water system. Fr. Maurice Schroeder accompanied us as far as Iquitos. The trip upriver from there was difficult getting into and out of boats and portaging. At one point we had to walk a 10-inch plank to get into a boat.

It was eye-opening to see the Santa Clotilde Hospital, to meet the resident physician and his family from the USA who was just finishing a year's contract at the hospital, to attend medical rounds with the Peruvian physicians completing their mandatory service in a remote location prior to receiving the license to continue their careers. It was exhilarating to witness the dedication of the nurses, pharmacist, laboratory technicians, record librarian and support staff, and to see first-hand the appreciation of the patients and their families receiving care in this remote area.

Without this hospital and the clinics along the Napo River, health services, prenatal care, immunizations, hospital care, etc. would not be available to the Peruvians living in this remote area. Patients would have to make the long trip to Iquitos for care and probably many would not survive the trip. Your previous contributions have helped develop this amazing hospital which grew under the direction of Fr. Moe and



Fr. Jack MacCarthy, the priest doctors and their collaborators. Although more is covered by the Peruvian Government, there are always extras not covered such as milk for infants, some medications, supplies, equipment, etc.

It was your generous support over the last 50 years that has seen this facility grow from a small clinic to a hospital with many satellite clinics, all due to the dedication and hard work of Frs. Schroeder and MacCarthy who have seen the growth to include Peruvian physicians attending at the hospital as well as a Peruvian medical director.



# *In your words*

**BY FRANCIS KENNY**

GLOUCESTER, ON – Our ancestral family farm was located outside of Ottawa on Montreal Road, across from the Holy Rosary Scholasticate (HRS). The seminary was built in the 1930s and the Oblates and our family were neighbours until the seminary closed completely in the mid 1970s.

My parents Olive and Percy Kenny were honorary Oblates and celebrated at Galilee Centre in Arnprior. At the time of their deaths there were bequeaths made to the Oblates.

I attended St. Patrick's College in Ottawa along with several young Oblates including Gary Laboucane and Doug Crosby. I studied under Oblates Farrel Banim and Leo Cormican, who celebrated our marriage along with Jack Davis in 1973. Moe Schroeder, OMI, was a teacher at St. Patrick's High School where I attended from 1964 to 1969 with several men who would become Oblates.

Blaise McQuarrie was just a novice Brother at HRS before leaving for Peru. I still communicate with Roy Boucher, OMI, in Arnprior but the names and numbers of Oblates dwindle. Most of the priests and brothers who went through HRS have passed away.

For your interest, I have attached a photo taken circa 1978 of the Holy Rosary Scholasticate.



Holy Rosary  
Scholasticate  
(circa 1978)

# Is change coming?

BY JOE GUNN

By May 2022, hundreds of discussions had taken place in Canadian faith communities in preparation for the Synod of Bishops. Has your participation ended? What will become of these consultations?



Joe Gunn

Many parishes assembled summary documents of groups that met or were held on-line due to pandemic precautions. Most parishes and dioceses have posted their own summaries on their websites. From new summaries received from the four Canadian regions, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops will soon prepare final “Canadian” input, detailing what was heard. Bishops from North America will discuss similarities and differences and submit to Rome their further gleanings. Finally, as with all Synods, preparatory documents will be released by the Vatican, most notably an *instrumentum laboris* (working document) for bishop delegates to the October 2023 Synod in Rome.

What do you think the input from Canadian Catholics will be?

Oblates minister in about a dozen dioceses in English-speaking Canada. I tried to read these diocesan summaries to discover what might point to emerging patterns. Here is a flavour of what Catholics are feeling and saying across the land:

Every diocesan summary included the need for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, in recognition of the tragedy of the Indian Residential Schools.

“...the hurt and loss of trust in the Church is deep, and time, care, and a concrete plan to heal fully is essential...the Church must respond to the victims of abuse

with a spirit of ownership of the issue, with justice and empathy for the survivors and strategies for prevention...strong leadership from the bishops and adequate reparations are necessary, alongside grassroots initiatives along the path to *reconciliation*." (Ottawa)

As well, every diocesan summary touched on the need for lay leadership, especially that of women:

"The leadership of *women in the church* was highlighted as a key area of concern. Participants felt that the hierarchical structure of the institutional church required a renewed vision of how women could serve in key leadership positions...By Church law women are excluded. Inclusion depends upon clergy decisions. Women's voices are excluded from homilies. Years of exclusion mean that women speakers are not appreciated. This is not walking together." (Edmonton)

Inclusion was a common theme:

"The vast majority of respondents expressed that any moving forward of the Church's mission needed to include a great and further reaching out to those who feel abandoned by the Church. Particularly those in irregular marriage situations, those holding uncommon or unpopular views, women, the elderly, the youth, and the LGBTQIA+ community." (Hamilton)

Another group observed:

"While being greeted with hope, this synodal process has also been met with a not-insignificant amount of skepticism...Given past experiences with Church leadership, the question arises: is this synodal process just lip service? Is the Synod just to help people let off steam, or will there be changes?" (Saskatoon)

Oblate faith communities can help keep synodal decisions alive, joining Francis in attempting to make church renewal, based on the practice of synodality, a permanent feature of our lives of faith.

(Joe Gunn is the Executive Director/Directeur général of Centre Oblat)

# K E N Y A *reflections*



**BY ALFRED GROLEAU, OMI**

ST. ALBERT, AB – Fr. Alfred Groleau served in the Kenya mission from October 2006 to December 2015, and returned for four months in 2017. Following are some of his reflections on his time there as the mission celebrates 25 years since inception.

## **What impressed you the most during your time in the mission in Kenya?**

It was the people, especially the children and the youth. To begin with Kenya is a nation of youth. Roughly speaking, half of the population is below 20 and the average death was in the mid-40s when I was there.

I enjoyed my time with HIV orphans in Nyumbani in Nairobi where I presided Eucharist for three years. At the height



**Alfred Groleau,  
OMI**

**Children are active participants in liturgy with dancing and singing**





of the HIV pandemic in the late '90s, Fr. D'Augustino, an American Jesuit, established a home for HIV orphans, not expecting them to survive as they did after the turn of the century.

He limited the number at the orphanage to maintain a family setting. He developed other forms of assistance for families affected by HIV: resource centres throughout Nairobi offered social assistance to families and in a rural setting he established a "village" where hundreds of grandparents were assisted in supporting their orphaned grandchildren. He died before I arrived in Kenya in 2006.

The children at the orphanage remembered his kindness and his energy. He had affirmed each of them in the sense of their personal dignity. Liturgies with the children were always friendly and energizing. I enjoyed their liturgical dances, their singing, and they participated well in short dramas during the homily.

I was blessed with another nourishing experience while I lived in Méru when Fr. Rewa invited me to preside at Eucharist on Sundays at the Méru University of Science and Technology (MUST).

Fr. Rewa founded orphanages for street children (300 boys, 300 girls) and he was a pastor serving eight communities as well the chaplain of MUST.

On Sundays, 500 to 600 Catholic students filled a large auditorium for a vibrant liturgy featuring good music and liturgical dance. The students came into the hall carrying loudspeakers, computers, and musical instruments. This allowed me to project the text of my homily on a screen for the advantage of those who could not grasp a Canadian accent that was foreign to many of them.



At the last liturgy I presided, one of the students thanked me profusely and he presented a précis of almost everything I had said in my homilies. I was impressed by his attentiveness.

In those years I also catechized students for sacraments of initiation. The Bishop of Méru came one year and confirmed 199 candidates, and three dozen of them were from MUST.

It is certainly the youth and the orphans that remain in my memory. Orphans abound on the city streets of Kenya. Since President Kenyatta mandated compulsory primary education at the beginning of the century, many schools have been created by the government, the churches and private corporations. This is why much of the contributions from MAMI to Kenya went to the support of schools.

Rita Bellachandran, one of our Oblate Associates, is one who created a home for girls in the high country close to the Oblate Parish in Kionyo. Known as “Mama Rita” in Kenya, she is also one of the founding members of the Oblate Associate group there.

### **What was the greatest challenge you faced?**

The challenge that caused me anguish was how to respond to the tremendous needs of the poor when, for example, a mother with children says she will have to sleep outside in



the rain because her landlord has locked her out of her rental home. Also, there were fires in their homes because children played with fire pots.

In Méru, every year there were fires where poor families were left homeless having lost their meagre possessions. In face of the many demands, the Kenya mission had to give preference to community projects over individual assistance.

### **What do you consider your biggest accomplishment while there?**

After four years serving the Oblate Mission in administration, I moved to Méru in the house that welcomed candidates to Oblate life in the first stage of their formation that we call postulancy. I was there for five years. We have had priestly ordinations since, two that I attended, and two Kenya Oblate brothers have professed final vows.

I am proud that the Kenya Mission has been committed to the vocation discernment of our candidates, not only to their number. The social advantages of clerical life are attractive to candidates coming from poor families, so motivations need to be tested.

### **What advice would you give to a Canadian missionary going there for the first time?**

Try to learn the language of the people as much as possible as soon as possible. Also, be cautious in how to respond to demands of people with urgent needs.

### **What memory do you cherish the most from your time there?**

The memory of praying with the people in liturgies, not only with children and youth as I have mentioned, but also in parishes in small or larger church settings – some with dirt floors as in some of the out-stations in Kionyo Parish.

*(Fr. Alfred is currently the Director of Foyer Lacombe in St. Albert)*

# K E N Y A *reflections*



**BY DON CLAERHOUT, OMI**

ST. ALBERT, AB – When I was asked to go to Kenya, the main purpose was to help bring the water project to completion. After there for 19 months, it was not fully completed but was in a state where I was quite certain at least three Kenyans in the area could maintain the project.

Various things impressed me in Kenya. The area near and at the water source is so beautiful. The vegetation in the forest along with the wild animals and insects held my attention. I was impressed by people working long hours picking tea, or cutting building blocks out of the quarry with a simple hammer and chisel, or crushing lava rock to cover driveways and walkways, or trenching more than 100 kilometres by hand, and all for a little over a dollar per day.



Don Claerhout,  
OMI

Visiting the prison left me with a different impression. The ward where likely 200 men were enclosed in a room so small that the men could neither stand nor squat was shocking. Some had an extra piece of clothing that was hanging from the pole supporting the metal roof. Yes, a galvanized roof with no insulation, and at the equator, covered them. Add to that some person near the prison at a Gospel church, singing poorly but loudly.

I do not know how these poor men could endure the conditions for more than a few hours, yet some were there several months and had yet to be sentenced.

Another unpleasant memory was the slums in Méru. We saw mostly women and children confined to a shack roughly 7-by-11 feet. Cooking was done in a clay pot that was a fire

hazard. And when one building catches fire, where does it stop? There is not even clean water for cooking, let alone dousing a fire. And where do all the adults find employment to purchase food and clothes?

I was also struck by the way crime was handled. Police were not the most honest and people were physically beaten and died in prison. Often the civilians dealt with the person committing a crime and I heard of six or seven being murdered for stealing a chicken or a goat or cash.

One challenge that I had not expected was purchasing a Toyota Hilux Surf vehicle for the water project. It appeared to be the best vehicle for the money we could spend. It proved to be the most troublesome vehicle I had driven. The engine gave out three times despite being exceptionally careful while driving.

Another challenge was working with plastic pipe that was too small to provide the water needs for an area, and using pipe that was too light for the job. Larger pipes were difficult

**This tank feeds the Kaburia Line, which serves about one third  
of the Mount Kenya East Water Project members**







to join and would often leak. Several smaller pipes that should have been glued, were not. Often the pipes were buried before being tested for leaks so wild or tame animals would not fall into the trenches. This caused a lot of extra work opening the trenches to locate the leaks.

Although the government said the water was only for domestic use, all hydrants that I saw went to the gardens and not into the homes. Was there enough water for all those who signed and paid for the project, or did only those along the main line profit? I realized that I was there to help with the project and leave the management to them. It is rewarding to know that many people did benefit, and I appreciated hearing one leader remark publicly that they were helped by us, and now it is their responsibility to help one another.

*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)*





# Kenya

## N O T E B O O K

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

### JUNE 13

We held a fantastic celebration for the 25th anniversary of the Oblates and Kionyo Parish, and opened the new church – dedicated by Bishop Salesius Mugambi. There were tents for guests, and food for everyone.

The dedication of the altar was unique! Apart from blessing with Holy Water, and later the Oil of Chrism, five earthen-ware pots filled with charcoal were placed on the altar corners and centre, symbolic of the five wounds of Christ. The bishop then added incense to each and created a good cloud of smoke which drifted up to the high ceiling out the large altar window, which is still waiting for glass.



Gerry Conlan, OMI



Dedication of the new altar

We had visiting parishioners from Kisaju, Larmudiac and Méru Oblate parishes. All our pre-novices and most of our Oblate priests attended.

To finally see the church complete and filled with people was a great relief. I estimate between 1,500 and 1,800 people attended. It will be a good venue for Easter masses, special school celebrations and large funerals. I look forward to the day when we can replace the plain glass with coloured stained-glass windows telling various stories and speaking to the people who pass by.



Fr. Gerry with a parishioner



The church was filled to capacity



Someone said the church is visible from the main highway, 12 kilometres away, and certainly the lighted cross on top will be visible 40 kilometres away in Mitungu.

Our Nairobi youth leaders, Andrew and George, distributed food to 36 families in Mathare Slum. They are so happy to be the bearers of the “good news.”



Fr. Ken Thorson addresses the congregation



Nairobi Oblate youth group enjoys a walk in Karua Forest

## JUNE 20

With the international Oblates here for a JPIC (justice and peace) conference, it was a good excuse to have wine and beer each evening. It was a sacrifice but important to be sociable with our guests. And Rome was paying!

The JPIC group visited the Franciscan Sisters who are very involved in JPIC ministry. Sr. Mary Wangai is quite a lady. She had two young men in their JPIC office who do a lot of training and animation of groups so more people know simple things they can do to help the environment and stop destructive developments like the new oil pipeline between Uganda and Tanzania.

They said they would be happy to do a training day with our Oblate youth in Nairobi that will give them skills in growing herbs and small plants that they can sell. One becomes a perfume that the women love because it's nice, has no chemicals and is cheaper than the shops.

Our Nairobi youth once again distributed food to the poor people in Mathare Slums. Andrew said the people were very hungry and had big smiles as they went away with some food. Meanwhile, the youth are busy preparing to visit Tharaka Nithi primary school to speak to the children under the care of our youth member, Christine. I'm still amazed with the generosity of our youth.



## JUNE 27

Politics continues to dominate life in Kenya – a great distraction from the fact that so many people are desperate for work and struggling to find food. Thankfully some people, like our Nairobi Oblate Youth, have been busy helping out. This week they have done double good. First, Andrew and George took food and distributed it to about 35 families in Mathare slums.

Then 14 of them hired a matau (shuttle) and went to Tharaka Nithi, about 200 kilometres from Nairobi, to visit a little impoverished primary school called CCM Kandega where our youth member Christine (with a Master of Education – Administration), started working.

What Christine really wanted was for us to come and talk to the students, teachers and parents. So many have lost hope or don't value education. The youth group came with food and cooked a huge pot of rice and beans. Many of the children were very hungry and came for seconds and thirds. Fifteen parents rolled up (apparently because there was free food). That is almost all the parents in the school. Most of the kids are related.

The youth arrived about 11 a.m. and prepared lunch. I arrived at 1 p.m. (got a bit lost), and we started lunch immediately. Lots of smiles all around. This place is so dusty. We were happy to see the local government had constructed two com-

pletely new classrooms, and half finished two more. The mud brick rooms have been demolished,

The youth visit the school at Tharaka Nithi and cook a meal for students and parents





but just left in a mess. The mud-brick kitchen and staff room are still in use. Thankfully, the roof that blew off has been replaced. It's a very dusty place.

The students, parents and staff just sat around anywhere they felt comfortable. Usually, the students just have black olive-like berries and go back to class. It's hard to study on an empty stomach. Christine said many of the children are reluctant to go home because of the fighting and arguing at home.

After lunch the program was simple: opening song, opening prayer by the board chair, welcome by the head teacher, then talks by each youth member and myself. The children had never seen a white man before.



This is what lunch usually consists of for the students

The day finished with our youth handing out footwear, which made the parents and the children smile.



The students at Tharaka Nithi were happy to receive new footwear

## JULY 2

Our youth are making serious plans now to visit each other! About 30 of our 50 members in Nairobi are silent partners. But even some of the most active are struggling. As a result, they are planning an organized attack to bring some financial gifts. We have three young mothers among us and two young dads. George, Andrew and David kindly went to Mathare Slums again and distributed food to about 35 families.

## JULY 9

The Oblate Youth in Nairobi shared a surprising and sad article on HIV among young people in Kenya. It also highlights the huge increase in teenage pregnancies. By chance, I had agreed with the sisters at Nyumbani children's home to give a frank and open talk to the boys aged 14 and over, most from secondary school home for holidays. There's a real absence of education in human development and sexuality in Kenya. People are shy to talk about these issues. But the HIV news update reminds us of what happens when young people are left in ignorance or rely on local gossip.

The 23 young men (can't call them boys) were attentive, and I managed to get them laughing regularly. Three of the Oblate Youth attended, and George gave them advice in Swahili – I had used a series of PowerPoint slides, videos and images to help them understand themselves.

The Nairobi Youth leaders continued to develop their visitation schedule and increase contributions to provide relief for some struggling youth members. George, Andrew and David did another outreach in Mathare Slums to distribute food to

Kisaju parish council meeting



another 35 struggling families. They discovered two of our own youth members there, who were very happy to connect and receive some food.

## JULY 16

Of great inspiration were our Nairobi Oblate youth who self-initiated visitation of members. They raised \$100 from among themselves to take gifts of food along, and started with the young moms in our group.

## JULY 23

It's early afternoon, and I'm writing this on the upper veranda of a budget eatery in Watamu, 110 kilometres north of Mombasa, on the coast. There's a nice cool breeze and the humidity is low. The locals think it's cold but it's a pleasant time of the year. Our mission gathered in Mombasa this week for our annual retreat. I can say I feel rested and refreshed after the four-day retreat.



Oblates in Mombasa take a break from their retreat

After Saturday mass, a young lady begged me for confession as I left the church, so we went back inside. When she finished a boy came running. Then a sister, who also asked me to hear confession for a group of six children. I thought they might be eight or nine years old, but they told me they are 13 and 14. I joked with them about eating some more chickens to grow taller. One boy asked how he could become a priest, so I told him to start helping people free of charge, and if he enjoys it, then he might be ready after he finishes school and learns a trade.

Our Oblate youth in Nairobi continued planning on helping the other members during this tough time. One member has arrears of two months on his rent, so they decided to assist him and gave him about half (US\$50). So inspiring. The slightly better off are helping the less well off.

Fr. Constant, OMI, celebrated 20 years ordination on Thursday and led our Mass that day. On Saturday, OMI priests Daquin and Fidel both celebrated 22 years. We thank God – that is 64 years of service between them.

Thanks for the prayers. We all prayed during retreat for the many people and families who support us and care about us.

## **JULY 30**

I stopped for a haircut in Nairobi and got my shoes properly cleaned and shined. I asked the lady shoe-shiner about the city council and whether they harass her. She said last week a competitor inside the city markets complained about her on the street outside, so they came and demanded \$30 from her (proper fee is \$50 per year). She gave them \$20 borrowed from a friend because she did not have money. She lives from day to day. She might make \$10 a day, but has to pay for food, transport, some cleaning materials and take care of her children.

I am always amazed how government workers just don't care, usually, about poor people. Now, if she has to pay \$10 or

\$20 every month in bribes how will she ever save up to buy a licence for \$50? The council should allow payment every three months to give a chance. But how to make it happen?

## AUG. 7

In preparation for the presidential election on Aug. 9, we filled the cars with fuel and tried to buy extra food. A local man was very angry at the president because there is no maize flour on the shelves – the staple food for Kenyans.

Our Nairobi youth have been wonderful again, visiting a few struggling members last week. Nicholas, one member, is struggling financially but is making do. He was really touched by the visit of our other youth.

George and Andrew were distributing food for the people in Mathare Slum. This week they struggled to find food in the shops, and then getting a good price. They said there was a crush of people looking for food assistance. Usually they

feed 35 families, but on Thursday they had a queue of 150 people, so they reduced the quantity to each and managed to give everyone something. It's a worry at this election time when tensions are so high already that people can't get enough food or can't afford it.



Food distribution in the Mathare Slums



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