

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



May 2023

First Impressions



Adapting to change



How often in your life do you experience that memorable *first time*? We can vividly recall where we were, the weather, the time.

So it must have been for Fr. Andrzej (Andrew) Stendzina, OMI, when he touched down in Kenya for the first time to visit the Kenya Mission (cover photo). In his words, there was a sense of “excitement and relief.” Fr. Andrew details his experience on the following pages.

Then there was the experience of Charles Okeyo, OMI, who returned to Kenya after three years of study in Rome. His first impression when he left for Rome was: “*Will I make it? Am I equipped to adjust to a new culture, or learn a new language?*” He did make it, and he learned two new languages. Impressive!

Facing new challenges in one’s life is not easy, and it seems there are no shortage of those, especially as we age. Transition is not easy, and we have no choice but to adapt.

This issue of *Oblate Spirit* represents a major change for us at MAMI. It is the first of two issues this year that will not be mailed but will be delivered electronically as a cost-saving venture. The money we hope to save means more for the missions and the poor. The last two issues of the year will be mailed.

We hope you have somehow found your way to these pages. Change can be good. We thank you for your patience and support. The Oblates thank you for your generosity and kindness.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

First taste of Kenya

BY FR. ANDRZEJ STENDZINA, OMI

OTTAWA – Arriving at Jomo Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi towards the end of January this year with Fr. Ken Thorson, the Provincial of OMI Lacombe Province, my emotions were those of excitement and relief. After 24 hours of travel, stepping into the breeze of a balmy night, I knew that my trip to Kenya would in no way compare to the frozen sidewalks of Ottawa. Fr. Fidele, the Superior of the Kenya Mission, was the first to greet us.

An overnight stay at the Oblate Centre House in Karen, our home base for the next three weeks, melted away the fatigue of travel. We began our great pastoral adventure by car early the next morning, arriving late in the afternoon at the Mission of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Larmudiac, in the county of Nakuru.

St. Joseph's is the most recently established Oblate Mission in Kenya and is ably ministered by the pastor and superior, Fr. Faustin Litanda and his Oblate missionary team. The enthusiasm of the Oblates and the warm welcome we received



Fr. Andrew



Fr. Andrew helps transfer food for distribution in Larmudiac

when meeting the men, women and children of the area, was heartening.

Overall, we visited five of the nine Oblate Missions in Larmudiac, being joined by both the Oblates and the local Christians, all of whom delighted in showing us around and sharing their experiences and hopes for their communities. After three days we again took the road back to Karen, travelling the short distance to Kisaju the following day.

The Oblate Mission in Kisaju is growing rapidly and consists of St. Paul's Parish and eight prayer houses under the spiritual care of Fr. Gideon Rimberia. Kisaju is also home to the postulancy formation house where candidates interested in the Oblate life learn about and experience the Oblate charism.

Among the many projects of the parish is the construction of a rectory for the Oblates working in the parish. The new structure will also provide desperately needed office and pas-

toral space. Among the prayer houses the two most remote are located in Maasai territory where I had the honour to preach that first weekend.

At St. Mark's Prayer House in Ilolopolisat, during mass, I witnessed an emotionally intense goat-gifting ceremony. A generous and devout woman chose to offer a goat, one of her valued possessions, as a way to support our Oblate missionaries. It was the parable of the widow's strength come to life, a humbling experience. After mass, men and women shared their hopes and challenges as this area is severely affected by drought because there has been no rain for the past three years.

Upon our return to Karen, we participated in the annual study days, getting an opportunity to dialogue with our Kenyan brothers. It was a time of strengthening and building up our Oblate community, after which we once again hit the road, this time for the Parish of Kionyo.

The lush, green area of Kionyo, located in the mountainous region of Méru, is well known for its tea plantations. Although not quite complete, the church of St. Stephen's Parish is the home of a vibrant Christian community led by Fr. Constant Ilombun.

On Sunday, at St. Paul's Church in Njogune, a prayer house in St. Stephen's Parish, the mass was enlivened with music and

Tea picking in Kionyo



liturgical dancing as we celebrated several Oblate Associates solemnly renewing their commitment.

Then it was on to the final leg of our mission visitation at Méru, specifically St. Eugene de Mazenod Parish, with Irinda and Gachanka prayer houses under the leadership of Fr. Daquin Iyo. The Christians of Gachanka Prayer house are planning a new church and I enjoyed participating in lively discussions about local projects.

The spirituality of the Kenyan people, despite ongoing challenges, and the unifying presence of the Oblates living out the charism of St. Eugene made a strong impression on me. The rapid growth of the mission is proof that our ministry in Kenya is genuine and appreciated.

My experience of the mission was a hands-on life lesson in the ability of faith to move mountains. Living at the missions in prayer, sharing our thoughts and observing the whole-hearted participation of the Kenyan people as they worship affected me profoundly. I return to Canada with a deep resolve to emulate the vibrancy of the Kenyan missions and the people who daily honour Our Lord by living out the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod.

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





Charles Okeyo, OMI, (left) and Bruno Antione, OMI

Return to mission

BY CHARLES 'ABASUBA' OKEYO, OMI

KENYA - Returning home after three years and four months in Rome is a humbling and enriching experience.

Rome was a unique mission that was assigned to me. I remember immediately after novitiate, and professing my first religious profession, my obedience was to the International Roman Scholasticate.

My first impression was filled with many questions: *"Will I make it? Am I really equipped to adjust to a new culture or learn a new language?"* I remember entrusting all to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary. I deeply believe it is God who, after giving someone a mission, is the same One who gives enough graces to face the challenges.

I vividly remember the challenge of following the classes in Italian. In my first academic year, at the Gregorian University, I felt like a child who needed to learn from the beginning. I

needed much humility and perseverance, and I thank God I managed to learn the Italian and French languages. I also needed to learn the new culture and to purify my personal and cultural beliefs so as not to misjudge my new Italian culture. I had to learn to love their food, songs and way of life.

Time quickly passed. In the end, I felt both the joy of returning home and the sadness of leaving my classmates and brothers in the community. It was difficult to let go of my new friends and those who had become my family. I remember doing pastoral work in an Oblate parish. The children I was helping in preparation for First Holy Communion were sad when they learned that I had to return to my country.

A Kenyan proverb says, *"In finishing climbing every mountain, there is always a realization that there are many other taller mountains to be climbed."* This proverb helps me look at my mission in a different way. Having finished my formational discernment in Italy, I now see huge tasks to be accomplished, tasks that can only be accomplished by the grace of God.

I thank all who have helped me during my three years in Rome. I cannot repay you, but promise, in my daily prayers, to ask God to continue blessing you. I will do my utmost to make you proud of your investment in me.



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We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed, visit our website at www.omilacombe.ca/mami/donations/ 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.



A new classroom

Making a Difference

Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI, continues to make a difference in Chinchá Alta, Peru. “I was asked to bless another classroom and work started on another one,” said Br. Blaise. “Teachers ask me to build classrooms in their schools. We are noted for our work in education. This work is so important because one is close to the teachers, the parents and the dear children.”

Happy 61st
Anniversary
Blaise





Every cent of every dollar
you give will go ***entirely***
to the mission works
and ministries of the Oblates.

Fr. Les honoured

Fr. Leszek (Les) Kwiatkowski, OMI, recently received the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Award for his work with Indigenous People. Since 1990, Fr. Les has been working with Indigenous People in various communities in Alberta and Northwest Territories. He has worked with the Dene in NWT, he has served on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta, he has worked with the Big Stone Cree Nation people in Wabasca, and the Cree and Nakota Sioux in Lac St. Anne. As a Catholic priest, he serves humbly and becomes a welcome part of the community in which he lives. He is warmly accepted at the pilgrimage in Lac St. Anne, where they gather annually to honour St. Anne at the lake that has healing waters. He doesn't know who

nominated him for the award but it could be any number of people that have been touched by him as he quietly goes about his work.



Fr. Les Kwiatkowski, OMI, (left) and Elder Charles Letendre, of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation

A Christian responsibility



Joe Gunn

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – When we see massive floods in Pakistan and California, or raging forest fires here at home, we can sometimes imagine that Creation’s demise is already and unyieldingly upon us.

In March, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change reported that (using figures from 2019) the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide was higher than at any other time in at least two million years. In April, Canada’s 2023 National Inventory Report of greenhouse gas emissions showed that Canadian emissions *actually rose* in 2021 (the most recent calculations available.) Recognizing how inadequate our climate responses remain, it seems that experts will call for ever-more radical and urgent solutions. For example, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called for a “global phase-down” of existing oil and gas production and the cessation of all licensing and funding of new oil and gas.

How will our faith institutions respond more adequately?

The United Church at the bottom of my street has just installed two electric vehicle charging stations.

An Oblate parish in Ottawa, St. Joseph’s, announced on its website and in the headliner of the parish bulletin that it has divested from fossil fuel investments. The parish finance council administers a portfolio that included one lone fossil fuel asset in its small fund, a pipeline company. The parish simply decided to reinvest in a Canadian renewable energy provider.

This might be the first Canadian parish to take such action, reported in an article in the National Catholic Reporter that outlined more than 30 other faith-based divestment actions on Earth Day weekend (April 22).

Additionally, on April 13, a letter to the Governing Board of St. Paul University (a Pontifical University founded by the Oblates) asked them to divest from fossil fuels. Seven organizations signed, including *Le Centre Oblat*, the student's union, support staff union, professors' association, chaplaincy ministry, etc. The university Rector has already responded favourably, agreeing to move conversations forward on the matter.

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis asked Catholics to align their investment policy with the moral imperative to care for Creation. Francis said the "use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – need to be progressively replaced without delay" (*Laudato Si'* 165). Consequently, this entails "spreading the use of ethical, responsible, and integral criteria for investments, avoiding the support to companies that harm... environmental ecology (for example fossil fuels.)" ("Journey Toward Our Common Home, Five Years after *Laudato Si'*", Interdicasterial Working Group of The Holy See On Integral Ecology, p. 178, 179.)

There are many and varied ways to act for climate justice. Faith communities are increasingly recognizing the roles we can play.

(Joe Gunn serves as Executive Director of Le Centre Oblat: A Voice for Justice)

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI

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



YouTube Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions

Hardly a drop to drink

BY JOSEPH MAGAMBO, OMI



Inspecting the land

KAJIADO COUNTY, Kenya – The prolonged period of drought experienced in most parts of the country has negatively affected the lives of pastoral communities in Kenya.

Kajiado County has not received adequate rainfall for the last three years and that has had a major impact on the lives of the people we serve.

Many animals have been lost to drought and others are dying. There is no food, no water. The dams constructed by residents and county government have dried up, leaving people and animals desperate for water.

Those who are lucky to have their own boreholes with water are taking advantage of the situation and selling water at escalated prices, a reality which has frustrated many residents because they have no money to buy enough water for domestic use and for their flock.

Those who cannot afford to buy water are forced to travel long distances in search of water. Many children are forced to miss classes, instead helping their parents and guardians search for water and pasture for the animals.

As a parish community we are supporting most affected families with food donated by parishioners through a program we call *eating with the poor*.

As a religious person, I pray with them and offer psychosocial support. I use examples from scripture to show them how faith, love and hope can be of great help in their lives during this difficult time. I am blessed when they show appreciation for my contribution and accept that no matter the challenges, life must continue.



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

JAN. 22

NAIROBI, Kenya – We are experiencing a terrible increase in threats and violence against landowners, especially elderly people in the Karen area. Thankfully, one culprit was put in jail, and another released on bail. But they have high connections, so we don't expect much to happen.

Youth Mathare Slum food program continues. People are most grateful, receiving four kilograms of maize flour. Fifty families are selected by a group of women in the slum who created a refuge-shelter for women and children (daytime only).



Gerry Conlan, OMI



Celebrating Word of God Sunday

JAN. 29

Of interest this week was the Supreme Court ruling about the division of property in a divorce. This created a very animated topic for the Nairobi Oblate Youth to discuss, as some are in the process or are married. Very interesting. No longer do all properties have to be equally split.

We welcomed Fr. Ken Thorson (Provincial Superior) and our vicar, Fr. Andrew (Andrzej Stendzina)

for a three-week visit from Canada. We also welcomed five sisters (Guardians of the Reign of the Holy Name of Jesus) from Spain and Kenya who are establishing themselves here in Kenya.



Fr. Ken Thorson arrives
with gifts from Canada

FEB. 4

On Thursday we celebrated the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Fr. Andrew, our vicar, led the mass with a simple but inspiring message: *be patient with yourself, with your community and with God. God is patient with us!*

FEB. 11

This week we distributed funds for education support of needy children in each of our four parishes, something that was only possible because of the kindness of our MAMI family in Canada.

Fr. Fidele received four beehives that we will install on the farm at Méru.



Kisaju Parish Mass

FEB. 18

Seven prisoners are being released after finishing their sentences at Langata Women's Maximum-Security Prison. Another prisoner was sad because her son finished Year 12 last year and received a "D" – failure. Now he's depressed. Fr. Fidele is working on getting him a scholarship to help him get some practical qualification. As hard as it is for moms and dads in ordinary life, I feel for this poor woman in prison – feeling so helpless. Thank you to all the MAMI supporters who empower us to help such people.

Fr. Fidele
washes feet
at Langata
Women's
Prison





Fr. Ken oversees the
renewal of vows

We held a nice celebration on Feb. 17 at Kisaju Postulancy. It was our 197th anniversary of existence as an official congregation in the Catholic Church, and we welcomed two new postulants: Felix Omukaga and Kevin Rodgers Kilonzo Kyalo.

FEB. 25

What a crazy week we just finished. People coming and going, another full Mission meeting to discuss our challenges, planning dates and updates for urgent projects plus the usual schedule. However, we are still living in a good space compared to most of the people in Kenya. Life is hard, and I don't expect it to get easier any time soon.

MARCH 5

Parts of Kenya are now in their third year of drought. *Please pray for rain.*

Drought has decimated Maasai livestock



BBC World reported this week on the abuse of women in Kenyan Tea plantations. Senior Kenyan work managers demand sex from the women coming to apply for work. If they refuse, they don't get a job. Some are abused after employment. It's really unjust and demeaning for the workers. Women live in fear of losing work. The sad thing is this predatory behaviour is widespread in Kenya and so difficult to deal with because of corruption among the police.

MARCH 12

The rains continue to elude Kenya and East Africa. We are praying, but obviously God has a different plan for now.

MARCH 19

I felt like singing this week, *We can see clearly now the rain has come*. It was nice to hear heavy rain touched many parts of Kenya – at least for one day, so far.

MARCH 26

We were blessed with plenty of rain during the week. And, better still, the rain was mainly at night and the morning. So, we managed to get enough sunshine to charge the batteries and heat the hot water units.

Unfortunately, there were large demonstrations by opposition political parties. Some of our youth participated at one of them, but I warned them to be careful and disappear if violence started or they might end up in prison. I shared a bit about what they can expect there. I also encouraged them to



Palm Sunday at Gachanka Prayer House

find out exactly what they were protesting about. As usual, some hooligans took the opportunity to damage property and throw rocks at innocent cars. Me, I stay home – more or less.

APR. 3

Thanks be to God the rains are continuing regularly, with nice hot spots in between to recharge the batteries and heat our water.



Carrying of the Cross on Good Friday

APR. 10

We were relieved that opposition leader Raila Odinga listened to common sense by the president and stopped his protests. The violence and destruction by his supporters caused terrible suffering and financial losses for many small businesses. The country also suffered from negativity overseas that affects tourism, and the currency weakened further.

I received a small newsletter from our Oblates in Ukraine. It's inspiring to read of their generosity and courageousness under such difficult conditions.

APR. 17

One bit of interesting news I picked up during a week in Rome was that the Oblates nearly went broke in the late 1800s. They started discussing with the Holy See about merging with the Redemptorists or joining dioceses, but after hearing that all the Oblate priests would have to redo novitiate with the Redemptorists, they decided to try harder, money came from somewhere and we continued.

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



Another way to help

"You saw me hungry, and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me."

Perhaps you have valuable jewelry that you might want to donate to the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) to help those in need. Fr Antonio Pannunzi, OMI, donated this gold bracelet that belonged to his late mother.

We proceeded to get an appraisal and then placed it on auction where it sold for \$2,200.

I thank all who gave their guidance and time to facilitate this sale. We thank Jackson Jewellery Appraisal in Vancouver for doing the appraisal and Dupuis Fine Jewellery Auctioneers for their assistance in the sale of this item.

We thank Fr. Pannunzi for thinking of MAMI and the poor that we serve.

Thank you, *Fr. Ken Forster, OMI*



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Do you have publicly traded securities that you would like to donate to the benefit of the Oblate missions? You can directly donate your publicly traded securities (shares) to *AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI* and receive an official income tax receipt while avoiding the payment of capital gains tax.

To take advantage of this tax-saving offer, please call Diane Lepage (1-866-432-6264) at our office for further information. A minimum market value of \$5,000 is suggested. We would be happy to facilitate this exchange that benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions. To view an excellent instructive tutorial on how you can increase the value of your donation of securities and earn a tax credit at the same time: <https://omilacombe.ca/powerful-way-leave-legacy-2/>

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Oblate Missions

*A publication of the
Oblate Mission office.*

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Printed in Canada

