

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



February 2024

Final Vows



That's how the light gets in!



The paths we have navigated for the last two years have been strewn with difficulty. Globally we saw the attack on Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, and chaos caused by global warming, to mention a few. As we age, we are more likely to experience illness and departures of those we love.

As we slowly move into 2024, we do so with hope in our hearts ... hope for peace and hope for our future. In the words of Canadian icon Leonard Cohen:

"There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in."

That light is glowing much brighter for the Oblates of Lacombe Province, perhaps not so much in Canada, but in the Canadian Oblate Mission in Kenya where five young men took their final vows to commit to the Oblates at the end of January.

We currently have 107 Oblates living in Lacombe Canada, most at an advanced age. Of the 107, only 31 are under the age of 74. Fr. Hanh Van Tran, in 2005, is the last Oblate ordained in Canada. As of this writing, there were 20 vowed Oblates serving in the Kenya Mission, at an average age of 43 and none over the age of 75.

The Kenya Mission is growing by leaps and bounds, and the mission is a beehive of activity (*See Page 32*).

The light of progress and growth is shining more brightly than it has for many decades. The spirit of the Oblates is alive and well.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Final Vows

Taking final vows (also known as perpetual profession), as a “religious” (sister, brother or priest) describes the lifelong commitment made within a religious order, like the Oblates.

When someone takes, or makes, final vows, they are making a permanent promise to live according to the specific rules and lifestyle of their religious community (rather than to a bishop, as diocesan priests do). This most often includes vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. We Oblates make a fourth vow, perseverance. It’s a significant and solemn step, where we offer our lives in service, alongside others in the order, for the sake of the Gospel and the poor.

– Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI Provincial Superior



A time to celebrate

BY HARLEY MAPES, OMI

LARMUDIAC, Kenya – In a joyous liturgy bursting with songs and dance, the Oblates of OMI Lacombe Kenya Mission gathered on Jan. 25 with family members, Oblate Associates, and parish representatives to celebrate the perpetual profession of Brothers David Ojiambo, Stephen Wakesa, Charles Okeyo, Benjamin Karani, and Stephen Makori.

Fr. Faustin, Fr. Joseph, Br. Zachary, the pastoral team for St. Joseph the Worker parish in Larmudiac, along with Fr. Phelix Johya, evidently spent hours preparing for the day's events as

the liturgy and lunch which followed flowed without mishaps.

In his address to those making perpetual vows,



David Ojiambo, OMI, and family



Br. Charles (centre) during ceremony professing his perpetual vows

Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, reminded them, “As you make your vows today, know that you are stepping into a deeper reality of living ‘in Christ.’ This participation in the life of Christ is what fueled Paul’s mission, and it’s what will sustain you in yours. You are not alone; you are part of a larger community, the Body of Christ, where each member supports and strengthens the other.” He prayed, “... may God bless you, our dear brothers, as you profess your vows today. May He guide you, sustain you, and use you as instruments of His love and grace for the work of the Oblates in the Kenya Mission or wherever your missionary journey may take you in years to come.”

As followers of Christ, living the gospel is not just for those making vows in a religious community, and so Fr. Ken reminded the congregation that “... we are all part of this mystical body, called to live out the Gospel in our own lives, supporting our brothers who today commit themselves fully to the Lord’s service. May the example of St. Paul inspire us all to live our faith more deeply, to embrace our own transformative journey in Christ, and to build up the Church, a community of love and service.”



The Oblates of OMI Lacombe Canada welcome these newly perpetually professed members of the Lacombe province and invite all MAMI members, Oblates and Associates to continue holding them in prayer as they begin their ministry.



An Oblate family picture at the Kenya Mission



GIFT PAYMENT OPTION



We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card! Please complete the gift form enclosed, visit our website at www.omilacombe.ca/mami/donations/ to give on-line, or call our office toll free: 1-866-432-6264 and we will be pleased to assist you in facilitating your donation to the Oblate missions.



Perpetual Vows

BENJAMIN EMOKOR KARANI, OMI

Benjamin Karani, originally from East Kenya, was born on Sept. 13, 1993, in Teso. He is the sixth child in a family of seven, comprising five boys and two girls. His late father, Sebastian Anacet Emokor, was a tailor by profession, and his mother, Frigina Akello, is a merchant. He received the sacraments of Christian initiation in his original parish at Saint Rose of Lima Parish in Amukura, within the Diocese of Bungoma. After his philosophy studies in Nairobi, he did his novitiate in Ngaoundere, Cameroon, where he professed his first vows on Sept. 7, 2019. In the same year, he began his theological studies at the Catholic University of Central Africa in Yaounde-Cameroon, where he graduated with a degree in theology in 2022. After his studies, he was sent to Kisaju (Blessed Joseph Gerard Postulancy) for regency and assisting in the parish.



(Regency is an extended period of pastoral experience outside the formation house. It is a period of preparation for the reception of orders for the candidates for the priesthood.)

CHARLES OWINO OKEYO, OMI

Charles Owino Okeyo was born on Oct. 12, 1989, in Nairobi. He is the second born in a family of five children. He has three sisters and one brother. His parents Raphael Oyugi, a civil servant, and Pamela Achieng, a businesswoman, live in Nairobi. Charles is from Saint Joseph's Parish Jericho, East Land in Nairobi. In 2018, he went to the novitiate (Our Lady of Hope) in Germiston, South Africa. In 2019, he professed his first religious vows. He joined the international scholasticate in Rome for theological studies from 2019 to 2022. After his studies, Charles started the regency program in Nairobi, assisting at the pre-novitiate for six months. In March 2023 he was assigned to Méru Community, Saint Eugene Parish, Irinda.



STEPHEN WEKESA WANGILA, OMI

Stephen Wekesa was born on April 1, 1994, in Bungoma diocese in the western region of Kenya. He is from Kabula Parish. He is the last born of three children. His father, Gabriel Wekesa Simiyu Oparah, is a catechist, and his mother Margret Reginald Nabwile Mlupi, passed away in 2020. Stephen started his religious formation in Méru Postulancy in 2014. He then went to the pre-novitiate in Karen, Nairobi, from 2015 to 2018. He did his novitiate in Ngaoundere, Cameroon (2018-2019). His first Oblation took place in Cameroon on Sept. 7, 2019. He did his theological studies in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 2019 to 2022. After his theological studies, Stephen was assigned to St. Stephen's Parish, Kionyo, for regency.



DAVID HUMPHRENCE OJIAMBO, OMI

David Ojiambo was born on Aug. 23, 1993, at Oyato village in Busia County, in Western Kenya. He is the fourth of seven children and has three brothers and three sisters. His parents are Juma Kentrix Omodo and Karen Eunice Juma.



David grew up with a strong Christian faith in the Diocese of Bungoma. He went to the novitiate (Our Lady of Hope) in Germiston, South Africa, where he professed his first vows on Jan. 28, 2019. He completed his theological studies at St. Joseph's Oblate Scholasticate in Cedara, South Africa. After his theological studies, David was assigned to St. Stephen's Parish in Kionyo for regency.

STEPHEN MAKORI MOSE, OMI

Stephen Makori Mose was born on Sept. 12, 1998. His parents are Kennedy Mose and Josephine. His father passed away in 2009. He has four siblings, and he is the third born in the family. At his parish, there were many religious sisters and seminarians who gave workshops on vocations. He came across a vocational magazine and wanted to know more about the Oblates. He first completed his studies as a teacher and then was contacted by the vocation director. He joined the Oblate pre-novitiate in 2014. He went to the novitiate (Our Lady of Hope) in Germiston, South Africa, where he professed his first vows on Jan. 28, 2019. He completed his theological studies at St. Joseph's Oblate Scholasticate in Cedara, South Africa. After his theological studies, Stephen was assigned to St. Eugene de Mazenod Irinda Parish.



Missionaries Stand for the Land

BY JOE GUNN

OTTAWA – On Oct. 4, Pope Francis released an Apostolic Exhortation concerning climate change, called *Laudate Deum*. He wrote, “I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values. At the same time, I cannot deny that it is necessary to be honest and recognize that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level.” (LD #69)

Canadians are fortunate to have leadership in this effort to develop “effective solutions” to improve the condition of people and the planet. The Fall Campaign of the official aid agency of our Catholic Church, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada (DP-CC), is worthy of our full support. Called “Stand for the Land,” this campaign is exactly the type of action in which the pope is inviting faith communities to engage.

For years DP-CC has provided financial support to the work of a Jesuit-inspired organization in Honduras, Central America, called the *Equipo de Reflexion, Investigacion y Comunicacion*



Superior General Fr.
Luis signs the petition

(ERIC). This organization operates a community radio station and accompanies several communities that have been criminalized for defending their lands and waters from harmful large-scale extraction projects. In the case of the community of Guapinol, hundreds of people opposed an iron-oxide mine that was allowed to be built in a national park designed to safeguard water sources for more than 200,000 people. While dozens of peaceful protestors have been charged for defending the land and water, eight were imprisoned for more than two years, and this year, after their release, three of these men were assassinated.

The alarming, yet familiar background context was provided by ERIC staffer Elvin Hernandez at St. Paul University in October at an event organized by the *Centre Oblat*. A *coup d'état* in 2009 brought a new president to power, a man who declared Honduras “open for business.” (The now former president is currently facing drug and weapons charges in the USA.) The new president lifted a seven-year moratorium on mining, and over 500 mineral concessions were hurriedly granted in a country smaller than Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined.

DP-CC has circulated a petition that proposes five demands we can all support: 1) to strengthen protection mechanisms; 2) to arrest and prosecute the assassins of the murdered land defenders; 3) to provide reparations to the affected families; 4) to restore the protected areas in the national park; and 5) to cancel all mining projects that hold irregularly issued licences. Hopefully, 32,000 signatures will be presented to the Honduran Ambassador to Canada, encouraging her new government to act.

You can access the petition at [Act | Development and Peace - Caritas Canada \(devp.org\)](#) and sign it on-line. Better yet, you can gather signatures among your family and parish community.

(Joe Gunn served as executive director of Le Centre Oblat: A Voice for Justice.)

COP28 unites global voices for climate action

BY DAQUIN IYO IYAN, OMI

(Fr. Daquin attended COP28 at Expo City in Dubai as a VIVAT International delegate. VIVAT International addresses human rights issues with particular focus on the rights of children, women, and eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and the culture of peace.)

NAIROBI – The COP28 event held in Dubai at Expo City from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12th brought together a diverse and dynamic gathering to address the global challenges of climate change.

The summit showcased a commitment to prioritizing vulnerable communities, as emphasized by President Sultan Al Jaber. Leaders from various sectors, including civil society, business, Indigenous Peoples, and international organizations,

converged with shared determination to close gaps by 2030.

Simon Stiell, the UN climate change executive secretary, stressed the need for clear signals on renewables, climate justice, and resilience. Civil society played a vital role in side events,

Fr. Daquin in Dubai



underscoring climate change extremes such as loss and damage, extreme temperatures, and their disproportionate impact on vulnerable countries.

Negotiations were intense, particularly regarding the wording on fossil fuels. The African group of negotiators prioritized the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), seeking a phase-out of fossil fuels, which sparked controversy. Despite initial dissatisfaction, a consensus agreement was reached, addressing fossil fuel transition, emission reduction targets, loss and damage, adaptation, and climate finance.

Civil society's strong voices were evident in presentations, press conferences, and actions. Their emphasis on loss and damage, disappointment with initial drafts, and highlighting split views added depth to the discussions. Negotiators prioritized the GGA, with a call for a phase-out of fossil fuels, reflecting the urgency for sustainable solutions.

The COP28 outcomes reflect a comprehensive agreement achieved through a collective effort. While commendable progress has been made, the strong voices of civil society and negotiators, their disappointments, and split views indicate the complexity of the challenges ahead. The emphasis on transitioning away from fossil fuels, ambitious emission reduction targets, and financial commitments is a positive step, but ongoing dialogues and actions are crucial.

Acknowledging the missed aspects, a critical view emphasizes the need for continued engagement with civil society and negotiators. A follow-up plan should involve addressing disappointments, fostering better communication channels, and ensuring that diverse perspectives are integral to future climate discussions. Strengthening the involvement of civil society and negotiators in monitoring and implementing the agreed-upon actions will be vital for the success of global climate initiatives. The global community must remain vigilant, adaptive, and responsive to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and considered in the ongoing fight against climate change.



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



Breaking barriers, instilling hope!

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – In the seven parishes in our region we are trying to get people interested in evangelizing the inmates in the new and modern jail where there are now 3,000 inmates, of which 200 are women.

About a year ago I and three team members made our first visit to the jail. We were given the green light to go anywhere by the jail director, and he also gave me permission to use my camera.

Once we established the needs of these inmates, the lack of blankets became a priority, and we were able to provide 1,800. As each week passed, we learned more about their needs: toothpaste, toiletries, tables, chairs, musical instruments, water tanks, items for the making of shoes, T-shirts, caps for

construction workers, rosaries (1,400), bibles (48) and 2,600 books I stole from our house library.

A few months ago, a group from the central parish located in the heart of Chinchá Alta started to visit the jail twice a week. They go there to teach the inmates about the love of God for all, even the naughty ones. So, now we have two groups visiting the jail, my group of house builders and the other group composed of lay people of different professions including teachers.

The two groups recently met to lay out a practical plan so as not to duplicate the good work. Our stance is that you can't teach people about the love of God if their stomachs are empty.

The other group preaches the word of God while we preach the love of God by helping meet the basic needs of the inmates. With your help and donations, we try to meet most of these needs.

Since our first visit to the jail, the attitude of the inmates

Inmates produce items for sale





has changed greatly. They greet us with hugs and solid handshakes. We can see positive spirit among them, and they do not take our work for granted.

In the shops they produce items that show a lot of talent and they are learn-

ing a trade. I have a project for a group of 25 inmates in one of the shops where they make beautiful ceramics. These are taken out of the prison and sold by the lay group. The money collected is given back to the people who made the items, and this helps the prisoners to help their families.

The oven they have is no longer functional due to use and age. We asked them to pray to Our Holy Mother Mary so we can get the funds to get them a new electric oven.

When some prisoners were released, we helped them build a house to begin a new lease on life.

One man (Louis) got married by the Church and is getting his six-year-old daughter baptized. Another man got a job as a taxi driver and yet another man got himself a good business by selling plates of fish foods. A leader of a gang was reformed, and we got to help him, his young wife and a daughter building their house.

We see 200 women inmates, and we noticed the prison lacks a bakery. So, we are trying to get one installed by communicating with the prison authorities.

Our theme with the inmates is based on one word. We try to give them HOPE!

MONTHLY GIVING



MAMI is able to fund transformative collaborative projects in partnership with the poor through donations, publicly-traded securities, bequests and community organizing — all of which we couldn't do without our incredible MAMI community. But, there is nothing like the impact of sustained monthly giving, turning what could be a one-time donation into lasting, long-term solidarity.

In his encyclical *"Fratelli Tu+ "*, *"Brothers and Sisters All"*, Pope Francis speaks about the need for us to see ourselves as one family with God as our Father. He defines solidarity in this way: *"Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community."* Monthly donors give us the confidence and security to double down on our efforts to embrace the poor as our brothers and sisters. We encourage you to join the circle as a monthly donor by using the enclosed gift form.

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



In your words

A century of service

BY SUSAN VELDER

ST. WALBURG, SK – I read your “Wanted Your Stories” notice in the *Oblate Spirit* and thought I should say a word.

I try to donate to the Oblates because they have been a part of my entire life. They worked in our community since homesteading days and have been a huge part of my spiritual and cultural development.

In 1907 Bishop Pascal became bishop of Prince Albert. Homesteaders were settling in the St. Walburg area at that time. The settlers were mostly French, German, English, Ukrainian and Polish.

By 1913, a Roman Catholic chapel existed named St. Marguerite. It was about four miles southwest of where St. Walburg now stands. St. John’s Church west of St. Walburg

St. Walburg Church



welcomed Oblates from Onion Lake to serve their small parish by 1918.

However, in 1922, when the railroad and station were established in St. Walburg, things changed. The then-Bishop of Prince Albert, Bishop Prudhomme, sent a priest, Fr. Hubert Hermes, an Oblate, to St. Walburg to build a church and parish in that location. St. Marguerite and St. John's were soon closed.

The Oblate Province of Alberta / Saskatchewan was formed in 1920. The St. Walburg District became a part of that Province. Makwa, Barthel, Loon Lake, Paradise Hill, Good Soil, St. Marguerite, Cleaves and St. John all became part of the St. Walburg District.

Fr. Hermes was a German intellectual, capable, learned, and hard working. He spoke German, French and English and had a keen understanding of human nature. When he took up residence in St. Walburg he began without delay to make plans for the construction of the new church.

Arthur S. Brooks was a handyman who, along with a crew from North Battleford, fashioned the main structure. Once the building was enclosed, Fr. Hermes, Brooks and a few local workmen built and erected the interior ceiling arches, the steeple and large cross above the steeple.

On Christmas Eve 1924, the first mass was offered.

In those early years, beginning in about 1900, traveling Oblates offered masses in home and country chapels. In 2014, when St. Walburg parish priest Fr. Richard Doll, OMI, was transferred to Trinity Manor in Saskatoon, the Oblates had served this west central region of Saskatchewan for more than 100 years. Since 2014, priests other than the Oblates have served here.

We here in St. Walburg and area have been much blessed in so many ways by the dedication, hard work, prayers and example of the many Oblates who have lived and worked here. We thank and remember them fondly.

Respectfully submitted: Susan Velder

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



Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI



YouTube Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions

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





Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

OCT. 15

NAIROBI, Kenya – A few days after the terrible situation unfolded in Israel, we received a warning from the U.S. government that Al-Shabaab will probably carry out an attack in Nairobi as a sign of unity with Hamas. We

need to be careful where we gather.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

OCT. 22

Fr. Daquin worked with Euticus, our farm manager, to initiate some improvements to the farm at Kiirua, Méru (repairing the roof gutters on the house). The farm experienced heavy rain and we are in a hurry to plant some fruit tree seedlings. Later in the week it poured rain again and washed out a good amount of soil and damaged the access road.

Fr. Praveen has been busy trying to level the volleyball court. They created a court boundary edge using cut stones around the lower side, then backfilled inside the court to make it level.

Kiirua Farm - flood damage on road





Volleyball court preparation

A solar technician came to look at how we might add more solar panels to the pre-novitiante for improved battery charging during overcast days and help run the pump more easily when overcast. We also looked up prices for another washing machine as one of their old machines died last year and we budgeted for a new one for this year. My, the prices have gone up! We soon expect to have up to 18 people in the house.



Installing solar panels

OCT. 29

I checked out a new hot water system that uses a condenser (like a fridge) to heat the air and therefore heat the water. It operates on 600 watts which is manageable for a solar power



Kiirua Farm - working on the cow shed

system. The other advantage is that the hot water is stored in a tank next to the bathroom, not on the rooftop, which means no water wasted waiting for the hot water to reach the shower.

NOV. 4

A raft of new laws came into effect at the airport, taxing all sorts of things as people enter the country, which is not smart as it will deter tourists whom we need. One woman came through the airport with her wedding dress. Customs demanded so much money she left the dress at the airport and departed in tears.

Kenrod, our Nairobi youth surveyor, has been laying out 27-acre blocks of land for sale at Komarock because some of the Maasai community wanted to sell land and get some money. Kenrod said it has good potential because the water is less than 100 metres underground and the land is very fertile once you get rain.

NOV. 11

Our faithful Oblate youth in Nairobi continued giving food to the hungry in Mathare slum. George told me he's excited each time they go, because the blessings he gets afterwards follow him for a week because people give him small jobs. It

has nothing to do with the people in Mathare, rather he just sees it as God blessing him for sacrificing his time. It is a good reminder to us all: God never forgets our kindness, and we should



Kiirua Farm - Euticus,
son Gerard and Fr. Gerard

always be humble and see that God is helping us, rather than praising ourselves for good things that happen.

I sent a little help to our farm manager as he sends his young brother to Kionyo for the annual initiation program. Euticus is a generous man. He and his wife have two children to care for, and he also cares for his wife's other child and his younger brother who has learning difficulties.

Michael, our architect, finalized the draft renovation plan for the old rectory in Larmudiac. Now we shall review and look at how it might be funded. It would provide 13 bedrooms with ensuite (helpful for visitors) and could be used for periods of the year to generate some income for the parish. Costs are yet to be calculated and will probably need to be spread over two years.

Kionyo - Youth gathered on the feast day of St. John



NOV. 18

We started the week with Fr. Fidele being installed as the Superior for another three years, along with his new mission council (Fr. Constant, Fr. Gideon and Fr. Greg). I was the main celebrant as he could not install himself!

George, our Nairobi youth member, invited me to meet a group of deaf people at his parish as often they are going hungry. I said I'd only come if the local priest was involved. It was a good meeting and reminded me how much potential these people have, even though they are often ignored by Kenyan society.



Nairobi Youth visit
the deaf community

NOV. 25

We started the week with the sad news that Fr. Fidele's dad passed away at age 85. Fr. Fidele was calm and worked hard to prepare things in the mission before travelling to Kinshasa.

The rains have been consistent, many parts of northern Kenya and Mombasa are experiencing floods and the counties

Flooding in Méru County



are seeking emergency help from the national government. Parts of Méru have been flooded.

There is an increase in crime. The owner of a house in our area was held up at gunpoint, drugged and had his valuables stolen, so we are being careful. The automatic gate is a good help for our safety.

Laban, the son of our former cook, came for a visit. We had helped him through Don Bosco Technical, and he is doing well. I'm proud of his efforts to make a success. He is faithful (kept searching for work), religious (teaches kids the bible), honest, polite, and hard-working! Now the good fruit is coming. He has a good job and his boss appreciates him, connecting him to more training (programming car computers). We helped him purchase a special computer diagnostic tool for cars. He was very happy and tested all our cars for "free".



Laban with his new car diagnostic tool

The deaf group I visited last week sent pictures of their joy at receiving our donation to buy a bit of food. Although it was not a big donation, I believe it was the fact that they feel someone cares.

I prepared a Ruby Fund loan to Felix, our farm worker. This is a special fund created by a Canadian family which allows us to help our workers with emergency funds to be paid back at a slow rate and a low interest.

DEC. 2

I visited Monica, an elderly German woman, for coffee, but first she dragged me over to her new lawnmower that was not working. I checked the oil and gave it one pull of the starter, and realized there was no spark. The lead on the spark plug was disconnected. She now thinks I'm very competent!

DEC. 10

The big event for the week was the closing mass and celebration of Immaculate Conception at the pre-novitiate. Fr. Praveen and the pre-novices did a great job

preparing the student common room to accommodate more people. The singing by the young men was brilliant, and the food was excellent. We had visitors and parishioners from Kisaju, Kionyo and the local area. It is a good way to involve our people and strengthen the de Mazenod family bonds.



Children celebrate Christmas with gifts and a party

DEC. 17

I was in Rome for meetings this week. The General Finance Committee has increased under the new General Administration, not just checking, but looking for solutions. The focus of one meeting was on helping to prepare for the change in head taxes around the Oblate world. The general administration council in Rome relies on contributions from each unit in the world.

In the 1990s, the treasurer general developed a system that taxed the wealthy units like Canada and Australia more than the less wealthy units like Ghana and Cameroon. Until recently that was working fine, but the number of Oblates in wealthy countries has dropped considerably and each death means a big drop in “tax” for the general administration budget.

The increasing number of Oblates in the southern hemisphere is good, but the tax per Oblate is very low, so you need about 10 new Oblates in the south to offset one from the north.

DEC. 24

I was proud of our Nairobi youth who attended Mathare as usual, to share food with the hungry. Following is a message from Andrew: *"Today was a very successful day. We went to a different distribution centre at Mathare, the Legio Maria Centre. We were welcomed with songs like special guests. There is a special section where no footwear is allowed. They have special forms of greetings. We later joined Mabatini residents for their festival. Helped in food preparation and service. A very successful day! I have returned home late and happier."*

The sensationalised reports about the Pope's proclamation permitting priests to bless people in irregular situations (living together before marriage, same-sex couples, etc.), has really confused many of the youth. I've tried to help them understand what the Pope is trying to do, but the media reports are overwhelming.

DEC. 30

The Kenya Shilling is in freefall against other currencies and the situation is concerning. Two nuns from the Daughters of St. Anne were robbed between our house and Resurrection Gardens about two days before Christmas.

Then, thieves broke into Irinda Church on Christmas or Boxing Day and stole the sound system inside (about \$1,500). They broke into several new offices and found nothing, but damaged the doors. They then broke open a steel door on the external storeroom for the pump controller and took it away – about \$600. Sadly, one member of the gang held a knife to

the watchman while the others did their dirty deeds. The elderly man was a bit traumatized by it all and felt very bad about the thefts.

Broken locks after the break-in





Construction on Gachanka church continues

All our communities celebrated Christmas well, with good attendance at masses, except for Méru where they were down a bit as some people went back to the villages for Christmas with their families.

I agreed to do baptism for Kenrod, our former Nairobi youth chairperson, at Gaturi Prayer House in Kionyo. It is so beautiful in Kionyo.

JAN. 7

I attended a special ceremony at Ngong Cathedral to consecrate three women as Consecrated Virgins, a unique association in the church dating back to the first or second century AD. There are now nine in Kenya and about 5,000 around the world. The mass was led by Bishop John Oballa Owaa, in the company of 10 priests. Consecrated Virgins are self-supporting women who live in the community as lay women, helping the community. Some are lawyers, others are nurses, doctors, counsellors, pastoral workers, etc. The idea is to show that people can be happy by serving the community and living a chaste life.



Consecrated Virgins

JAN. 15

I'm saddened to report that one of our scholastics, Br. Collins Masinde, OMI, has died in an accident in South Africa. It has shocked all of us. He was a promising young man with a generous heart for those in need. We are still waiting for the final reports and the body to be found. From what we can make out, he was washed off the rocks at an isolated rocky beach while having a break from their annual retreat. Maybe he hit his head and lost consciousness? Who knows? He was washed out to sea and presumed drowned. Please pray for his family, his friends and us Oblates. May he RIP.



Br. Collins
Masinde, OMI

JAN. 20

We now have a new OMI, Br. Peter Wakwabubi. He took First Vows on Jan. 19 at our Oblate parish in Johannesburg.

We continue to hope that Br. Collins's body might be found in South Africa. It will be hard for the family to have final closure without his body, so we keep praying for them.

There are many sharks in the area, so there is little hope his body will be found.

Fr. Ken Thorson, our provincial superior, and Br. Harley Mapes, our provincial treasurer, arrived late Friday evening from Canada.

Fr Ken was warmly welcomed in Kenya and, a day later, he welcomed home Br. Peter Wangira Wakwabubi, OMI from South Africa, our newest Oblate (First Vows). They enjoyed a breakfast together.



Kenya Mission: A beehive of activity

(The Oblate Kenya Mission is alive with activity on many different fronts. Fr. Gerry Conlan, the mission treasurer and invaluable link to Oblate Spirit, provided an overview of Mission activities for the last half of 2023.)

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

NAIROBI – Kenya's economic challenges are continuing with many auctions advertised in the newspapers every Monday and Tuesday. Severe flooding has caused havoc for communities in Kenya (especially northern and Mombasa). But the Maasai are happy: it is the first rain in three years!

Fr. Fidele, our Superior, was appointed for a third term of leadership and a new council was installed Nov. 13. Some members went on vacation and a regional Young Oblates meeting took place in Zambia.

Our four parishes continue with many ministries in prayer houses, and all parishes sent parishioners to the National Prayer Day at the Subukia Shrine.

The Kisaju Parish promoted tree planting by inviting families to "own" a tree and look after it to maturity.



Fr. Gerard leads the Mass as Fr. Fidele Munkiele OMI makes profession of faith and promise



Méru parish youth make a visit to the Oblate Mission Centre in Nairobi, for prayer and reflection at the local shrine (Resurrection Gardens)

Méru Parish started a new program helping older youth transition to adult life, using the life of St. Eugene as a framework and source of inspiration.

Our two postulants are doing well and have been approved for pre-novitiate in 2024. The pre-novitiate is truly international: four men from Lesotho, three from Namibia and five from Kenya. They then left for pastoral placements and short holidays. After their philosophy exams, two workshops will run for child protection and cultural education.

Three scholastics returned home from Cedara. Moses and David are ready for final vows and to prepare for ordination. Elias and Sylvester are doing their regency year before completing theology. The other three scholastics (Charles, Stephen and Benjamin) completed six weeks of intensive final vows preparation in Cameroon. Three other scholastics are in the United States, Philippines and South Africa.

Our Oblate student priests are Frs. Leon and Vitaris (Namibia, Canon Law); Frs. Thembo and Chitambo

(Zimbabwe, Dogmatic Theology & African Philosophy); and Fr. Pita (Lesotho, Formation).

Prison ministry continues at the women's maximum-security prison. Chaplaincy at Nyumbani HIV-plus children's home also continues. The Oblate youth in Nairobi continue distributing food in Mathare slum twice per month and are now looking at supporting a large group of deaf people in a poorer part of Nairobi (people with disabilities are often abandoned in Kenya).

There are several other projects in progress.

Karen pre-Novitiate: is doing a feasibility study to expand the solar power system and transfer batteries and controllers to an external guard house (for safety).

Kisaju Postulancy: completed a new solar power system that works well, even running the borehole pump for a few hours each day. They are preparing to construct a small guard house and out-source night guard services.

Kisaju Parish Korompoi Prayer House: the Oblates installed a solar-powered borehole on Oblate land to serve locals for a small fee.

Kisaju Parish Centre: parish rectory construction was completed; finishing touch-ups and furnishing is now in progress.

Larmudiac Parish: is in pre-feasibility to renovate the old rectory and make additions to create accommodation for visitors and part-time rentals to generate income.

Installation of solar panels to power OMI borehole pump to serve the church and neighbours





Formwork for concrete arches over the Gachanka church entrance

In Kionyo Parish: the Kairiene prayer house constructed a nice entrance gate, the Kionyo prayer house completed a watchman's house, and three loads of church pews arrived for the new Kionyo church.

In Irinda Parish: (Méru town), parish office furnishing continues and the Gachanka church construction made good progress, and they are preparing for security wall construction and small solar power for the house.

Méru Postulancy: The Sons of Divine Providence requested to leave their lease early; the Kenya Mission is busy looking for alternative users.

Komarock: Ten-acre and three-acre blocks of land were purchased for future ministry 50 kilometres east of Nairobi.

Karen Mission Centre: a detailed feasibility study was submitted to extend the administration/hospitality house to add 32 rooms (a mix of small and large).

Kisaju OMI Centre: created a caretaker cabin and ablutions, is ready for pump installation and establishing short-term farming to generate income.



Nairobi youth gather with the deaf in front of
St. Joachim Church in Soweto

A spark of hope

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

NAIROBI – I visited a group of deaf people at the parish of George, one of our Oblate youth club members. The deaf people are largely left alone, but the new parish priest (Fr. James) and George are helping to change that.

George wanted to use some of the money we set aside for the Mathare Slum food program to help the deaf with food. It was a good meeting.

One young man had recently been attacked by robbers and was badly beaten in the process, which must have been frightening for someone who can't hear and can't talk. He recovered well, and could give us a smile.

Meeting with the deaf, George, Fr. James and the interpreter, we developed a strategy. We will look for some sponsors for monthly food assistance, a database will be developed of skills for each of the deaf people and advertise that in the parish so they can be given jobs as needed by parishioners and Fr. James where possible.

Among the group is a chef, a website designer and a welder, who I encouraged to specialise in artistic welding so he stands out from other welders. Fr. James is going to help him



Preparing gifts
for distribution
to the deaf

produce the SVD logo in metal as a job and will try to buy a welding machine to keep at the parish.

The man who was robbed did website-design, so Fr. James will get him to enhance the parish website. Fr. James will also help the cook find work.

It's amazing what brainstorming can achieve. I encouraged Fr. James to look for volunteer teachers and, with the interpreter, teach them how to read English. It will help them a lot if we can locate some text-to-speech devices where they can type a message and it speaks back to the listener. But most of them learned the local deaf language which is a simplistic back-to-front English to minimise the signing required.

Fr. James promised to ensure the 10 a.m. mass every Sunday has an interpreter, so the deaf can feel welcomed and nourished instead of disconnected.

It was sobering, yet uplifting, to meet and share with this group of disadvantaged people. It is encouraging to see there is hope for the future!

The deaf are happy
to receive the gifts



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