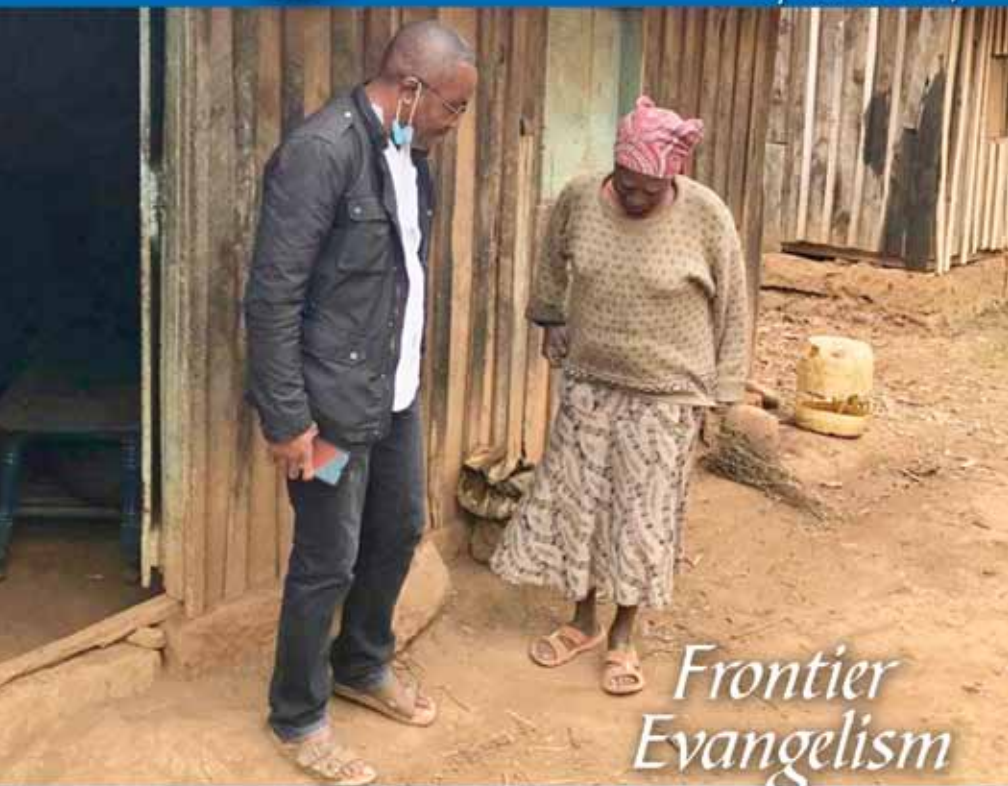


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



September 2024



Frontier
Evangelism

Troubling times



Climate and politics are themes we rarely mention, but this is one of those times when they have been thrust upon us. Climate change and the political climate have erupted into forces that are impacting the country of Kenya, where the Canadian-supported Oblate mission is caught in their grips. From disastrous rain and flooding to deadly political protests, the situation remains fraught with tension.

Fr. Gerry Conlan, OMI, provides us with an extensive weekly look in his Kenya diary (apologies for the length) at the politics and its impact on the poor and destitute in the country. And it's hard to ignore the climate when Oblate priest Phelix Johya had to climb over a tree that fell across a flooded bridge to deliver Sunday mass and Eucharist to outstations near Kisaju.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, a master of the written word, discusses his life as an Oblate and reflects on Oblate history and those who still go bravely where few dare to tread.

The need to feed the hungry and the poor, and the need for spiritual nourishment have not disappeared. It was *frontier evangelism* more than 100 years ago, and it remains *frontier evangelism* today. That is the spirit that inspires the Oblates at work as they address the needs of the poor in our world.

Also, a reminder that All Souls' Day is near, the time of year when we collect the names of your deceased loved ones for whom we offer prayers. (See the prayer card insert). Time flies much too quickly for those of us left behind and the list of our departed loved ones grows steadily longer.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Frontier Evangelism:

Oblates go where no one else dares

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate Lacombe gathered in St. Albert, AB, for their national convocation May 13-17. It had the theme of “Dare We Hope? Pilgrims of Hope in Communion.” Oblates and associates from across Canada – and the world – gathered to talk about how the Oblate mission to proclaim the Gospel and serve the poor will be actualized in the years ahead. As of 2024, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) have approximately 600 seminarians, globally. The Oblates founded the Archdiocese of Edmonton and were essential to the evangelization of the Canadian West.

People who attended convocation put into their own words how the Oblates are proclaiming the Gospel and serving the poor – both in the past, and the future.

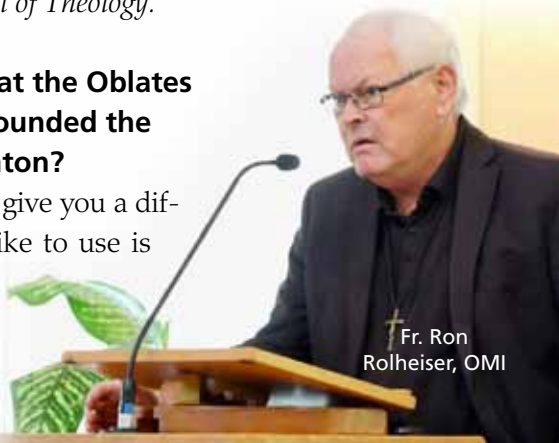
This is the first in a series of interviews with attendees at the convocation. Other participant’s interviews will be included in future issues of *Oblate Spirit*.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Fr. Rolheiser has been an Oblate priest for more than 50 years. He was ordained in 1972 and served in the Archdiocese of Edmonton from 1972-1991. He currently resides in San Antonio, Texas, at the Oblate School of Theology.

Is it accurate to say that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate founded the Archdiocese of Edmonton?

Yes, except I want to give you a different verb. The verb I like to use is that we “planted” the Church in this area.



Fr. Ron
Rolheiser, OMI

And you know, it's not just the diocese of Edmonton, but virtually every diocese in Western Canada west of Winnipeg was planted by the Oblates. There are some that we did not found but the major dioceses of Edmonton and Calgary, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Prince Albert. They were planted by the Oblates. Other priests came too, but the dioceses were largely planted by the Oblates.



Jean Pierre Faye, OMI, ministers to the elderly in Méru

And you know, the charism of the Oblates is to plant churches and then we give them over to a diocese. So the whole idea is to spawn a diocesan clergy. That's true in most other dioceses [that we have founded]. We plant a church, we get it going, and then it becomes a diocesan church.

And in one regard we move on sadly – because it's hard, emotionally – to move on. And so we leave churches (parishes) just when they're really thriving and that's what it means to be a missionary.

I'll give you an example. The American Oblates, in the last 20 years, have let go of over a hundred thriving parishes, taken

The Oblates responded to the hurricane in Haiti





Transportation down the Amazon to Ste. Clotilde hospital

over by dioceses. And you know, in some ways it's satisfying. It's like, if you raise a child, the child leaves home, but it's also emotionally hard on us. You know, you plant yourself there, you get embedded with the people and so on. And just when it's really thriving you move on. That is what has happened all across Canada, including in Edmonton.

But that's also deeply Christian. Remember, Jesus said, everybody must leave something. Everybody who's called by Jesus is asked to leave something. You leave something behind. And yet Christ promises that there is always new life after the sacrifice.

You've talked a lot about the missionary charism of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and how founding dioceses and parishes has been essential to your work in history. What does your missionary charism look like now? Is your order still founding dioceses?

Excellent question. Both! First of all, we're worldwide. So we're still in a lot of places like Asia, India, and Vietnam. We're still founding churches in Africa.

In the Western world, like North America, there aren't new churches to be founded. But what we're doing is we're going to those places where most people don't want to go. So, you're going to find us in inner cities. You're going to find us in parishes and places where others don't want to go, to be with the poor.

If you go to places like London or Leeds or Dublin, if you go into the inner city where the cops are scared to go, that's where you find the Oblates. We're down on the borders in Mexico. So we try to find out where the poor hang out and then we try to move towards them.

As Jesus said, "the poor you'll always have with you."

What is a memory of yours that sums up what it means to be an Oblate of Mary Immaculate?

So one day I went to Edinburgh, Scotland. I went to our parish there and the whole area was barricaded. It was in a place where the cops were scared to go. And I'm sitting there with the pastor, and we're having a beer. He's talked about how wonderful it is to be in this place and yet there are cameras for security and his rectory is like a fortress, for safety.

I remember he said, "Well, the police are scared to come, but I feel pretty comfortable here."

And I remember thinking "that is right."

This is where we should be. Where no one else will go. With the poor. I was proud at that moment, proud to be an Oblate.

While I was still living in Edmonton, I went on a sabbatical to Oakland and we were in a rough part of the city and the pastor had built a bathroom that the homeless could use.

They could come at night, and they could sleep on the church grounds, and so on. And I had a car, and my car stood there for six months but it was never touched, because they knew I was a priest, that I was an Oblate. If anyone else had parked their car there, it would be gone in the morning, the tires would be gone.



Adobe bricks become homes for the poor in Peru

And you know it was interesting, we're in this really rough area of Oakland, and we're probably the only five white people there, and I felt completely safe. The people on the streets, they knew we were there for them. The pastor would go out at night, and he'd ask the guys to hand in their guns and one night he brought in 22 guns. He gave them back to them in the morning.

And I thought, "yeah, this is what it means to be an Oblate."

You know, I also love working in urban, affluent parishes [where it's more comfortable]. There can be more emotional satisfaction. But we're called to be missionaries!

That is my invitation to young people.

*I don't say – do you want a "good" life? A comfortable life? I ask them do you want something hard? You want a real challenge? **Join us!** The adventure draws young people, and the Cross. But it's a different kind of adventure. It's the adventure that Jesus assured us of, that we would also receive a hundredfold back.*

Daring for the sake of ministry

BY PHELIX JOHYA, OMI

KISAJU, Kenya – I joined Kisaju Parish on Oct. 6, 2022, as an assistant pastor immediately after my ordination. The area was drought stricken, it was hot and the roads were very dusty.

During my pastoral visits, I saw animals in the cowshed too weak to even get up. The whole livelihood of our pastoralist people in this condition sometimes moved me to tears. I felt the pain and sadness of our people. While blessing their houses and animal sheds, I offered words of hope and prayed for them. I learned that a priest is to be ready any time to make sacrifices for the flock he shepherds.

After three years of drought, when people had lost hope, it began raining heavily, roads were rendered impassable and rivers were filled beyond capacity to the extent that three of our outstations could not have Holy Mass on Sundays.

I twice tried to cross the river bridge for mass on two Sundays with my motorbike, but failed because of the flooding. I gazed helplessly at the river with pain in my heart, seeing the church on the other side but unable to get there.

Fr. Phelix after crossing the river



Phelix Johya, OMI





Fallen trees block the path

On the third week I was scheduled to celebrate the first mass at our parish centre, while Fr. Greg Oszust was to celebrate mass at St. Bernard in Olturoto, one of our interior outstations at the same time.

I was already dressed for mass when I received a phone call from Fr. Greg that he was unable to cross the flooded river and that a large tree had fallen across the bridge. He asked that I call and have mass cancelled again, but instead I asked Fr. Greg if he would trade masses with me so I could try to go to Olturoto.

I removed my Alb and Stole, grabbed my mass kit and jumped on a motorbike to Olturoto. On the way I met Fr. Greg, who urged me not to risk it. But I was determined to find a way.

Upon arriving at the flooded bridge on which the large tree fell, I thought for a few seconds, then decided to leave my motorbike behind. I took my mass kit with me and started to cross. I carefully climbed the branches of the fallen tree, and after a few minutes I was on the other side.

At Olturoto, I met a congregation that was eagerly waiting for the Holy Eucharist after going two weeks without. I celebrated mass with the people of God, and left fulfilled for mass at the next outstation.

Flood disaster

**BY FIDELE MUNKIELE, OMI
KENYA MISSION SUPERIOR**

NAIROBI, Kenya – While the government has pledged considerable aid and is actively assisting in various areas, the scale of the recent flood disaster requires additional support. NGOs and local churches are stepping forward with their resources to help, particularly in slum neighborhoods where public centres are now sheltering displaced individuals.

Additionally, there are plans to evacuate communities at risk of dam failures to safer locations, with the government committing to create temporary accommodation centres equipped with basic necessities.



Karen residence flooding

Flooding of the grounds at the postulancy in Kisaju



In Mai Maiu, a dam burst at 3 a.m. causing a deadly flash flood that claimed the lives of more than 70 people as they slept. The situation in Nairobi's slums is equally rough, with flash floods transforming minor watercourses into deadly torrents; in Mathare alone, 60,000 residents have lost their homes. Despite these challenges, the young people of Mathare have been lauded for their bravery in rescuing hundreds, thus preventing the loss of more lives.

With numerous dams across Kenya at risk of failing and potentially causing further severe floods, the anticipated heavy rainfall poses a major challenge due to already wet soil. Compounding the situation, factors such as corruption, contractor negligence, and poor urban planning have intensified the effects of the floods. Additionally, deforestation, insufficient drainage, and substandard infrastructure have significantly worsened the disaster's severity.

In Méru parish, the heavy rains led to the collapse of one of our primary schools. Similarly, the parish of Kionyo, located in the high mountains, reports that the elderly are suffering from the cold as dry firewood becomes scarce, and the slippery roads make it dangerous to go into town for supplies.

The Kisaju Postulancy (formation house) has experienced flooding in the basement, chapel and bedrooms due to water seeping through the walls, effectively isolating the facility like an island amid the waters.

While the main centre remains intact in the Kisaju Parish of Maasai, its several prayer centres face unique challenges. Access roads through rivers are blocked by water and sometimes fallen



Irinda school toilet block collapses

trees, severely restricting local employment and access to essential services. Some residents are facing starvation because they cannot get food or medical care. The local Maasai community, recently emerging from a drought, faces challenges as their livestock die of sickness.

People in Larmudiac Parish lost crops and money because they bought fake fertilizers. These challenges are anticipated to reduce contributions necessary for managing parish and school expenses, pastoral programs, and children's food programs, indicating a long-term impact on community support and recovery.

Any help that can be provided to share with those in need will be heartfully appreciated. Meanwhile, the Oblates from our parishes are working to alleviate suffering wherever possible, and our young Oblates continue to distribute food aid in the Mathare slums of Nairobi.



Flooding in the Mathare slums

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI



Lacombe MAMI Oblate Missions

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





Shops along the road

Eye-opening journey

BY LOUIS KLOSTER

(Louis was a member of the Canadian MAMI contingent that visited the Kenya Mission earlier this year.)

KENYA – On our first day in Kenya, a Friday afternoon, traffic on these two-lane asphalt roads was often heavy. There were many lorries on the move, and they struggled to climb even the smallest hills, holding up traffic. Impatient drivers were constantly trying to overtake them, leap-frogging each other, dangerously tailgating each other and pulling into oncoming traffic in order to leap-frog over each other. There was no blaring of horns, just the flashing of headlights from oncoming vehicles to passing vehicles that had to suddenly push their way back into their own lane.

From the cramped quarters of our van, we could observe a great deal of human activity. The roadsides were places of commerce, with small, side-by-side shops – strip malls of sorts – selling everything from shoes to sheepskins and services. Some had Christian names like God at Work Grocer, Blessed

Roadside vendors



Salon, and the Lord's Butchery and Pub. Many individual, temporary stalls sold bags of onions, melons and other produce, hanging from wooden racks, each display looking the same as the one beside it.



Louis makes a friend

Sometimes, flocks of ducks and even pigeons were being sold from the roadside. And everywhere there were sheep and goats, donkeys and cattle grazing in the ditches, some of them tethered, but all casually watched over by a shepherd. Herds of cattle could be seen in adjacent fields. And then, in one area, we began spying giraffe and zebras intermingled with them. And then we came upon bunches of baboons comfortably walking on the shoulders, as if on patrol, the wildlife intermingling with the domestic.

I was expecting life in Kenya to be quite different than my first visit in 1985 and my second in 2003. However, apart from the arrival of some of the big-box stores and restaurants found in the West, life for the average Kenyan does not appear to have changed significantly. The roads have improved, with more fancy cars, many of them Toyotas and driven by the wealthy. But most Kenyans travel distances by taxi vans called matatus. And there are always many who are just walking, some carrying burdensome bundles of firewood on their backs.



In the late afternoon, schoolchildren in their smart



Greeting from school children

school uniforms, heading home for the day, joined the scores of people on the dusty roadside footpaths. Donkeys are still used to pull carts, and motorcycles are still precariously laden with three people or unwieldy packages of goods. The rich are still rich, and the poor, poor.

On the fourth day of our visit we drove from Nakuru to Kisaju. As always we began the journey back to Kisaju with a prayer for safe travels. The Oblate van, like all larger vehicles on the road, is limited to 80 kilometres per hour. Drivers are required to install a 'governor', which shuts down the fuel intake when the vehicle reaches that speed. While we trust our driver, Fr. Gerry Conlan, other drivers can take great risks, placing us in danger as well. One must drive defensively, as vehicles will sometimes pass on the shoulder. Pedestrians seem to be unconcerned about walking on the road, dangerously close to fast-moving, unpredictable traffic. They tend to



Irinda primary school classroom

walk with the traffic rather than facing it, as we are taught in Canada.

The journey to the Oblate residence in Kisaju took under two hours. This time on the road is very interesting, as we observe a great deal of human activity from the road. There is an abundance of evangelical Christian churches in Kenya. There seems to be a high Christian population. There are scripture verses on some vans and phrases like 'A prayer a day keeps the devil away'. On the back of one lorry were the words: 'Nothing in life is permanent. Be humble.'

Our route from Karen took us through a relatively quiet, wealthy neighborhood of Nairobi, where huge homes are hidden behind high walls, tall hedges, and iron gates. Security is of high priority. Even the Oblates hire men to guard their premises. And unfriendly dogs are let loose at night to patrol the property.

Within minutes we were once again in an impoverished area, teeming with people and rows of small shops. The air

quality decreased significantly, with countless vans and three-wheeled vehicles called tuktuks running about and picking up passengers. Donkeys, sometimes two or three together, pulled wagons. Bicycles and carts were laden with plastic jugs for water. Fruit was being pushed around on carts, and bags of charcoal were stacked on the roadside for sale.

As we neared Kisaju, the landscape changed. The land opened up and we could see far into the distance. Kisaju is situated in this sparsely populated area. Oblates in the parish include Fr. Greg, Fr. Phelix, Fr. Gideon, and Fr. Jean Pierre, who is originally from Senegal. We were introduced to Br. Stephen and Br. Benjamin, both of whom have recently made their final vows.

Also here are three young postulants, that is, men who are living in the Oblate community, learning the Oblate charism and, for the next year, are beginning to discern the priesthood.

Wherever we go, the Oblates seem to have a great sense of humour and a ready smile. They appear to be relaxed and joyful, the very kind of people you would want to get to know. I was surprised to learn that there are more than 700 Oblates in Africa alone, in countries like Cameroon and Senegal, Zimbabwe and Niger.

On the seventh day we drove from Kisaju to Karen. Even mid-morning, the traffic was very congested, complicated

by cows roaming onto the road and by donkeys and men pulling carts. We were twice stopped by police and questioned. To our advantage, Fr. Gerry was wearing his clerical collar, and these checks





were brief and rather friendly encounters.

As Fr. Gerry skillfully navigated the chaotic streets of downtown Nairobi, with its traffic circles and uncontrolled intersections, we passed a large slum, a sea of rusting tin roofs. Within 10

minutes, and in stark contrast, there were skyscrapers and golf courses with palm trees and lush lawns.

Fr. Gerry cautioned us not to have bags or phones near open windows as we drove through congested areas, as thieves can snatch valuables out of your hands. One evening, we took a longer route back to the Oblate house, simply because that road was safer; vehicles can be stopped and its occupants robbed. Nonetheless, we have not felt personally endangered while in Kenya. We tend to travel as a group, and our Kenyan hosts know how to keep us from danger.

We drove from Karen to Méru. When I wave to Kenyans, they are quick to wave back and smile. And their smiles are beautiful. If I was to do the same in Canada, I would be looked at suspiciously. Men in Kenya have a three-part handshake that begins with the usual handshake, transitions to a 'clenched fist' position, and concludes in the same way it started. Canadians are known to be 'nice', but perhaps Kenyans are nicer.



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and ministries of the Oblates.*



Farewell to Queen's House

(Following is an excerpt from a story written by Kiply Lukan Yaworski for Catholic Saskatoon News.)

SASKATOON – A celebration marked by mixed emotions of gratitude and grief was held July 18 at Queen's House of Retreat and Renewal in Saskatoon, as hundreds gathered in person and online to mark the closing of the facility after 66 years of providing a spiritual oasis on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River.

"As I pondered this day, the history of Queen's House and the role it has played in the Church and beyond, the closure of ministry offered in and through this sacred place, the countless feelings we have around its closing – and as I pondered the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – I was reminded that God is right here, right now, God is present in our hurt and in our hope, in our joy and in our sadness, in our achievements and in our incompleteness, in our passion and in our discouragement, in our betrayal, and in our faithfulness," said homilist Fr. Doug Jeffrey, OMI, at the mass that opened the farewell celebration.

"This moment is an opportunity to recognize and acknowledge the missionary Church, where our hungers, our deepest

longings, and God's grace meet and embrace, where death and resurrection offer both pain and possibility."

The farewell celebration followed an annual Summer Stillness Retreat that has been offered at Queen's House for many years by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI.

"Thank you for the love you have for this place, for what you have given to support this place in so many ways," said OMI Provincial Ken Thorson to those assembled to bid farewell.

"We come in a sense to say goodbye, but also, and I think more importantly because that is what Eucharist is all about, is to give thanks – to give thanks for the ways in which God has blessed the city, the province and beyond by the ministry of Queen's House," Thorson said.

In his homily, Fr. Jeffrey said: "As this chapter of our ministry comes to a close, it is a time to rest, to appreciate, to ponder, to give thanks, to treasure and to let go."

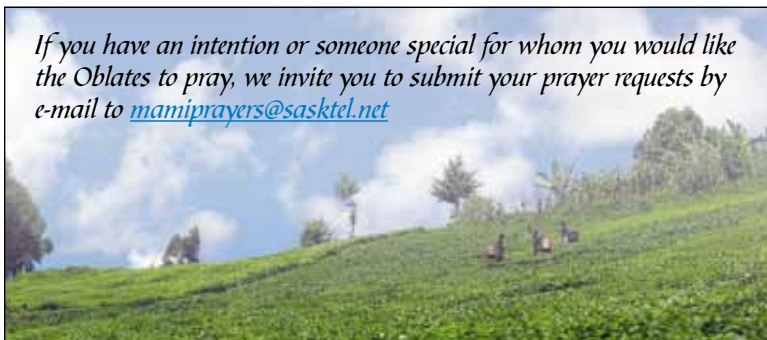


Doug Jeffrey, OMI



Ken Thorson, OMI

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



Christians challenged to be pilgrims of hope



Joe Gunn

BY JOE GUNN

Pope Francis has proclaimed “pilgrims of hope” to be the theme of “a great symphony of prayer” in the Jubilee Year 2025.

For millennia, Christians embarked on pilgrimages during holy years. In search of indulgences, they travelled to basilicas, setting aside time for prayer and performed penance. In May, Francis’s message, *Spes Non Confundit* (“Hope does not disappoint”), used these words of Romans 5:5 to reinforce what the Holy Year of 2025 should mean.

Francis wrote, “Pilgrimage is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life.” Yet, in 2025, Francis wants the Jubilee Year to not only be a time of spiritual renewal – but also a landmark moment of achieving social and environmental justice.

After all, this would be in keeping with the biblical meaning of Jubilee, as found in the book of Leviticus. The word Jubilee comes from the Hebrew word *yobel*, which is a ram’s horn. This wind instrument is blown to mark the start of a Jubilee Year as described in Leviticus 25:9. Observance of the Jubilee Year involved the cancelling of debts, a period of rest for people and the earth, and land being restored to the landless.

Many Canadians will remember the Jubilee Year 2000. Responding to Pope John Paul’s call to cancel the odious debts of countries of the Global South, we collected the largest

number of petition signatures in our country's history. Jubilee 2000's global campaign led ultimately to the cancellation of more than \$100 billion of debt owed by 35 of the poor-



est countries. Here, the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative convinced the Chretien government to cancel the bilateral debt owed to Canada by several highly indebted poor countries. And shortly after, I co-ordinated the Make Poverty History initiative, when we wore those white wrist bands and followed the celebrity campaigners and popular rock musicians (such as Bob Geldof and Bono) who pushed for global poverty relief.

But let's face it – the poor don't want new anti-debt campaigns every 25 years. Unless structural reforms are made to global financial architecture, periodic debt relief will remain a mere stopgap measure. In 2025, we need to force governments to eliminate tax havens, levy currency transactions (Tobin Tax) and create a multilateral debt mechanism through the United Nations (rather than the obstinate IMF and World Bank.)

Francis now wants us to focus on what he calls “a new form of injustice which we increasingly recognize, namely, that “a true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.” Those who have contributed least to create the current climate emergency are paying heavily for our continuing expansion of greenhouse gas use.

So how will you and your faith community journey through the Jubilee Year 2025?

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

In your words

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – Many of us take for granted the *Oblate Spirit* booklet and those responsible for putting it together. Their interest is in telling the readers about the good and great work the Oblates do.

The *Oblate Spirit* is a powerful tool in getting the Word of God to the public and showing in photos what the Oblates do among God's little ones.

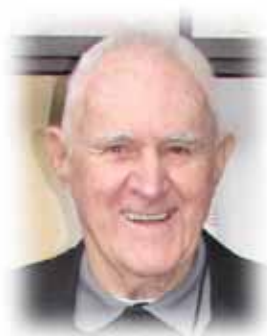
To help to get to know Christ is to help people with their pressing problems, which are many. To see how the Canadian Oblates are working in Africa is a good example of Oblates getting their hands dirty. They get tired but feel good about themselves and their work.

Really, nothing gets built without workers. When Oblates see basic needs and can do something to help solve the pressing problems, they need support, and this is where the *Oblate Spirit* comes into play. Canadians with generous hearts are the support system for the front-line troops in the war on poverty and misery.

If I can provide a little advice, after the *Oblate Spirit* is read, take it to a bus station, airport, eating places, taxi, parish church, your office and leave it there. You never know what kind soul might read it.

In Christ and Mary and with a heap of love,

Brother Blaise



Blaise MacQuarrie,
OMI



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

APRIL 20

NAIROBI, Kenya – I'd like to say a big thank you to the generous people in Vancouver who helped organize the MAMI immersion trip to Kenya earlier this year and for their support and encouragement.

It has been rainy, but somehow God always managed to send enough sunshine for the solar hot water and solar power. Our upgraded solar panels and re-wiring have reduced outside grid consumption to an average of five to six units per day, down from 20 before the solar system went in. At the administration centre, we were able to connect the kitchen to solar power with a manual change-over switch. That should help further reduce the power units paid to the grid.

It's been a heavy week of helping people in emergency situations. Simon, our carpenter, asked for help as the city council officers were grabbing his tools because he had not

managed to pay the inflated business fee. One of our former cooks requested help to contribute to the family land succession costs, so she will be able to get a small share of the family property. Solomon, our former guard here in Karen, lost his job



Gerry Conlan, OMI



Storehouse solar panel roof in Karen

due to business downturn, and has a wife and small child. He usually asks for help twice a month. Before it was for transport, now it is for food.

Peter, a former alcoholic youth, called for his weekly \$5 food assistance I've been giving. He needed to extend my help due to having been hit by a motorbike on Christmas Eve. This week he asked for transportation to collect his certificate for the free course I helped him register for last year. Let's hope he can support himself as we move forward.

Our Oblate youth in Nairobi did a mission of kindness to two members in the Kayole area, both with new babies. About five members visited other members in financial distress, especially new mothers in our group. About 15 members contributed something small and that is matched by a generous person. It's hard not to be proud of them for their generosity, time and enthusiasm. They are the hope of Kenya.



Nairobi Oblate youth executive meeting

APRIL 27

All is going well around the Mission. The repairs at Larmudiac Old Rectory have been completed, but more work is still required for the Méru Postulancy, where a few goats are needed to eat all the grass!

I am a bit alarmed by a new Agricultural Bill presented in parliament that requires everyone doing even a little bit of farming to get registered and pay an annual fee. This is not about regulation for the good of the country or the people, this is just another money grab. So sad.

Heavy downpours of rain have caused extensive flooding all over East Africa. Tanzania and Burundi have suffered many deaths due to flooding. In Kenya, many areas of Nairobi, Mombasa and other towns have been flooded.

MAY 5

The rains continue to fall. Robert, a farmer in Nakuru being sponsored by one of our friends in Canada, has reported that the rains have been too much for the crops in Nakuru. Worse, the fertilizer sold to him by government officers was fake. Now he's searching for a bit of extra money to buy proper fertilizer.

MAY 12

Five Oblates from Kenya flew to Calgary for a three-week visit and to attend the Oblate convocation in Edmonton.

Kenyan Oblates visit Fr. Albert Lacombe's gravesite in St. Albert, AB



MAY 19

Finally made it to Mathare Slums where I joined Lenore Boyd for lunch at the Street Kids Art Centre, carrying a cake I just purchased. She had a group of helpers. They are young people helping the poor and most are working through university for various degrees in social justice, social development, etc. They are grateful for the clothing and money I've been requesting from the Karen area.

MAY 26

The Nairobi Oblate Youth joined me for Sunday mass at Nyumbani and then came back to Karen pre-novitiate, where the pre-novices cooked a nice meal. The youth and most pre-novices spent more than two hours discussing hot issues such as relationships, dating and sexuality. There was some intense conversation about celibate priesthood and family issues like equality between spouses.

It was a most successful engagement, and everyone wants to do it more often. The pre-novices were likewise happy to be challenged by out-of-textbook answers, and understanding more of where the youth are at today.

JUNE 2

We were grateful to welcome Frs. Daquin, Phelix and Joseph Nzioka safely back from Canada. There was a bit of drama as they entered with suitcases full of donated t-shirts. Fr. Phelix and Fr. Nzioka managed to sweet-talk the customs people, but Fr. Daquin was not so lucky. I had to go and twist a few arms to release the two big bags with a \$75 fee (but better than \$500!). The reduction came after my suggestion we take the donations to another country.

We keep hearing sad stories about the demolition of houses along the river in the Mathare and Mukuru slums (about 40,000 according to Br. Frank at the Reuben Centre).

JUNE 9

We were happy to welcome Mac and Mike from Canada (Toronto and Calgary areas) to our home in Karen. Mike was supposed to arrive with Mac on Wednesday, but he booked his ticket using Mike instead of Michael and although Canadians accept that for domestic flights, it doesn't fly for international check-ins. So Mike arrived Saturday evening. They are en route to Nakuru to train plant operators at the Nakuru County Water Treatment Plant.

JUNE 16

The political news continues to be troubling around the Finance Bill for 2024. It's unfortunate that politicians are valuing their own interests above that of the people they represent. The conflict-of-interest issues are very high here.

On Tuesday, we started the solar power system installation for the borehole pump at Kisaju OMI Centre. I was quite nervous due to the height above ground (18 metres), and the local attitude to safety. But all has gone well and Peter (parish

Confirmation mass in Kisaju





Solar power installation at Kisaju OMI Center

executive member at Kisaju Parish), has shown commendable care for safety. In fact, I learned a few new ideas on how to do such a structure. Never too old to learn!

JUNE 23

The country has been in uproar over the government decision to pass the unpopular Finance Bill 2024. There was a peaceful protest that the inspector general of police said was not to go ahead. But that breaches the constitution. Some are threatening to take him to court for abuse of power. The young people are quite angry because it is destroying their futures and making it hard to survive today.

Sadly, one young man was shot dead, another was shot and lost his private parts, and another is in critical condition. One policeman had his fingers blown off when the tear-gas canister blew up in his hand.

JUNE 30

So many amazing things have happened: courage and tragedy. We are proud of the young people challenging the churches for their silence during the Finance Bill issues. Last Sunday, they entered the Basilica in town and received a round of applause from the congregation. One young man told the

TV cameras: “I am not a Catholic, I’m a Christian,” challenging the church to speak out. The youth promised to be peaceful, but they will not be silent.

Two days later, the government and the world have been shocked and amazed at the resilience and courage of the Gen-Z people of Kenya. One young woman said on public media: *“We are no longer afraid, and because we are not afraid you have no power over us.”* Many people have wondered why the bishops have been so silent.

Because of the brutal response by the police firing on unarmed civilians, who were exercising their constitutional rights to protest, the youth stormed parliament and took away the mace (symbol of the Speaker’s authority).



Lifting the roof into place for the Gachanka church

Gachanka church roof structure in place



I heard that all the MP's fled for their lives, but one in a wheelchair was abandoned. Some of the protesters protected him and asked if they could call an Uber for him. Meanwhile, outside, snipers were killing innocent people. There was tear gas everywhere. At Rongai, a 12-year-old boy was shot eight times in the back, killing him. Some are saying more than 100 people were shot dead by the army at Githurai. The government says six dead. Other sources indicate that army trucks came to carry away the bodies, there were so many.

President Ruto initially called the Gen-Z actions treasonous and the Gen-Z criminals. The next day he called them brothers and sisters. They said they do not trust Ruto.

Meanwhile, ordinary people are still struggling to survive day by day. I helped Rose, my shoeshine lady, with a hospital bill for her TB. She was grateful even though it was only 20 per cent of the total.

I accompanied our Oblate Youth who visited the deaf community in the wider area of Soweto Catholic Church. It's a poor area and many families lost their homes in the floods. There is much need, but perhaps the most important is that people take time to be with them and try to understand their challenges, their joys and creativity.

Nairobi youth visit the deaf at Soweto parish





Plastering the retaining wall at Kiirua farm

It was a powerful revelation for our youth members to see how fortunate they are to have all the senses. They were inspired by the courage and adaptability of the deaf people to communicate and work a little here and there to survive. As usual, I received quite a few requests for assistance with school fees, and one of the leaders, Consolata, shared her medical challenges and needs. Not sure what to do with all of them. The deaf people were so grateful that people cared enough about them to come and spend a day with them.

I saw there was a call to donate blood to help the victims of the police shootings. At Nairobi Hospital there was such a crowd that they told me, *"Father if you wait, you will be here until 11 p.m. It's OK, go home, your presence here has encouraged us: you have saved a life."* So I went home, but I don't think I saved anyone. But I think they were happy a priest came to offer blood.

JULY 6

Well, it has been quite a week in politics. There was a big protest in town and other parts of Nairobi, lots of shooting by the police and a huge mobilization of police. The whole atmosphere was layered in tear gas.

On July 1, parliament quickly passed a law to increase the salaries of all politicians and senior government personnel. It was reversed after a huge outcry from all sections of society.

JULY 13

Over lunch, our chef Dancan showed pictures of dead bodies being recovered from the main rubbish dump in the Mukuru Kwa Jenga slum in Nairobi. These were young people killed by the police during the protests at Githurai about 10 days ago. I think there will be a huge backlash. There are reports of more bodies in other places. It is very sad.

JULY 20

The country is wrestling with on-going protests and corruption. The president dismissed his cabinet and gave them large severance payouts, which made everyone angry. Then he appointed a new cabinet, and many are angry about the selection of six who were just sacked. There were some kidnappings and more people killed. It seems there is now a broader range of age groups joining the protests.

Meanwhile, most people are struggling to get through life

and many are sinking. The Oblate mission is doing what it can to help people, one person at a time.

We are still facilitating some help for 19 students at Jamii Bora in Kisaju Parish. Our MAMI friends who visited



New life at Kiirua farm

this year were keen to help them and got them into school. They were recently sent home, so our MAMI friends are on the case again, and looking to help for the next few years as well. This is a heart-warming moment in our lives because they are all orphans, and the local community, though struggling to care for their own families, have been giving them shelter and food since they started school in March. A few of them sleep in a shed on church land at Jamii Bora and neighbours take them food.

On a bigger scale, the mission and OMI Lacombe, along with MAMI, have been assisting each parish to reduce their monthly expenses by installing solar power. This means people don't have to sacrifice so much when the economy is going down so hopefully our parishes will have more funds to assist people in need. Paul Isaboke successfully completed the installation at Larmudiac and Kisaju Parish within a week, so we are grateful to him. Five installations are done, leaving only Meru and Kionyo.

My Aussie friend asked me to bless the farm she is establishing to provide work away from the slum for some of the street boys. We blessed the farm, the sheds, the fruit trees and the large greenhouse. They were very grateful and presented me with a lovely painting by Patrick, one of the street boys.

JULY 27

It has been a funny week, weather wise, which matches the continued political turmoil: cloudy, coldish, a little rain and some sunshine. Gen-Z held new protests, making a big fuss about taking over the airport and several major roads, so most police and army were stationed outside the city, but the youth descended on the city in big numbers and held peaceful protests without the violence caused by rogue elements like previous weeks. The president still ordered police to fire tear gas and it was like a thick cloud all over the city.

AUG. 3

Politics continues to boil over. To add a little salt to the mix, the president has increased the road maintenance fuel levy from 7 to 25 shillings. So now fuel will increase another nine per cent. People are furious and all the matatus (mini-buses) and city-buses are planning a week-long strike. It will paralyse industry and transport.

A little excitement for me was the installation of a heat pump (hot water system) that can easily run on solar power. Since installation, it has had no problem heating water despite cloudy weather and cool mornings.



Solar heat pump
is installed

AUG. 11

Exciting news that three of our scholastics have been called for their diaconate ordination. Fr. Fidele met the Archbishop and he agreed to do the ordination in September. In addition, pre-novice Emmanuel has been accepted for novitiate in 2025, so he will now transfer to Kisaju Parish for pastoral experience until Christmas.

Our Oblate youth came to visit the pre-novices, enjoying a good meal and a long conversation discussing what the youth expect from priests and brothers, and what missionaries expect from the youth. Everyone said it was a good experience and more engaging than the first meeting in May where they talked about relationships and church teachings.

Our carpenter in Donyo had a crisis. His only means of living is the wood-table cutting machine. The electric motor burned out. I owed him \$20 for the lattice partition, so I sent him \$90. He is always training two young men there, giving them a chance, when he can hardly make his own way. It is good to empower him.



Sr. Hellen makes perpetual vows

The Holy Spirit nuns celebrated the perpetual vows for Sr. Hellen. You will note in the photos that Sr. Hellen prostrated herself before the altar during the *Litany to the Holy Spirit* while Bishop Wallace invoked the prayer of the Church. The flowers were sprinkled on Sr. Hellen as a sign of death and rebirth.

The Oblates are connected to the Holy Spirit nuns because we accepted the Ministry of Chaplaincy to them in 2015 when their monastery officially started. Ironically, it was Fr. Wallace (now bishop), as Pastoral Coordinator of the Archdiocese, who asked the Oblates to do so.

Kiirua farm is progressing bit by bit. Farm manager Euticus extended the retaining wall, moving each course of *earth-bagging* inwards a little to give the wall better stability and safety as it goes up. A baby bull calf was also born.

Thank you for your prayers and encouragement!

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