


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



February 2025



New Life

New Year, New Life



The Old Year ended with a celebration of abundance at the Holy Family Mass in Kionyo, boding well for the New Year and the future of the Oblate mission in Kenya. There were 21 baptisms woven into the final Sunday mass of the year (the cover photo) in a joyous celebration to help bring an end to 2024.

The Canadian Mission in Kenya also continues to expand with five more young men welcomed into postulancy. A new church is near completion in Gachanka. The Nairobi Oblate youth group, so welcomed in the Mathare Slums, has extended its reach to a deaf community and to another group with spinal injuries.

These are just indications of the abundance and growth of the Oblate community and mission in Kenya. They also point to a growing need for support at home and abroad. One way to spiritually connect is through the annual Novena of Prayer from March 19-27, joining a global community of celebrants from Haiti, Ukraine, Kenya, Angola, Bangladesh, Peru, Colombia, Congo, Haiti, and Nigeria, all of whom are connected to Canada through the support provided by MAMI.

This all serves as a reminder that we are a global community in need of support, whether at home or abroad. The Oblates can't solve the problems in our world, but they can help make life just a little bit better for the poor, one soul at a time. That is the Oblate way. Help us help them, one prayer and one penny at a time.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

The winds of change are blowing

BY FR. GREG OSZUST, OMI

NAIROBI, Kenya – The sun was rising as we started our journey toward Olturoto and Embuyangat, two of the outstations nestled amidst the Kapiti Plains (savanna land), a two-hour drive from Nairobi. I hadn't been there for more than six months and was looking forward to reconnecting with the community. Not going there was due to the lack of transportation and the remoteness of the place.

It was a beautiful time in the savanna. With acacia trees blooming, the air smells like a combination of lilac and dry hay. It was raining the night before, so we were concerned about difficulties in reaching the place because there was a river to cross and roads that are more like walkways for people, so they can be muddy (black cotton soil).

After Mass at Olturoto, we hurried off to Embuyangat. To our surprise the road wasn't so bad, and we arrived a little earlier than expected. Upon arrival we were met by several school children who came for mass from the school neighbouring our church. I was joined by Br. Joseph, postulant Patrick and Br. Makori. While we waited for the people to gather, the brothers set out to teach and entertain the children.

After mass, we took tea with the elders and learned that

Children greet Fr. Greg at Embuyangat





Perimeter wall at the university

the Maasai community tries to be connected despite the different religions they practise. The women of all religious denominations meet at our church once a week, just to have common prayer and talk about the community and challenges of life. The men from different churches meet every Sunday at various churches and raise funds to help each other, the fruits of which we experienced when they purchased chairs for our church.

On our way back, we encountered significant changes in the landscape. Construction has already started on a university near our church, and it's enormous, 100 acres gated with a perimeter wall. It looks very strange in the middle of nowhere!

We noticed many changes on the road to Embuyangat. With several land sales, new owners constructed fences, so there's less and less land for grazing. This is a huge change to the way people lived before, and for the wildlife that was once

in abundance. Four years ago, when I started in this region, there were many wild animals, but now noticeably less.

Proceeding further, we noticed that the huge tree that was our landmark to know where to go has fallen. We took pictures but, as I reflected on it, it is a metaphor that the old ways are going and the new are coming.



Our landmark tree has fallen

Fr. Paradis celebrated

BY QUINTON AMUNDSON

(Published on The Catholic Register website)

Fr. François Paradis, OMI, was presented with the Catholic Missions in Canada's (CMIC) St. Philip Neri Award for providing compassionate and community-oriented missionary service. He is known by two spirit names bestowed upon him by Indigenous elders.

Early into what would end up being 17 years (1983-2000) of providing priestly ministry to Sagkeeng First Nation and surrounding Ojibwa communities in southern Manitoba, Paradis met with an Elder named Jack Starr and gifted him tobacco. A week later, Paradis and his missionary colleague, Sr. Margaret Sadler of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, participated in a pipe ceremony with Starr.

"I could follow some of his prayers because of the language I knew," recalled the 77-year-old who was ordained a Catholic priest in 1972. "He was praying for me and my ministry, and then he gave me my first spirit name, which was 'Black Wolf.'"



Fr. Paradis receiving the 2024 St. Philip Neri Award from Archbishop Francis Leo of Toronto

Paradis asked Starr about why he chose Black Wolf.

“He said ‘it is up to you to find out.’

Upon reflection, Paradis came to interpret the Black Wolf as “the general — the one who stays behind but leads the pack.”

Later, during a sweat-lodge ceremony, another Indigenous elder declared that he be called the “Whitehead Eagle flying from the East.”

One week later, the Elder’s granddaughter approached Paradis to say she thought she knew the meaning behind the spirit name. She relayed the story of the community rebuilding the Fort Alexander Roman Catholic Church in Sagkeeng after it burned down in 1980.

“She said she saw an eagle fly through the big round window of (the new church),” said Paradis. “Anything coming from the East means a new beginning or opening. (A) White-head Eagle flying from the East means one who opens new ways.”

His efforts to promote interreligious dialogue exemplify his Black Wolf and Whitehead Eagle attributes at work. Participating in numerous sweat lodges, Sun Dance rites, traditional fasts and pipe ceremonies was entirely novel as a Catholic priest. Still, he also led from the back by ensuring the Ojibwa elders and community members commanded centre stage.

From 2003 to 2007, Paradis served as pastor of Kateri Tekakwitha Aboriginal Parish. In that role, he began to hear positive appraisals about the reconciliation workshops the Indigenous-led non-profit organization Returning to Spirit (RTS) delivered.

Paradis felt called to become involved. In January 2007, he earned his certification as an RTS trainer. In 2008, he devoted all his ministerial efforts to co-leading seminars.

“When we talk about a Returning to Spirit workshop, it is about who you are — the spirit in which you were created,” said Paradis. “It has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. We’re really in the line of personal development and personal aware-



Fr. Paradis in conversation with Megan Postin and Debbie Doornbos at Convocation

ness. (It is) about being aware of the pain and the events that may have crippled you — we all have them — when you were young. Those events may be keeping you stuck today. They may prevent you from being who you were fully meant to be and make you afraid, feeling like no one loves you or you don't belong."

For Indigenous people, Paradis said the crippling event for many was a residential school. Some had to formulate coping and survival strategies that stifled their true essence.

Paradis said work still needs to be done "to convince non-Indigenous people that they have a major role to play in reconciliation. It is not just about First Nations people."

Lisa Raven, an Anishinaabe woman of Hollow Water First Nation, is RTS's executive director. She became a trainer at the same time as Paradis. She lauds her colleague and friend's wisdom and genuineness.

"François holds a wealth of knowledge," said Raven. "The way that he relates to Indigenous people is through ceremony. François is a Sundancer, he's a pipe carrier and he holds two sacred names. He brings forward that aspect. He had been engaging in ceremonies long before they became popular. In fact, maybe it was even questioned at that time. Now, he's a

real pioneer. Indigenous people recognize that and see that as authentic.

“Another powerful aspect is him being a priest,” continued Raven, “and belonging to the Missionary Oblates, which ran most residential schools here in Manitoba and probably across Canada. Him being part of reconciliation is not only him speaking for himself, but he also represents that and sits in proxy for a lot of Indigenous people who need to reconcile, and maybe specifically with the Missionary Oblates, priests or males.”

Raven said a powerful action Paradis completes during each workshop is reading the written apology to the First Nations of Canada from Fr. (now Hamilton Bishop) Douglas Crosby, OMI, on behalf of all the Canadian Oblates. This apology was read on July 24, 1991, by Crosby, then the president of the Oblate Conference, at the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage in Alberta.

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Lacombe Canada MAMI



**Lacombe MAMI
Oblate Missions**

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



Meaningful moments

Lisa Raven is the executive director of Returning to Spirit, a healing ministry based out of Winnipeg that works with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, primarily through Fr. François Paradis, OMI, who serves as a trainer with Returning to Spirit.

Ms. Raven was part of the Canadian delegation that travelled to Rome alongside a small group of Canadian bishops prior to Pope Francis's 2022 visit to Canada. Ms. Raven is Ojibway, from Hollow Water First Nation in Manitoba. She attended Marieval Residential School in Cowessess, SK.

The following interview was recorded during the OMI Lacombe convocation earlier this year.

Lisa Raven on the impact of the hospitality of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate during the spring 2022 Rome delegation visit

"We were invited during our time there to stay at the Oblate general house. And that was much appreciated! All of the costs were covered for our stay there. And, for me, that was one of the most meaningful moments of reconciliation for myself.

"Because just imagine! You know, in my grandfather's

Lisa Raven (centre) with Fr. Paradis (to her left) at the Oblate general house in Rome



time, that never would have been possible, an Indigenous woman being invited to stay at the Oblate general house. So, it was amazing that that happened, that I was welcomed and I was able to bring my bundle: my pipe and my drum and my rattle. At the meetings [in the Vatican], I was able to pray and do ceremony in ways that wouldn't have been possible in the past. And not only that, there was a genuine curiosity about [my people's ways]. I expected maybe 5 or 10 people to be interested, when I was sharing in the Vatican about different Indigenous traditions, but then over 50 people came, seminar-ians came, all there to learn.

"So that experience in Rome was a real acknowledgement for me of how far we've come in terms of reconciliation. Sometimes that is hard to measure, how far we have actually come, but for me this was a very, very clear example of what we've been able to achieve!

"There were many missionary Oblates who ran residential schools, including the one that I attended, so developing this [new] relationship with the Oblates in the present is healing. I don't think these kinds of healing experiences get highlighted too often and they really should!

"Because this is the essence of reconciliation; it's not a list of boxes to check off. No, it's about these moments – like what I experienced in Rome – and we need to collect as many of these moments in our lifetime as we can!"

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.

A cautionary tale

BY FR. GERRY CONLAN, OMI

NAIROBI, Kenya – We were blessed to start the new year with a visit from Fr. John Wotherspoon, OMI, a man renowned for prison ministry in Hong Kong. He is visiting Kenya once again to encourage people not to become drug mules, a desperate situation that has landed a Kenyan mother in a Hong Kong prison.

He began his visit by joining Fr. Fidele at the Langata Women's Prison. Thanks to help from kind Hong Kong friends, a donation to the prison has enabled six women to be released.

He is also actively trying to assist Isaac, a nine-year-old boy who has had a growth on his stomach since birth. Isaac's mother is in a Hong Kong prison for drug smuggling.

The mother agreed to be a drug mule to get enough money to take the boy to hospital and treat the problem. She was arrested at the airport in Hong Kong.

She was desperate and willing to risk prison for her son. A mother's love is amazing!

Fr. John went to Mater Hospital where he visited Isaac, who is getting good care, including ultrasound, with sponsors in Hong Kong absorbing the medical costs.

Fr. John also had meetings with journalists, police, and former Hong Kong prison-



Isaac



ers now back in Kenya. He also came to the pre-novitiate in Nairobi to lead mass and talk about his unique prison ministry, for which he has devoted the last 15 of his 40 years as an Oblate.

He was travelling with two members of a non-government organization and also visited Uganda and Ethiopia to spread his cautionary message.



Fr. John Wotherspoon, OMI

Healing Prayers book

We invite you to receive a copy of our Healing Prayers book that can be used daily to pray for healing in your life, in the world, local community, family or for special intentions of healing the body, mind and spirit.

Please indicate on the enclosed gift form if you wish to receive the Healing Prayers book.





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

In the end

We may be small, but we pack a punch!

We are the loyal supporters of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) who channel our donations through MAMI to make an impact on the lives of some of the poorest people in the world.

MAMI (the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate) is an organization of those who extend themselves into foreign countries as helpers of the poor. By prayer and material offerings, MAMI supporters help the Oblate priests and brothers who are sharing God's gifts in different areas of the world.

Through MAMI, we can provide support such as food, clothing, shelter, education and spiritual guidance to those in need, those who feel like they have been forgotten by the world.

One of the ways we can offer this support is to consider leaving a charitable donation to MAMI in our wills. In Canada,

Preparing medicine for anemic baby In Côte d'Ivoire



when you donate to an organization like MAMI, you receive a charitable tax credit that helps reduce the taxes owed, before and after death.

Henriette Le Strat, a lifetime supporter of missionary works, explains her affection and motivation for supporting MAMI.



Toussait is very happy with his new well in Côte d'Ivoire.

“My love of missions dates back to my childhood when I would listen to my mother talking of her time as a child living in Brazil,” she began.

“Then, when I worked in Bolivia, I had the opportunity to visit the area where my family lived as we still had a cousin living there at the time. It was a memorable visit.

“My brother Gerry Le Strat, OMI, worked several years in Guatemala and there also came a wonderful occasion for me to visit the country and his mission.

“The opportunity never arose for me to visit the Oblate Mission in Kenya, but I did work in Cote d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) for a few years after I retired from teaching.

“After all these years, reliving these mission memories where I left part of my heart, I thought the best way to keep supporting these missions is to include them all in my will with MAMI.

“May God bless all the missionaries and their work.”

Yes, we may be small, but we have huge hearts, hearts that have a home for MAMI and the poorest of the poor in our world.

A feather in MAMI's hat

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – Why this title? Well, dear friends, what follows is the history and your big role. When I was living and working in the parish of Fatima, located in the city of Chincha Alta, I ventured into an area where thousands of families were living in a desert area – the runoff of the foothills of the Andes Mountains.

This region was and still remains a city dump, a place where many people lived without clean running water, no lights and dust everywhere. One sunny day I met with Fr. De Gaul, a priest from Holland who took an interest in our work and wanted to see the area. After walking in the heat of the day, he asked, “What do you need?”

Gravel pit





Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI

“Water pipes,” I answered. I soon received a cheque in the mail from him to buy the pipes. He and a Catholic group from Germany helped with 22 projects getting clean running water to thousands of families. We did this work without specialists, just using nothing more than common sense.

Now, as an ex-coal miner, I noticed there was much good gravel from the ditches we were digging for the water pipes. At the time we were also building small houses for the homeless, and we had to buy the gravel, sand and rocks for the house’s base construction. One day I met a farmer standing in his field of 5.25 hectares of flat land where he grew corn and other produce.

He (Mr. Kispy) told me he wanted to sell his land. He said he could not make a living off his crops because the people were stealing what little the land produced. This area had beautiful gravel that we badly needed for our building of little houses for the homeless.

I asked him how much he wanted for the 5.25 hectares and he quickly said \$4,000 US. A few days later I handed him the first down payment, which came from the heart of MAMI (Missionary Associates of Mary Immaculate). The other three parts quickly followed.



Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI

Many years have since passed, and you should see the hole we made as thousands of thousands of truckloads of gravel, sand and rock came out of there. I had teams of men screening the gravel for much fine sand needed for the making of bricks and also for setting them in the walls of the houses we were building. I had 20 drug addicts working there and we helped them by constructing a nice building to give them a place to stay. Many of our Oblate students worked in the gravel pit and today they are priests and two have become bishops!

The gravel pit has now been sold, so you see my dear friends, your missionary who has no education to speak about, no titles of any kind, and only calluses on his hands, got this done.

This is the goodness MAMI has helped provide for the Peruvian Oblates.

*In Christ and Mary, with lots of love,
Blaise*

A place to heal

KYIV, Ukraine – A festive Holy Mass was held at St. Nicholas Church to commemorate the patron saint of the church, St Nicholas, followed by the opening and consecration of the Christian rehabilitation centre supported by MAMI Canada.

“It is very symbolic that the opening of our centre took place today, on St Nicholas Day, as it is a reminder that we can all be St. Nicholas and do good. That is why today we are opening a centre where we can provide assistance, primarily spiritual, to all who need it. We are very grateful to AMMI of Lacombe province for their support of this Centre,” said parish priest Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskyi, OMI.



Children's play area

Room for quiet meditation



He also noted that the centre has separate rooms, each named after a patron saint.

The centre includes a room for the youngest children affected by the war against Russia, a physiotherapy room that serves people who have lost limbs and offers massage services, and a special room where people can talk to a priest, ask for spiritual advice or meet with a psychologist.

“Most often people just want to talk, and the ability to listen is the first thing that heals. People need to be heard, to feel their value, and this is the main goal of our ministry: to be with people and for people, to give them love and support,” said Fr. Pavlo, commenting on the main challenges and needs that clergy often face in this war-torn country.

Donating securities to Oblate missionary works

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/>

Down memory lane

BY JACKLYNNE GUIMOND

FORT FRANCES, ON – It is All Souls' Day, Nov. 2, 2024. I slept in this morning! It must be at least a venial sin when so many souls in Purgatory are depending on my generous prayers to be released today.

It was what we learned at The Pines in Chatham, Ontario ... *(the best boarding school in the nation)* ... *my alma mater 1962-1964.*

We were instructed to make as many trips to chapel as possible. Each time we were to pray three Our Fathers, three Hail Marys, and three Glory Be's ... genuflect, leave chapel ... pause a moment ... then repeat this format as many times as we were able to. The image of a tortured soul being released to go to heaven was glorious ... kind of like helping God save souls.

We could also offer up sacrifices, like eating canned asparagus and beets or other foods we intensely disliked at meal-time on any day, but that only decreased a poor soul's time, not necessarily granting full release to Heaven.

I am not sure if we had completed our soul-saving task earlier that day, but on Nov. 2, 1963, I got the bright idea of heading out of town with my sister and two friends to do our part to raise money for our boarding school's annual chocolate bar sale.



Jacklyne and Gary Guimond

It made sense to venture out of town because I figured the town of Chatham would pretty much be covered by the other students.

My sister Wendy trusted me ... and it didn't take much coaxing to convince Bonnie and Mary Madge to join us. I had checked the balance in my student checkbook. Yep! There was enough for four bus tickets to Wallaceburg, just 18 miles away.

I remember how excited we were heading out of town ... *with no permission.*

It was exhilarating.

Eager to support our school's cause, we separated and began our trek from door to door. I am thinking we each had 48 or 50 bars to sell at \$2 each. A couple hours later as we were

near depletion, we realized we had missed lunch, and it was 4 p.m. As leader of this escapade, the other three looked at me. Did I have money for lunch?

Seriously? I paid for the tickets! What was I thinking? Or not? None of them had any money AND I had no money for return bus tickets!

It so happened that the

The Pines 1963-67



The Pines 1963-67



priest who had conducted our school retreat the previous year, Fr. Pat Costello, was pastor of Holy Angels Parish in Wallaceburg. He and I had been keeping in touch, so it seemed reasonable to ask for help, so we located the church, rang the doorbell and found him just leaving to celebrate mass.



Fr. Pat Costello

My confession was brief. At age 34 he was young enough to recognize we were not derelicts, just non-thinking teenagers who were in a bind.

He asked his housekeeper to heat up some soup for us. We had a lovely visit with her while he celebrated mass, to do his part in releasing some troubled souls earlier. Mass can be a powerful prayer tool.

Time can get away on one. It was now dark and there we were in Fr. Pat's car heading back to The Pines. We were terrified, to say the least, even though he assured us that he had called Mother Carl Frances to tell her of our whereabouts.

The short trip gave us ample time to concoct our individual stories, and they were varied. We did a lot of giggling, likely more out of fear. What would be the consequences? By the time we arrived back home, our stories had meshed into one. We would all tell the truth. After all, we did sell all our bars, fundraising for the school! That had to count for something!

We all lost our one and only visiting Sunday that month, but we were infamous at school for a few days. Girls in the hallways would laugh and ask, "How many bars did you sell?" We proudly replied: "All of them!"

Some mistakes can follow one forever though.

The following June, in 1964, I graduated with plans to return to The Pines in September to enter the OSU (Ursulines of the Chatham Union) postulancy. The powers that be suggested I wait another year to mature.

Sixty years later I still haven't mastered that, but I have acquired a taste for asparagus and beets!

OMI Lacombe Canada divests financial holdings in fossil fuel companies

OTTAWA, ON – The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate of OMI Lacombe Canada have decided to withdraw from a mutual fund that held its only remaining investments in coal, oil and gas companies. Responding to the 2019 Canadian Parliament declaration of a “climate emergency,” this organization of Catholic priests and brothers joins a growing number of faith groups who have decided to fully divest from financial holdings in petrocarbons.

The Oblate decision was made public in conjunction with a worldwide divestment announcement by religious organizations representing several faith communities and institutions. In Canada, this includes Saint Paul University and the Sœurs Servantes du Saint-Cœur de Marie Generalate, alongside OMI Lacombe Canada.

The world’s poor and marginalized, who contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions, are suffering the greatest impact from climate change and have the fewest resources to respond. For the Oblates of OMI Lacombe Canada, this decision aligns with their mission to “stand with the voiceless [poor], hearing and making heard their cry.” The UN reports growing numbers of refugees displaced by climate chaos, often arriving in inhospitable places with few resources for a dignified life.

OMI Lacombe Canada’s Provincial leader, Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, stated that his community’s decision to fully divest was

a response both to the scientific reality of climate change and in alignment with the moral leadership of Pope Francis. “In his Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* in October 2023, the pope wrote that our ‘abandonment of fossil fuels is not progressing at the necessary speed.’ In his statement to COP28 in Dubai, he called for the ‘elimination of fossil fuels as part of the larger and necessary eco-transition. Our eco-conversion in Canada can help to bring the pope’s moral message home.”

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

Happy to serve

BY BR. ELIAS MWANGI KIMANI, OMI

KIONYO PARISH, Kenya – It was an exciting time for more than 115 altar servers (all boys) from across Kionyo Parish who gathered for a one-week seminar at Nyaagi Primary School.

It was not just a moment full of fun but also days dedicated to prayer, meditation and reflection. There were detailed sessions on the sacred rituals of the mass, including specific roles of the altar servers during the service. They practised their tasks and learned about the significance of each action. Their dedication and exactness in serving earned them the name; *‘The Altar Ninjas’* for being quiet, fast, and efficient with all the right moves.

There were team-building activities, sports, fun and engaging activities that fostered teamwork, collaboration and camaraderie among them. These moments strengthened their sense of community that resulted in stronger bonds and lasting friendships.

One altar server drew our smiles and laughter when he brought a pencil to mass. When asked why, he said he “wanted

Kionyo altar servers’ camp





Kionyo altar servers' camp

to *draw* closer to God!" It was a funny joke because we all knew he had carried the pencil accidentally.

Many current altar servers shared inspiring stories that encouraged the new altar servers. They also had time to watch movies organized by Fr. Cosmas that were about Saints.

A memorable closing mass was celebrated by Fr. Constant to install 112 to the office of altar servers while six renewed their commitments.

Fr. Constant encouraged them to emulate St. Dominic Savio, their patron Saint, and ensure they lived their 2024-2025 theme which is *"altar servers in action: Re-igniting the flame of prayer and service."*

In your words

Celebrating the spirit of mission and community

BY MARY BATTLE

VANCOUVER – On Oct. 20, at St. Augustine's Parish in Vancouver, 80 supporters of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) and parishioners gathered to learn about the Oblate mission in Kenya, share a meal, and celebrate the global community we help support.

Fr. Ken Forster, OMI, a founding member of the Kenyan mission, addressed the attendees, sharing heartfelt insights





and stories. A presentation featuring photos, video clips, and personal accounts from our mission awareness trip to Kenya earlier in the year further brought the experience to life, offering attendees a glimpse of the lively communities we visited, and the impactful work being done by our partners, the Oblates, in Kenya.

The idea for this event came about during the mission trip to Kenya in 2024. Five of us from British Columbia —Peggy Ho Yuen, Marlis Joller, Mary Battle (all from St. Augustine's Parish), and Michelle and Doug Robertson from Vancouver Island – joined Fr. Ken and five others from Western Canada to witness first-hand the transformative efforts supported by MAMI. We were so impressed by what we saw, we were eager to share these stories of hope, resilience, and gratitude with fellow supporters back home.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was the authentic Kenyan lunch, lovingly prepared by Jane Rukaria, a Kenyan living in Vancouver. Jane's creations featured a feast of traditional dishes, including *kuku* (roast chicken), *mbuzi* (goat curry),

wali (rice), and *mukimo* (mashed potatoes with peas and corn), along with *githeri* (a hearty maize, bean, and carrot dish) as a vegetarian option.

Throughout the lunch, the atmosphere was filled with camaraderie. Guests renewed old friendships, discovered mutual connections, and formed new bonds, united by a shared commitment to the Oblate missions. For the “BC Five,” this event was more than just a gathering; it was an expression of our ongoing dedication to the Oblate mission in Kenya. Our recent trip had a profound impact on us, strengthening our resolve to support the Kenyan people in their efforts to build better lives.



Cook Jane Rukaria

Peggy Ho Yuen and Marlis Joller



The message we carried back from Kenya was one of gratitude and hope. The Oblates and the Kenyan people expressed deep appreciation for the support they receive, and their stories serve as a powerful reminder of the positive impact that collective generosity can achieve. We were honoured to be able to pass this message on to those at home. We would also like to add our personal thanks to Jane, the Oblates (who funded the lunch), and St. Augustine's parish and school communities for making the afternoon possible.

Our trip itself was symbolically shaped like a heart, and



indeed, the BC Five left a piece of our hearts in Kenya. We returned home not only with cherished memories and new friendships, but also inspired by the determination of the Kenyan people. We came home with

a renewed sense of purpose and a desire to inspire others to join the mission.

If you'd like to learn more about the Oblate mission in Kenya or are interested in supporting or participating in a future mission awareness trip, please reach out to Fr. Ken. As those of us who have gone can attest, it is an experience that will change your life and connect you to a global community of hope and resilience. We promise you won't regret it.

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*



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

OCT. 19

NAIROBI, Kenya – First of all, let me acknowledge and thank a lovely team of MAMI supporters at St. Augustine’s parish in Vancouver who held a gathering in October to encourage support for the Kenya Mission. Well done team and THANKYOU!!

Met with members of the youth group and three issues prompted interesting feedback: suicide, why some people are unfaithful in marriage, and the value of ethics.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

OCT. 26

Reagan, the son of my former shoeshine lady Rose, called for a bit of help. He is about 15 years old, now an orphan and trying to sort out the funeral for his mother. I find him to be quite courageous and keeping his head during a difficult time.



NOV. 2

The politics is getting sad. The Africa Union sent a letter to the government to stop the extra-judicial killings, abductions, etc. There is

Resurrection Garden
meditation day for
the youth



Pre-novitiate visit to Langata Cemetery to pray for the dead

some insecurity around Karen with people getting robbed. Friday was a public holiday, but nobody knew until the night before. Crazy!

NOV. 9

As usual, I had several requests for urgent help. One young man needed medicine, another food, and one of our Oblate youth who lost her job needed help to go home

and care for her grandmother (who was really a mother to her growing up). The Oblate youth in Nairobi are busy encouraging each other to help the patients at the National Spinal Hospital. They mostly need toiletries.

Happy to report that Reagan, the son of my shoeshine lady, has now been placed in a boarding school on the coast.

Karen admin staff luncheon



A sponsor is paying for his schooling, but I pray he will not be radicalized. He is going to an Islamic school. For the last week he has been sleeping on the floor of the local mosque (no mattress). It made me think: how many of our churches would allow abandoned youth or street people to sleep under cover inside the church? Anyway, a donor and I paid for his transport, a mattress and some sheets.



Irinda Wall foundation trenches

In a bid to help the church reduce expenses and boost the economy of Kenya, I held a second meeting with Kenya Airways executives to discuss their proposed ticket pricing for the Catholic Church religious. There are close to 400 congregations in Kenya plus the dioceses.

They are offering us a 15-per-cent discount on most routes and preferential/discounted add-on services.

I heard that the bishops of Kenya have told the government they will not sign up to the new National Health Scheme

Kisaju postulants on volleyball court





Agbenorxoe Catholic grotto statue in Ghana

until the government pays the church-run medical centres the millions of dollars due to them for services provided on behalf of the state.

NOV. 16

It's been a mixed week of hard work: travel from Nairobi to Accra in Ghana, playing tourist, evaluating projects, keeping Kenya happy from a distance, chasing information, teaching, meeting the local king and being well looked

after by the local Oblate community.

I was met in Accra by the local superior, Fr. Hyacinth, OMI, from Nigeria and he was accompanied by Fr. Daniel, OMI, (Senegal) and Fr. Jean Baptiste, OMI, (Togo).

I celebrated my 63rd birthday while in Ghana. The Oblate community created a nice celebration and presented a gift of a ceremonial shirt that I put on the next day.

During the week I travelled around the parish each day and we discussed project possibilities. Their parish shrine is elaborate in some ways, but the décor is getting run down. The Agbenorxoe Catholic Grotto statues are amazing, but badly in need of new paint.

Fr. Gerry and a district king



The streets of Accra are not as well developed as Nairobi, but they are getting there. Population is 2.7 million in Accra and 34 million for the country.

I was introduced to a district king, a Catholic, and showed him my appreciation for the good cooperation and support given to the Oblates. He was very pleasant. We took some photos in front of the wall on which five previous kings are painted.

Fr. Hyacinth took me to visit prayer centres in Dafor, Dafor Tornu and Fesi-Bame.

NOV. 23

As my time in Ghana was drawing to a close, Fr. Jean took me to visit the health centre nearby. It is cramped and has a leaking roof. The man in charge was preparing a request for the parish or Oblates to assist them. I suggested they buy a tin of bitumen putty and plug the holes to stop the leaking for now, while they wait for government funding to arrive. At least they had some medicine in the pharmacy and some equipment to help monitor women and babies.

Once back in Kenya it didn't take long for people to start calling for assistance, so I gave a few donations to the youth.

NOV. 30

Our Oblate youth excelled again. Six of them represented the whole group and we visited the National Spinal Hospital in Hurlingham. We had short

Oblate youth visit
Hurlingham Spinal Hospital





St. Bridget Church in Gdansk

prayers with small groups of patients and then gave each of them some small gifts of toiletries and other goodies. These were purchased from donations by all the youth members.

Some of the youth engaged one-on-one with the patients, which was the best gift of the day. Some of the patients feel abandoned by their former friends and family members.

During the week the youth also distributed food to the increasing numbers of poor people in Mathare slums. George and Andrew are very faithful to this task.

I ended the week back on a plane, flying to our Oblate home in London en route to meetings in Poland.

As we follow the invasion and attack on Ukraine by Russia, we pray for our Oblates working in Ukraine and Russia during these dangerous times. I saw this week that Belarus, the puppet state of Russia, has introduced new laws resulting in the arrest of some clergy and religious personnel.

DEC. 7

I was well received in Gdansk, Poland, for the general finance meeting that also involved treasurers from the

European region, Poland, Sri Lanka and other countries. The meetings were held at the Oblate Shrine where they celebrate four masses daily, hear confessions and have Adoration all day. They have 50,000 people come for confession over the course of a year.

The Oblate church here has a tragic legacy: the Soviet troops, at the end of WW2, herded 100 people (mainly Germans) inside the original church and set it on fire. Before WW2 Gdansk was a German city. Ten years ago it was in ruins. The European Union provided grants to rebuild on the condition that the facilities and meeting spaces can be used by all.

DEC. 14

It has been hectic since returning from Poland, and I was happy we had the Independence Day holiday that took a little pressure off the office.

Fr. Faustin had visitors at our house: a whole family who came for prayer and confessions. There were 12, including children, so I offered them tea and bread as they were here for several hours.

DEC. 21

Fr. Fidele drove Br. Emmanuel to the airport for travel to Lesotho to start his novitiate year. He was excited. It was his first time out of Kenya, first time on a plane, and the first time in a hotel (at Johannesburg airport).

Another joyful moment during the week was when Fr. Greg Oszust thoughtfully



Fr. Fidele drives Br. Emmanuel to the airport



National gathering for youth

arranged for a small Christmas cake and bag of donuts for our worker at the nearby OMI Centre.

Organized and led by Fr. Cosmas, the national Oblate Youth gathering took place in Méru from Dec. 11-16. Attending were youth from each of our four parishes of Kionyo, Méru, Kisaju and Larmudiac, along with one or two patrons/matrons from each parish.



National gathering for youth

In Nairobi, our youth members George and Andrew again distributed food to the poor in Mathare slums, and delivered a Christmas gift to the deaf community in Soweto Parish in the poorer part of Nairobi.

Soweto deaf community children sharing lunch





Gachanka Church in progress

We visited the new church in Gachanka. With the roof on, and all the scaffolding removed, the church is starting to look beautiful, and impressive. The top of the roof looks like a pile of spaghetti where the girders are all linking to the main roof “ring” on which the external dome is now resting. The dome still needs to be covered.

We managed to source 1,040 Cyprus tree seedlings for the Kiiroa farm property to extend the tree farm. Farm manager Euticus transported them and already had the holes prepared. The heavy rains have returned, so now is the time to plant.



Tree seedlings for
Kiiroa farm

DEC. 28

I celebrated Christmas Eve mass for the children and staff at Nyumbani and had a morning mass with the children on Christmas Day.

I enjoyed a day off with nearby friends Helen and Elizabeth. It is always a blessing to go there for Christmas as family comes home from places around the world. It's frustrating and sad that the economy has been badly mismanaged, resulting in many companies closing or transferring to another country. All the unemployed workers could hardly eat on Christmas Day, let alone celebrate or buy a gift for their children. One newspaper article said 6 out of 10 Kenyans would not enjoy Christmas this year.

I often think of Mother Teresa's response when someone mocked her by saying, you can't save all the children so why bother! Mother Teresa replied, but I can save this one. And I know, in our parishes, many people are helping one another, especially through our youth groups and small Christian communities.

When I was assistant parish priest in Kionyo, Igandene Prayer House was part of Kionyo. I was happy to hear that Kenneth, a former youth from there, got married last weekend. I always thought he would die from asthma and used to give him donated medication from Canada for two years until it ran out. Now he seems to be doing OK. Thank-you to our visitors who brought those medicines, because he used to really

appreciate them and had no money for local supplies. I also take my hat off to Kenneth who persevered



Kenneth and Nancy's wedding

during all those difficult days of gasping for air but still participated in youth activities. I sent him a small donation for the wedding and my prayerful support.

We are happy to report five new postulants have been admitted to our formation program, while three men are moving on to pre-novitiate. Annual renewal of vows was approved for Br. Sebastian and Br. Elias, while Br. Peter decided to take another path in life and left the Oblates in January.

JAN. 4

It's been a busy but good week that included a trip to Kionyo for 21 baptisms.

We were blessed with a visit from Fr. John Wotherspoon, OMI, our great prison ministry man in Hong Kong. He is visiting once again to encourage people not to become drug mules.

I also met with Euticus (farm manager) and his wife Anne at the Kiirua Farm and signed his 2025 contract, which included a special letter allowing a brother to stay with them in the house. The brother is helpful to have around, assisting Euticus and being there when Euticus is absent.

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We're all aware of the need to recycle and conserve limited resources. To contribute to initiatives like that we encourage you to share your copy of Oblate Spirit with a neighbour, a friend or family members. Or, as one of our readers has done, take the publication to church for others to read.



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