

Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



Christmas 2025



Praying for peace



We see many pictures of people in need from trouble spots in the world, but rarely has one photo (see page 10) had such an impact on us. It was taken by Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskiy, OMI, in Ukraine. It is of a young woman with two prosthetic legs, a victim of a brutal war, selling nuts on the street to support herself.

We asked Fr. Pavlo if he knew her *story*, but he said she is just one of many people he photographs in similar situations, and he did not know who she was.

In a perfect world we would not see the horrors of war, the results of famine, the hardships of poverty. But we don't live in a perfect world, and all each of us can do is our little part. In this issue we are asking MAMI members to do what they can to make Christmas and ongoing life a little brighter for the downtrodden in our missions.

Some of our supporters have committed to lasting bequeaths. A family from Alberta is a classic example. "We decided we should support that (Kenya) mission. When we received the *Oblate Spirit* booklet, we saw the good work being done, so it's something we should answer. We have a few things in our will, and that's one of them."

"We decided to support the very good things that MAMI is doing. Every day in our daily prayers, we pray for success of the work that's being done."

Gifts from the heart leave a legacy of hope. We pray your hearts and lives be filled with peace and joy this Christmas season. And we pray for that young woman in Ukraine!

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Christmas Wish List



CANADA

- ~ De Mazenod Door\$50
- ~ Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples\$50

KENYA

- ~ Prison Ministry\$25
- ~ Children's Schooling.....\$50
- ~ Needs of the Elderly.....\$40
- ~ Beehives\$75
- ~ Water Purifying Systems.....\$50

PERU

- ~ Santa Clotilde Hospital.....\$25

UKRAINE

- ~ Parish Outreach.....\$50

Christmas: A time of welcome and mission

BY FR. ANDRZEJ STENDZINA, OMI PROVINCIAL,
OMI LACOMBE CANADA

OTTAWA – Every issue of *Oblate Spirit* reminds us of something very important: the heart of our Oblate mission. Through its pages, we hear about the people and places where Oblates serve, often in challenging situations. We are invited to pray for them, to support them, and to remember that our family of faith reaches far beyond our own homes. *Oblate Spirit* keeps this missionary fire alive, and I am deeply grateful for that.

Christmas, too, speaks to this same spirit of mission. It is a time of hope, of welcome, and of sharing what we have with

Fr. Andrzej Stendzina during a visit to Kenya



others. Growing up in Poland, Christmas Eve was filled with waiting and expectation. As children, we would watch the sky for the very first star, and only then could we begin our traditional supper. Tradition called for 12 dishes, one for each of the apostles. We never had all 12, but we came close!

At our table there was always an empty chair. It was kept for the unexpected guest – a reminder that no one should be left out, especially at Christmas. That small tradition taught me that Christmas is never only about ourselves, but about making room for others, just as Christ made room for us in His love.

After supper came the gifts, not from Santa, but from the Baby Jesus. Then we would gather around the Christmas tree, singing carols together, before heading off to Midnight Mass. Christmas Day itself was quieter, spent with close family. It was a time of peace, joy, and gratitude, a time when we felt especially close to God and to one another.

This Christmas, may your hearts be filled with peace, your homes with warmth, and your lives with joy. As we celebrate the birth of Christ, may we also remember our Oblate missionaries who carry His light to places of need and hope. May their work inspire us to keep an empty chair in our own lives, ready to welcome the stranger, the poor, and those searching for God.

Merry Christmas to you and your loved ones, and may the New Year bring blessings to you, to our Oblate family, and to all those we serve around the world.



Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

A taste of peace, joy

BY FR. MARK BLOM, OMI

EDMONTON – Christmas celebrates the Word of God made flesh. Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples echoes every year the incarnate hospitality of God, especially to those in need at Christmas.



Fr. Mark Blom chats with the children

Located in one of the oldest neighborhoods in Edmonton, Sacred Heart has always been sensitive and responsive to the needy, and especially around Christmas time.

Momentum for our Christmas program begins by preparing for World Day of the Poor, in November, where we seek to serve a complete festive meal and a care package for those living on the streets.

There are three moments in our Christmas outreach: preparing a Christmas food hamper, including a turkey, for around three to four hundred families. We host a Christmas party for children, including gifts, that is really meant for families who can't afford gifts for children. On Christmas day a rich and festive



Dressed for
a party

Theresa Yatsalie paints the nativity scene pictured on the cover



banquet is served in our hall, attended by hundreds of people who live alone and are in need.

Being alone on Christmas day can be a deep sorrow and we provide an incarnate way for people who are estranged in so many ways from their families, society and even themselves, to taste again the peace and joy that comes when everyone is at the table because of Christ's birth.

This effort to deepen the celebration of the Lord Jesus' incarnation is a lot of work, and it doesn't solve the poverty and problems of the poor. We can't do it every week, but doing it at Christmas echoes the angel's visit to the shepherds living in the fields, those who were privileged to be the first ones invited to celebrate the Lord's birth.

(Fr. Mark Blom is the associate pastor at Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples)

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI



**Lacombe MAMI
Oblate Missions**

Website:

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



Snowflakes from Heaven Rosary

Celebrate Our Lady of the Snow's story with this beautiful rosary. Light blue shimmering glass beads combine with snow-white beads to form the decades of the rosary. The Our Father spacers are marked by silver snowflakes in honor of Our Lady of the Snows. The rosary's round centerpiece features Our Lady of the Snows, and an ornate crucifix completes this devotional piece.

Please indicate on the enclosed gift form if you wish to receive a Snowflakes from Heaven rosary.



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We have the ability to accept donations by way of credit card!

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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.

The consequences of war



A hub of support

BY FR. PAVLO VYSHKOVSKYI, OMI

KYIV, Ukraine – The St. Nicholas Oblate Parish has been a hub of humanitarian missionary activity since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Parishioners and volunteers collected, sorted, and distributed aid to internally displaced persons, the elderly, large families, and anyone else who found themselves in difficult circumstances.

Thanks to the support of parishioners and benefactors, the centre was able to establish stable operations and provide regular assistance to those most in need.

The parish organized a collection of humanitarian aid for



A treasure for a child amidst war



Destruction from bombs

the residents of liberated Kherson. Through the joint efforts of the faithful, a car was filled with food, medicine, hygiene products, and warm clothing and delivered to the city. This initiative was an important expression of solidarity and Christian love for one's neighbor.

The parish constantly supports our defenders, in particular

by visiting hospitals. During holidays, especially at Easter, parishioners visit wounded soldiers, bringing them blessed Easter cakes, homemade baked goods, sweets, children's drawings, and words of gratitude.

Parishioners also help medical workers by cutting gauze for bandages and assisting in the manufacture of dressing materials.

Fr. Pavlo Vyshkovskyi welcomes guests of St. Nicholas Church



Almost every year since the start of the full-scale invasion, the parish has organized Christmas charity fairs where parishioners bake their own pastries (Vincetian gingerbread cookies). All funds raised go to support the military, in particular our parishioners who are defenders, and these



Returnees from the front lines

funds were also used to organize a campaign to help the residents of Kherson. In 2024, young people also held a charity lottery, the proceeds of which were spent on hygiene products and sweets for wounded soldiers.

In 2024, with the help of MAMI Canada, the parish established the Christotherapy Centre, a space for spiritual and psychological support for people who have experienced the trauma of war.

The center offers individual counseling, group meetings, spiritual conversations, and retreats to help restore inner peace, faith, and trust in God.

In summary, it can be said that during a difficult time for Ukraine, the parish has become a centre of prayer, support, and mercy.

Our believers daily demonstrate their living faith through concrete actions – helping neighbors, serving the military, charity, and spiritual care for the victims.



Food distribution outside De Mazenod Door

With open hearts!

HAMILTON, ON – What started as a knock at the rectory door has become one of the most life-giving ministries in downtown Hamilton.

In 2012, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate arrived at St. Patrick Parish, and it didn't take long before people in need began showing up, not at an office or a food bank, but right at the rectory, asking for something to eat.

Fr. Tony O'Dell, OMI, and Fr. Jarek Pachocki, OMI, responded with simple acts of love: sandwiches, coffee, and time.

Over time, more people came.

A new look for
De Mazenod Door





A thankful recipient of a good meal

By 2016, this quiet outreach became a full-time ministry known as De Mazenod Door Outreach – named in honour of St. Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Oblates and passionate servant of the poor.

Operating 365 days a year, De Mazenod Door now serves light breakfasts, hot lunches, and Friday BBQs – often feeding 500-700 people a day. But this outreach is

about more than food. It offers dignity, welcome, and human connection. No one is turned away. Every guest is greeted as a friend and fellow child of God.

The ministry is powered by a remarkable team of volunteers, from local high school students to retirees who help prepare, package, and distribute meals, often in rain, snow, or heat. Schools, churches, businesses, and individuals sponsor meals and donate supplies. It's a beautiful example of what happens when a community decides to care together.

Volunteers are integral to the success of De Mazenod Door



We're excited to share that De Mazenod Door has received a vibrant new facelift, thanks to the installation of brand-new window wraps. This eye-catching upgrade has made our space more visible from the street, helping community members and guests easily spot us as they pass by.

The bold new design not only enhances the exterior of our building but also strengthens our presence in the neighbourhood. It serves as a welcoming beacon, reflecting the warmth, support and hospitality that De Mazenod Door Outreach has always offered.

De Mazenod Door Outreach is more than a charity – it's a living expression of the Gospel, inspired by the words of Jesus in Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink..." It embodies the Oblate charism to bring the Good News to the poor and abandoned, in word and deed. And at the centre of it all is the door, a sacred threshold where faith meets action, and love becomes tangible.

It is a parish with open doors and open hearts.

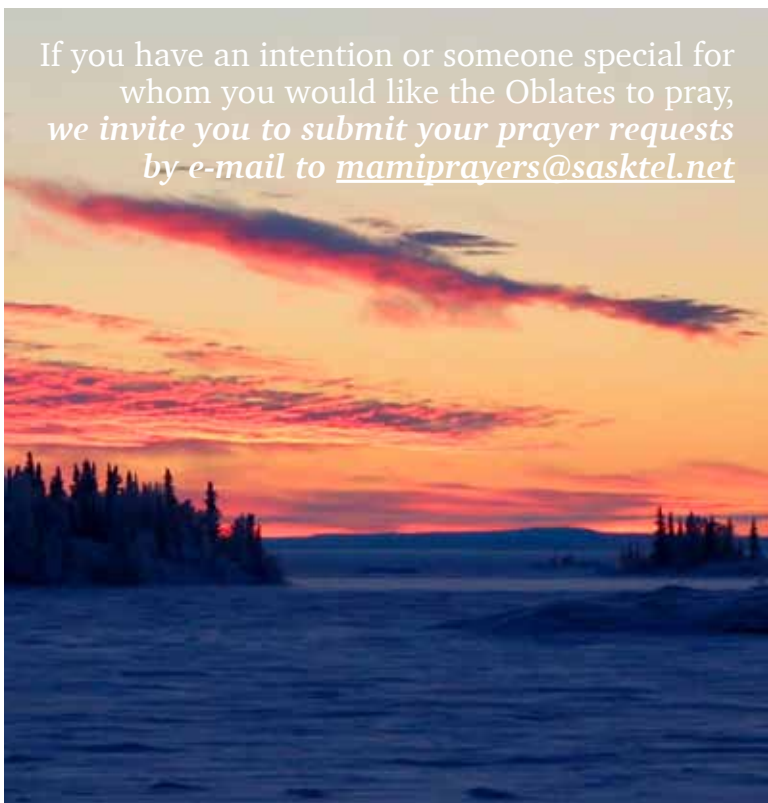


DE MAZENOD FARM

Over the summer months, in partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, youth participated in the Focus on Youth camp at De Mazenod Farm, gaining the unique opportunity to experience life on the farm, exploring agriculture, working with animals, engaging in crafts, and so much more.

This isn't just a fun day out – it's a valuable learning experience. The program introduces youth to new environments, helping them expand their horizons and discover new interests and talents. By keeping youth safe, engaged, and active, the camp enriches young lives while also fostering a spirit of community and meaningful contribution. We are thrilled to be part of such a wonderful experience for Hamilton's youth.

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*



Helping improve lives in Kenya

Ranging from the needs of youth, to needs of the elderly, to those incarcerated, the Oblates in Kenya are making a difference.

Struggling families receive assistance with school fees, supplies and lunches. Many also required assistance for uniforms and hygiene packs for the females. It is now also essential to find a few laptops



Completed water tower
in Méru Parish

Students at Larmudiac Mother of Mercy
Girls Academy off to create music





Students in Kionyo

for the schools to support the new competency-based curriculum introduced by the government. And we all know children need activities outside the classroom where sports equipment (table tennis, volleyballs, soccer balls, uniforms, etc.) and or/ small musical items contribute to a well-rounded youth.

Many elders exist on very limited financial means. Providing blankets and warm clothing can provide comfort and a can of paint can brighten their living space.

A new initiative to contribute to the sustainability of the Kiirua Farm is raising bees. The honey produced can help families and the Oblate communities eat healthy and reduce grocery bills. The sale of honey would also contribute to farm costs.

Most of the women in the Langata prison have committed petty crimes, such as stealing as a result of dire poverty and wanting to provide for their family's basic needs. Many have young children living with them. They have built a strong community. Fr. Fidele celebrates mass in the prison. There is a focus on preparing the women for their return to



Water is a vital resource

society by providing the tools they need to succeed: everything from communication skills to small business basics. Through MAMI, the women are provided with personal care items and a small monetary gift to help them get settled when they are released.

We know the importance of being able to access clean potable water. To address this need, and thanks to MAMI supporters over the years, a number of boreholes have been constructed. This has provided many Kenyans with access to this life-giving resource at a lower cost and without having to travel great distance. The Oblates are now planning to install community water purified systems in the locations where they have boreholes.

In your words

BY FR. ARMAND LE GAL, OMI

WINNIPEG, MB – As I was paging through the last *Oblate Spirit*, I saw the request for stories. I asked myself, “what story could I write about?” So, I decided to write of an event that happened in a parish where I was serving at the time.

After mass, a mother approached me with her son, about five years old.

“My son has a question for you,” said the mother. By then, the son is partly hiding behind his mother.

“During the mass, when the priest puts his hand over the chalice and paten, he asked me why the priest is doing that. So, I told him that the priest asks the Holy Spirit to come and change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.”

“Why can’t I see the Holy Spirit,” he asked.

“I did not know how to answer that question,” said the mother, “so I said we would ask Fr. Armand after mass.”

What would you have said?

After a few seconds of quick thinking, this is what I responded to the son and the mom.

“When you see the leaves on the trees moving, you know that it is windy outside. Right? Do you see the wind? No, but it is there. The Holy Spirit acts and does things, but we don’t see it.”

Then I added, “Do you have air conditioning in your house? Do you feel the cool air?”



Fr. Armand Le Gal, OMI

He said yes.

Then I continued, "We don't see the cool air, but feel it. It is the same with the Holy Spirit. We don't see the Holy Spirit, but we trust and believe that He acts, even if we don't see Him."

That seemed to satisfy the young boy, and they happily left.

And so goes life in a parish!

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



Fr. Faustin, OMI

Home blessing

Fr. Faustin, OMI, from Larmudiac St. Joseph the Worker parish blesses the homes of parishioners during the annual prayer and benediction of homes in Larmudiac Parish in Kenya. After a day of inviting God's blessing and protection on the homes, community members gather for mass at a designated home.





Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

AUG. 9

NAIROBI – I spent the week in Johannesburg at our annual treasurers' meeting for English-speaking Oblate units. Upon returning I dashed over to the parish council meeting in Kisaju to present the OMI Centre project plan and listen to their feedback.

Fr. Phelix had invited some Maasai elders, and the women came up with three good suggestions: a childcare area, a children's playground and a rehab centre for the many youth and adults affected by drugs and alcohol.

Another suggestion was for a gym, of which there are none in the area. The rooms set aside for a possible training area in the medium to long-term could become a gym and a space for child-care. But I stressed the groups coming would have to provide their own babysitting and children's playground supervisors. The Maasai elder, Mr. Moses, was brief in his response: a very good project, but let us remember the community, sharing jobs for locals during construction and later for operation.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

Progress at the Gachanka church





Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux

AUG. 16

We have a house full: five lovely sisters from the Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux – a sister congregation to the Oblates. After one week with us to learn a few tricks, they travelled to Eldoret where they will be in the new diocese of Kabsabet, a diocese in the ecclesiastical province of Kisumu in Kenya.

I collected Sr. Jesmin (Sri Lanka) at the airport and she was later joined by four nuns arriving from Rwanda (their nationalities: DRC, Lesotho, Pakistan, India).

I gave a little speech at mass to welcome the Holy Family Sisters, noting that this is a historic moment for the Oblates in Kenya. The sisters are close to the heart of St. Eugene, and were founded by his good friend Fr. Pierre Bienvenu Noallies. When Fr. Pierre died he requested St. Eugene to keep watch over their order. Since then they have been closely involved in ministry with the Oblates in many countries. There were early establishments in Sri Lanka (1862) and Lesotho (1864). They were established in Canada since 1901 and have more than 4,000 members in 27 countries across four continents.

AUG. 23

During the week there was the usual round of small donations to help people. Our youth member George called to remind me about the funeral for a young woman from the deaf community we have been supporting, so I sent \$50 to help.

The Holy Family Sisters continued to learn about life in Kenya. They toured the Alfajiri Street Kid's Art Centre, the Ruben Centre (medical care, school and vocational training). This was to help them realise the variety of simple works that could be done to help young people in their mission station. They moved on to Eldoret the next day, where they stayed for one week before continuing to Nandi Hills Parish.

The Kisaju OMI Centre project moved slowly, but an important step was agreeing on the feasibility scope and cost.

AUG. 30

On the projects front, our feasibility study contract was signed for the Kisaju OMI Centre project. We also held two meetings: one in Kitengela with the local county planning office, and the second in Kisaju at the site with several elders. Everyone was happy with the diagrams and pictures. But we urged them not to get too excited as we have yet to receive permission to proceed.

Meeting of elders and neighbours at Kisaju OMI Center



SEPT. 7

The mission has been busy, so it was good to welcome back Fr. Daquin from home leave. We managed to start the Kisaju road project and kickstart some of the technical work for the Kisaju OMI Centre. The Canadian MAMI mission immersion experience project was fine-tuned with a visitation schedule. They all seemed eager and keen during a zoom call we held two weeks before they arrived.

We signed transfer papers for the extra three acres at Kisaju OMI Centre.

After a lot of stress and expense with travel insurance, Fr. Faustin and Fr. Constant were both refused a visa to France to participate in a renewal program called the Aix experience. So disappointing!

I helped one of the Nairobi youth with an emergency loan (he usually pays back, but he is a worthy chap even if he doesn't manage it all). He said that Fabian, also a Nairobi youth, is planning to start his own legal practice. Another youth member, Immaculate, also contributed a lovely impact statement for us on how the Oblates have made an impact in Kenya for the last three years.



SEPT. 14

Fr. Fidele flew to a meeting for provincials at our scholasticate in Cedara, South Africa. He attended the final vows for three of the scholastics. We were very happy to hear that Br. Elias Kimani has vowed to commit his life to the Oblates. Fr. Fidele was on hand to personally witness the commitment and receive the

Br. Elias and Fr. Fidele in Cedara



Retaining wall behind the house at Kiirua farm

vows on behalf of Fr. Andrzej Stendzina our provincial superior in Ottawa.

I was very impressed with the work of manager Euticus to construct an extension of the retaining wall behind the main house at our Kiirua Farm in Méru and pleased that Fr. Charles and Euticus have been teaching some of the neighbours how to use the simple and low-cost building method. When we share simple practical ideas, we help reveal the Spirit.

Another project that has gone well is the road project at Kisaju OMI Centre. I visited the site and was most impressed.



The thick layer of gravel was well watered and compacted during the week. To keep the peace, we are also laying a section at the gateway for our neighbours.

Road construction at the Kisaju OMI Centre

As for planning for the Kisaju OMI Centre, we negotiated some rates for payment and confirmed some details for the gymnasium design.

Fr. Greg Oszust returned from a small celebration in Poland. A group of priests ordained with him about 30 years ago had paid for his ticket to join them for the celebration.



Fr. Greg Oszust, left, at celebration in Poland

SEPT. 21

Fr. Daquin helped organize an inter-denominational climate justice youth conference and the group marched from the Kenya Wildlife Service to the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. They finished with a shared interfaith reflection and a blessing for the Earth, calling on governments, communities, and institutions across East Africa to take bold climate action.



Fr. Daquin at the conference



Participants at the Nairobi Interfaith Youth Climate Justice Conference

We were also busy preparing for the arrival of our Canadian MAMI group. I don't like to say visitors, because they are really part of the family.

SEPT. 28

We are blessed to have 11 wonderful people from Canada with us this week.

I was joined by a few Canadians to meet Euticus and his family and tour Kiirua Farm. We inspected the retaining wall and earth-bag construction, before heading up the hill to see a 15,000-litre tank we rescued from Méru postulancy. It is operating well and is a big boost for water supply. Euticus

Ploughed land at Kiirua farm



also showed us a recently ploughed three-acre plot where they used a tractor for the first time on the property. It is more expensive but much faster than a bullock. Fr. Charles wants to try raising vegetables in the space.

OCT. 4

It has been a big week for our Canadian friends. We stayed in Méru/Kionyo parishes, then moved to Larmudiac Parish. Fr. Daquin and Fr. Charles provided wonderful hospitality in Méru; while in Kionyo, Fr. Gideon, Fr. Jean Pierre and Deacon Moses were also very welcoming and kind, along with the lay associates, local MAMI members and the parish council.

Our wonderful cooks, Agnes and Martha, were amazing. We also admired the new extension to the rectory in Kionyo; and the beautiful waiting room and water tower at Méru Irinda Parish. While in Kionyo there was a great welcome by the lay associates and local MAMI members. The youth leaders also came and shared their struggles and joys and showed appreciation for the work of MAMI Canada.

On the way to Larmudiac, we visited the Thompson Falls and had a presentation at Nakuru Mt. Kenya University by the young innovation club. They are developing ways to use the

Lunch in Karen for the Canadian visitors



free heat produced by natural geothermal vents about 30 kilometres away, such as raising chickens, drying food stuffs and processing the output from cricket farming.

We spent two days at Larmudiac visiting most of the nine prayer houses and meeting various groups of people, including parish leaders, school teachers, youth and staff. Fr. Faustin, Fr. Wekesa and Fr. Cosmas provided wonderful hospitality there, along with scholastic Matthew and former postulant Gregory.

Then it was back to Karen for lunch and a change of clothes, before continuing on to Kisaju Parish and postulancy. We presented new medical materials to the Urafiki Medical Clinic at Kisaju and the Lenkitem Clinic in the Maasai communities south of Kisaju. We then moved on to visit Olturuto Prayer House, where we met catechist Paul. The MAMI crew was happy to see the water borehole and purifier in place to provide low-cost clean water for the locals. Fr. Greg, Fr. David, Br. Benjamin and our two postulants Davis and Kelvin have provided wonderful hospitality; not to mention Mrs. Salome our cook.

Frs. Fidele and Gerry check out the roof reinforcement under construction at the Karen residence





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and ministries of the Oblates.*

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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/>

Contact update for bequeaths

Reminder: for those who have named MAMI as part of their last will and testament, please note important changes to our contact information.

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clothing the naked and
bringing the love of God
to those most in need.

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*A publication of the
Oblate Mission office.*

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Printed in Canada

