

March 16, 2026

For our final excursion with the guidance of Fr. Bonga, we bused through the countryside of Provence, to appreciate the rich history of this region including the first Oblate mission, Notre Dame de la Lumière located in the town of Lumière. This Oblate mission was founded in 1837. Our founder, Monseigneur de Mazenod, then Bishop of Marseille, installed the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We were deeply touched by the concelebration of Mass for our group by Fr. Michael and Fr. Bonga in this beautiful setting, the crypt, now dedicated to “Our Lady of Light”.



This mission is a place of prayer where many miracles happened. Pilgrims would come for a month's stay. From 1053 to 1957 it became the Oblate Scholasticate. At the warm invitation of our host Fr. Bernard, we were treated to a fine lunch at the adjacent Oblate facility.

As we continued our pilgrimage to Avignon, we were treated to beautiful landscape, complete with a snow-covered mountain top, the Luberon Mts., deep lush canyons as part the Rhone Valley, and well-appointed vineyards and olive groves lining the slopes and valleys.





The afternoon portion of our pilgrimage gave an appreciation of the rich and complex history surrounding the papal estates located in the historic city of Avignon which was the site of the 14th century Great Schism of the Catholic Church. The imposing site is a reminder of the great divide that existed between French Royalty and the Vatican.



Wherever we walked in this region we were reminded of the commercial importance of their famous lavender industry by the scent of lavender. One of my highlights was seeing the actual Pont d'Avignon over the Rhone River, the subject of a song that I had learned in elementary school in France – “Sur le Pont d'Avignon”.



We found the journey with these Associate colleagues a special blessing because of the loving care each had for one other in terms of health and safety and utter respect for the status of their respective spiritual journey. Only the love of Christ could have put together such a wonderful group of Oblate Associates, who are so ready to follow and continue to follow St. Eugene's charism in service to the poor.

Renee and Paolo Siraco