


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



May 2026



WHY?

They are three simple letters in the English alphabet. WHY? It seems we are born with this innate curiosity to question. It is the three-year-old in all of us that asks the bigger world around us: why do I have to do this? What compels me to do this? Why can't I play some more, mommy. Why do I have to go to bed, daddy? We learned to ask why at a very tender young age!



But as we age, 'why' takes on significant depth.

Why is there war? Poverty? Illness? Loneliness? Desperation? Starvation? Homelessness? Hopelessness?

So, why do we open our hearts to those desperate for help? We hope that, as you flip through the pages of this humble publication, you will be reminded why you continue to support the Oblate missions in Canada and around the world.

In 2025, donations to MAMI reached **\$2,761,606.34**, an astonishing number vastly surpassing the \$1,766,899.41 of 2024. It is an astounding number, considering there was a postal strike that delayed donations, and world economic conditions that caused us to re-think our spending habits.

Most importantly, it meant we were able to help offer Oblate missions in 19 countries financial assistance totalling **\$2,212,760.33** in 2025. Water, food, housing, medical care, education, and spiritual care were just some of the targets for our assistance. (See Pages 23-26 for a more comprehensive list of aid to the missions.)

So now, we wonder *why*? The answer, in the spirit of the Oblates: "Why Not?"

Thank you to all who have made such a heart-felt difference in the lives of so many. We are blessed to witness your goodness.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



Delivering health and hope

BY DR. ZACHARY GASTELUM

SANTA CLOTILDE, Peru – I am a Catholic missionary and family medicine physician from the United States serving with the Mission Doctors Association in the Amazon region of Peru.

In this role, I volunteer both as a physician at Santa Clotilde Health Center, a remote critical access hospital, and as a lay missionary sharing responsibility for our parish's various pastoral ministries. During my three years here, I have witnessed the immense impact of your continued generosity toward an institution that truly serves the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters

Not long ago I had the opportunity to see your support truly alive in the life and journey of a Peruvian infant. I would

like to share with you this memorable encounter as a living example of your “yes” to supporting our mission.

Filled with the joy of Christmas, we travelled by boat to a small community one hour away from Santa Clotilde. When we arrived with a handful of young carolers from our parish’s youth choir, a guitar, and various bags of goodies, we were welcomed into a humble home decorated with festive balloons and garlands hanging from the ceiling.

A group of men, women, and children sat in a large circle and a white cloth was draped over the centre table to welcome a figurine of Baby Jesus one of the sisters has brought along. A giant pot with a wooden spoon larger than most of the children in the room rested over an open fire, everyone eagerly awaiting the sweet hot chocolate brewing inside.

Despite the evident joy and excitement in the room, however, it didn’t take long for me to notice the visible suffering of a young infant lying on the hard, wooden floor in the corner of the room. His illness sticks out like a sore thumb amidst the

stark contrast of his joyful surroundings. He is skin and bones, ghostly pale, lethargic with sunken eyes, his cry a weak whimper among the singing and shouting from the excited, healthy children around him.

A brief discussion with his mother and grandmother soon reveals the cause: for two months he has



Training in progress



A time for prayer at Santa Clotilde

been suffering from a persistent diarrheal illness and worsening nutrition after stopping breastfeeding.

In their community there is no access to health care or formula supplementation to help the infant recover. I am hopeful and relieved because his family agrees to return with us to Santa Clotilde to care for him in the hospital.

A few days after being in the hospital, the numbers on the scale begin to rise, his diarrhea subsides, his sunken eyes begin to take form, and his weak cry becomes a feisty fight with each interaction.

He is eventually discharged with infant formula to aid in his recovery. I think to myself, “just as the Holy Family found refuge in a humble stable in Bethlehem, so too this infant has found refuge in the arms of a humble Church community in the middle of the Amazon rainforest.”

I am reminded of the many blessings from serving in mission in the Peruvian Amazon where the Church and its ministries are exactly that – a refuge for the sick, the poor, the homeless, the maltreated, and the forgotten. I am reminded that every time we receive one of the “least of these” under our roof, we encounter the Savior Himself, God become flesh. A mysterious and beautiful paradox comes to light: in welcoming Him into our hearts, so too do we find our refuge in Him.

The area served by Santa Clotilde Hospital is large and

diverse, caring for just over 100 communities and more than 22,000 inhabitants. Many of these communities are indigenous and still preserve their native languages and customs.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ live the realities of extreme poverty and limited access to basic necessities such as potable water, electricity, health care, and education. The local people also suffer from the plagues of substance use, interpersonal violence, human and drug trafficking, threats to the environment and Indigenous people's livelihoods, and limited access to the Church's various pastoral ministries.

Our efforts are complicated by long distances between communities only reachable by boat, the furthest of which is more than two to three weeks away. For this reason, many people must travel multiple days in canoe to address basic health needs.

It is into these difficult situations that, with your help, our hospital staff and missionaries enter to bring Christ's healing love and mercy. Your commitment to Santa Clotilde Health Center has enabled us to increase access to quality, life-saving care for our brothers and sisters along the Napo River. With your support, we continue to grow our workforce to be able to meet the high demand of patients, adapt to current

Transportation





Santa Clotilde hospital staff

government standards, and employ ancillary staff required for hospital operations.

With your help, we are working to renovate the hospital to ensure safe, sanitary, and dignified conditions to both provide and receive health care. With your contributions, we persevere in providing vaccinations to isolated communities only reachable by long, costly journeys on boat. And with your generosity, we persist in sustaining the lives of patients who require special medicines, specialist referrals, or infant formula that the government does not facilitate.

As I hope you can see, you are integrally united to our hospital family in the Peruvian Amazon in our common mission to encounter Christ amidst the immense challenges and sufferings experienced daily by our brothers and sisters. It is for this reason I express my sincere gratitude to you for continuing to cultivate the seeds of faith, hope, and love in a place continually threatened by the stifling weeds of secularism, injustice, desperation, and violence.

My hope and prayer is that with your help, we may continue to sow this seed, this call to mission planted in our hearts, so that it may flourish and produce much fruit in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for your openness and attentiveness to the needs of our global church family.



Saint Norbert's Rosenheim Church

A Tale of two parishes

BY MYRON GANSER

PROVOST, AB – After returning from the MAMI mission awareness trip to Kenya, I found it interesting to look back at the history of our own parish and compare it to what we had just experienced in Kenya. Much of what we saw happening in Kenya was similar to what happened in Western Canada, close to 100 years earlier. Just south of where we live, near the town of Provost, AB, sits Saint Norbert's Rosenheim Church, a beautiful remnant of Catholic history.

Just after the turn of the 20th century, St. Joseph's Colony was formed in west central Saskatchewan, extending into east central Alberta. Its eastern boundary was Tramping Lake, SK, and it stretched as far west as Hardisty, AB, north as far as Chauvin, AB, and south to Consort, AB. It was served by, you

guessed it, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. St. Joseph's Colony was just one of a number of Catholic colonies formed in Saskatchewan and Alberta that helped establish Catholic missions during the settlement of Western Canada.

The first priest to serve the Rosenheim district was Fr. Forner, OMI. He was followed by Oblates Fr. Schultz and Fr. Nelz. After that, diocesan priests served the area. Fr. Forner originally had two mission churches, one in Provost and the other in Cadogan. Churches were later established at Bodo, Compeer, Altario, Mount Carmel, Consort, Czar and Chauvin.

Church services were originally held in people's homes, and eventually a simple wooden church/rectory was built in Rosenheim, and in 1922, a large beautiful brick church was built. In fact, it is the largest rural Neo-gothic church in Alberta. It once served 100 families, some with as many as 10 children.

As the rural demographic changed, especially after the great depression, numbers decreased and eventually Rosenheim became a mission of Bodo. In 1968 it closed permanently, and the district is now served by St. Mary's Parish in Provost.



The church itself was scheduled to be demolished, but a group of interested people bought the church from the



diocese for \$1 and formed the Rosenheim Historical Society. St. Norbert's Rosenheim is now a provincial historic site. It still hosts mass on St. Norbert's Day at the beginning of June each year, as well as an annual church picnic. It is used for weddings, concerts and family gatherings. The cemetery is still in use.

Skip ahead 100 years and travel to the other side of the world where our MAMI group visited St. Stephen Kionyo Parish in Kenya. As with Rosenheim, St. Stephen began as a small prayer house (mission church), and eventually a beautiful new church was built and opened in 2022, all under the leadership of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It serves 11 mission churches and, in all probability, will eventually be turned over to the diocese, and be served by diocesan priests.

The similarities in the development of the two parishes is amazing. Of course, the common denominator is the Oblate missionaries that developed both parishes. They were the pioneers who came with the energy and enthusiasm to work in developing nations. They not only evangelized, but they built communities and supported projects to make life better for people with limited means.

They worked long hours, often physically working on projects between saying mass and administering sacraments. They brought hope and inspiration to many. The MAMI trip gave me a deep appreciation for these dedicated men. May God bless them and the works they are doing.

A prayer of hope

(Following is a message from Ukraine, written during the Easter season)

BY FR. PAVLO VYSHKOVSKYI, OMI

I would like to address you with simple words that come straight from the heart. This is not a (time) like any other: it is a time when God surprises us once again, entering the recesses of our humanity, our daily struggles, and the silence and expectations that each of us carries within.

We are living through days that speak of gift, betrayal, pain ... but above all, of faithful love. Jesus does not shy away from human frailty: He embraces it. This, today more than ever, is a powerful message for our times, so marked by uncertainty, fears, and confusion.

We, too, may sometimes feel tired, perhaps overwhelmed by our ministry or tormented by questions that have no immediate answer. And yet

it is precisely here, in these most authentic areas of our lives, that the Lord passes through. He does not seek perfection, but readiness ... He does not expect results, but open hearts.

The Word of God we hear these days is not a distant story: it is a living presence. It is Christ who passes by once more to wash the feet of humanity, who continues to give



himself in the broken bread, who continues to die and rise again for us. And he does so also through our hands, our voice, our lives given in service.

We are called to be people of hope ... not a fragile or naive hope, but the hope that is born of the Cross and blossoms on Easter morning. The world needs to see that this hope is real, concrete, and possible. And it will see it in our eyes, in our gestures, in our attitudes, in our presence among people.

I thank you for who you are, even more than for what you do. I thank you for your brotherhood, often hidden and quiet, but precious in God's eyes.

I thank you for your closeness at such a delicate moment in my life. I accompany you in prayer and entrust you to the Lord Jesus, that He may renew in you the joy of the Gospel and the strength of a love that never gives up.

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

Tears of joy

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

CHINCHA ALTA, Peru – We listened, and her prayers for a roof over her head were answered. Construction of homes for the poor has resumed.

As this was written, we had 11 homeless families on a wait list for simple houses. It is not uncommon to find five people living in a small shack with no lights, no clean running water, and no toilet.

These shacks are located on what was once the city dump. Those who qualify for our homes are often weak because they are not able to eat well. So, in order for them to be able to help with the construction of their homes, which is required, I bring them bags of food to help them with their physical strength.

When we meet for interviews, we often spend two hours listening to the physical and emotional needs of the candidates.

I recently met with four families to explain how we work and what was expected of them. Among them was a thin, feeble woman who told me she prayed for years that she would

Breakfast meeting for the crew





New school flooring

be able to die under a roof. She is 86 years old. When I said her house was on the list, she broke down and cried tears of joy.

I have assembled two four-man work teams, with two of the young men studying to be civil engineers. Our crews meet at a coffee shop every Wednesday morning to talk about the work being done, our progress, and the attitude of the families being helped. We share ideas and solutions for problems that arise.

And we take pride, especially when we see the smiles on the faces of people like that older woman whose dream has come true. That is evangelism, Blaise style!

Editor's note: Blaise also helped a school install proper flooring over what was just a dirt floor. The school approached him after raising money through various activities such as raffles, selling food, etc. to collect funds for material. They also asked Blaise to supply the labour, and he readily agreed. The work was completed in three days and the parents were happy with the support they received, as were the young children.



OMI

The Missionary Oblates
of Mary Immaculate

BY FR. ANDRZEJ STENDZINA, OMI

(Fr. Stenzina is the provincial superior of OMI Lacombe Canada)

OTTAWA – We celebrate a remarkable milestone, the 200th anniversary of the pontifical approval of our Constitutions and Rules (on Feb. 17, 1826). Two centuries of mission and service remind us of God’s faithfulness and the vision of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, who, with his first companions, embraced the call to serve despite humble beginnings and numbers challenges.



Fr. Andrzej
Stenzina, OMI

Our history is rich with inspiring witness: missionaries who ventured into difficult territories, Oblates and lay collaborators who lived the charism with courage, and those whose lives became examples of holiness. Their stories remind us of God’s enduring presence in our work and call us to draw inspiration from their example as we move forward.

At the same time, we recognize that our history, like any family’s, contains moments of struggle, mistakes, and missed opportunities. There were times when we failed to live fully the vocation entrusted to us, moments when our actions may have caused confusion, disappointment, or even hurt. Acknowledging these moments is not to dwell in shame, but to take responsibility, to learn, and to commit ourselves more fully to living our charism with integrity, compassion, and faithfulness. It is in this honest reflection that we find the foundation for true renewal, growth, and reconciliation.

As we celebrate, we are also invited to look forward. How can we embody this charism in our daily lives, in our communities, and in the world around us? How can we continue to respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalized with generosity, courage, and compassion. The bicentennial is not only a moment of gratitude – it is also a time to renew our commitment to the mission entrusted to us and to consider new ways to bring Christ’s love to those who need it most.

This Jubilee year is just beginning, and it promises to be a time of shared celebration, prayer, and reflection across our Province.

May this 200th anniversary inspire us to embrace our charism with joy, to serve with renewed dedication, and to walk together with courage, humility, and hope.

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/>

On the move

OTTAWA – Two significant changes were announced by Fr. Andrzej Stendzina, provincial superior of OMI Lacombe Canada. The new obediences are effective June 1.



Fr. Ken
Thorson, OMI

Following his sabbatical, Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, the previous provincial superior, will become the pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Ottawa. He served in ministry at the provincial level for the last 12 years.

Fr. Robert Laroche, OMI, will join the Kenya mission for one year. He spent the last four years in ministry at St. Joseph's in Ottawa. He will reside at the pre-novitiate in Karen assisting with the formation of future Oblate priests and brothers in Kenya and providing mentorship to the candidates.



Fr. Robert
Laroche, OMI

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.omi-lacombe.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.

Called to serve and not to be served

FR. ROBERT LAROCHE, OMI

OTTAWA – After 45 years of priesthood and serving in various mission parishes, especially among First Nations communities, it was time for a change. When our Provincial, Fr. Andrzej Stendzina, approached me with a one-year posting in Kenya to help in the formation of our pre-novitiate, I felt excited.

Even at the age of 74, my philosophy remains, “I am here to serve and not to be served.” I have always been successful in my ministry, and I am sure with God’s grace, my ministry in Kenya will bear fruit.

My role will be to act as an elder and grandfather image to these young men in formation. I will be called to do spiritual direction and serve those in formation through the various sacraments, guiding them to a good foundation for their discernment as future religious.

As a priest and missionary, I have always been a hands-on person helping wherever I can. If help is needed with small repairs, or the care of the garden, and if need be, the care of the animals in the compound, I will make myself available. This is to give a clear example to our young candidates that we are called to serve and not to be served. I believe that giving a visible example of service is the key to good formation in religious life.

There is still much to do in preparation for this new mission endeavor, but the greatest preparation is in personal prayer and in renewal concerning my own Oblate life. It is for this reason that you as the laity are called to pray for us priests and brothers to be a good reflection of Christ among God’s people. Blessings to all.

In praise of Blaise

BY BAERBEL JAECKEL

Dear Brother Blaise!

Thank you very much for your Christmas letter! I am sure glad you don't have to make that long journey to the post office anymore. Instead, you are building yet another home!

YOU ROCK, Brother Blaise!

A while ago I cut out your picture where you are standing in front of a truck ... shovel and pickaxe in hands! That picture is in my prayer book of psalms.

You are one of my Christian heroes. You probably don't like that description, but for me that's who you are! You don't make a thousand words. You work for a new home. You give families not just a roof over their heads, you show them the love of Christ!

Every day you are included in the prayers of our Holy Mother when I pray the rosary.

All the best to you!

Thank you, thank you; gracias, gracias; danke, danke; merci, merci!

God bless you through and through and all the people you work with and for.

From a small island on the West Coast of Canada, I am sending you my love and many greetings!

God is so very good.



The Oblate journey

BY KAREN AND DAVID SAX

In the last issue of *Oblate Spirit*, we saw the announcement of Fr. Glenn Zimmer's retirement. It's with a profound sense of gratitude for him that we write, expressing how much he's been part and parcel of our Oblate journey. God knows our hearts are full.

So, how did we come to be supporters of MAMI?

Last century we met Fr. Zimmer, OMI, in Guelph, Ontario, when he was discerning ministry for Queen's House of Retreats in Saskatoon, then encountered him and Sr. Margaret Dick, SNJM, when they were the directors of Queen's House of Retreats in Saskatoon, celebrating the Triduum with our young family, and most pivotally when we met them again at Qu'Appelle House of Prayer outside Fort Qu'Appelle, SK.

Glenn's encouragement led David to become a spiritual director, and as a couple who felt we were already living out the Oblate charism through our wedding vows, accepted the invitation to journey further in Saskatoon with Oblates, both vowed and Associates. We became Oblate Associates in 2008

Br. Blaise and Karen Sax during their 2012 visit to Peru



and continue as Oblate Associates of OMI Lacombe.

During this time, Glenn was encouraging us to explore what MAMI was doing around the world, and through the Holy Spirit we felt a call to support the missions, particularly Br. Blaise MacQuarrie, OMI, in Chinchá Alta, Peru. In 2012, when one of our four daughters was living in Peru doing doctoral research, we had the great privilege to personally visit Br. Blaise and continue to support him through MAMI. It was a joy to submit articles for *Oblate Spirit* on what we witnessed and shared in Peru.

Inspirational communications and personal visits over these years about MAMI have kept the fires burning for us to continue living our Oblate charism in being welcoming and hospitable followers of Christ and building Christian community, while serving the greater community. This is what Glenn encouraged us to continue doing in our lives, and for this we say, “thank you” and God bless you, always and in all ways.

Thank you for the opportunity to support Oblate missions through MAMI, including the Novena of Prayer throughout seasons. Please know, you as a team, were in our prayers when we made our pilgrimage to Aix-en-Provence, the birthplace of St. Eugene de Mazenod and our Oblates during this year, the 200th Anniversary of the Approbation of the Rules and Constitution of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

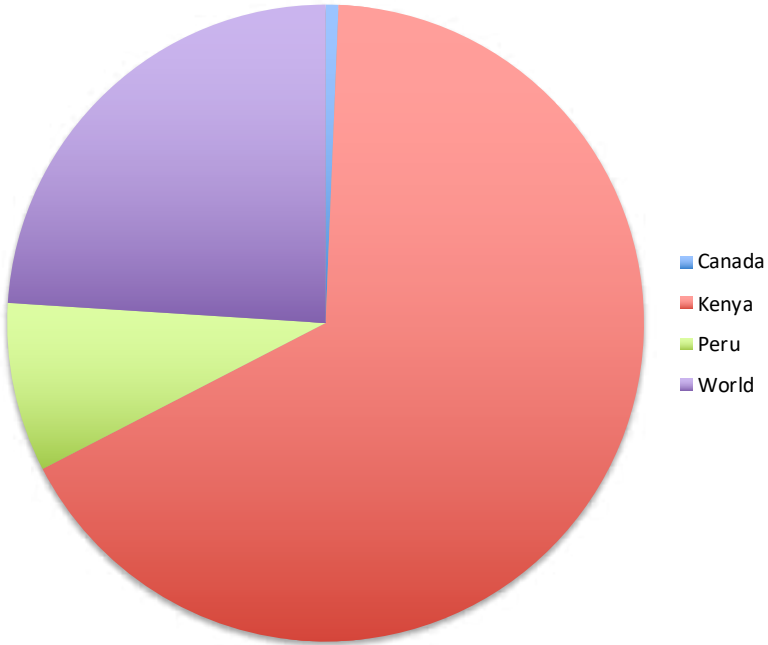
In Jesus and Mary,
Karen and David Sax



David Sax and Br. Blaise during their 2012 visit to Peru

2025 Projects Funded

\$2,212,760.33



Canada	\$14,436.99
Kenya	\$1,477,495.64
Peru	\$189,939.00
World	\$530,888.70



PROJECTS FUNDED

CANADA

MAMI supports the following projects in Canada:

- Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples in Edmonton
- De Mazenod Door Outreach in Hamilton
- Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
- Care of Oblate Elders

KENYA

MAMI's commitment to the Oblates in Kenya is ongoing. The Oblates respond to many needs in the parishes and communities, including:

- Church construction in Gachanka
- Education of students
- Water boreholes
- HIV/AIDS assistance
- Langata Women's Prison
- Support of the mission

Installing solar panels for water tanks in Kenya



PERU

Funds from MAMI supported:

- The building of houses
- Education
- Santa Clotilde Hospital
- Tertiary care for patients in Lima

Home under construction in Peru



WORLD

The cries from the poor and needy seem to grow louder each year along with the needs for education. In 2025, MAMI answered the following calls:

- Angola
 - School equipment for Fr. Joseph Mathuni School Complex, St. Mark School and Holy Mazonod College
 - Formation of 40 catechists at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish
- Bangladesh
 - School furniture and equipment at the Oblate Juniorate
 - Assistance with education at Lokhipur Mission Hostels

- Bolivia
 - Assistance with education at Nino Feliz School
- Cameroon
 - First formation
- Cedara
 - Assistance with education for religious sisters at St. Joseph's Theological Institute
- Colombia
 - Repairs for the OMI Pre-Novitiate
- Congo
 - Library supplies and musical instruments for Fr. Aloys Complex School and St. Joseph Parish, Songololo
 - Training for 30 women at St. Hubert Parish, Kinshasa
 - Funds for agricultural training and community gardening in Kinshasa
- Haiti
 - Assistance with education at St. Jean Baptiste of Tiburon Parish



Flooding in Sri Lanka

Flood response in Sri Lanka



- o Yard development at Mother of Love School
- o Youth programs including ministry development in Cayes Diocese and music program at Our Lady of Grace Parish, Blanchard
- o Renewable electricity development for St. Joseph's Centre
- o Parish furnishings for St. Eugene Parish
- o Retirement home for priests
- India
 - o Formation house construction
- Lesotho
 - o Purchase of a mini bus for the Formation Houses
- Madagascar
 - o Solar pump for St. Eugene School, Fianarantsoa
- Nigeria
 - o Re-roofing and solar energy reinstallation
- Pakistan
 - o Emergency relief efforts
- Philippines
 - o Repair for the school and faculty building for Notre Dame of Kulaman
- Sri Lanka
 - o Education of children
 - o Emergency relief efforts
 - o Solar panels for St. Vincent Home, Maggona



Caring for the poor



Oblate Associates on pilgrimage to Aix

A sense of coming home

BY DAVID AND KAREN SAX, OBLATE ASSOCIATES

NANAIMO, BC – Over the past eight years we have listened to our Oblate Associate companions speak of the joy and blessings received during an Aix-en-Provence experience at the Oblate Foundation House in southern France. It became something we hoped we might attend once life returned to some semblance of normal after Covid 19. We jumped at the chance when the opportunity emerged to join a pilgrimage group this year. We really didn't know what to expect but we trusted that all manner of things would be well.

Associates Dan and Joanne Friedt of Edmonton took the initiative to organize the experience with the team of the Foundation House. We got to know a little about our fellow Canadian pilgrims through Zoom meetings that provided a foundation to build a shared experience.

We all reached the Foundation House in Aix through the generous assistance of Fr. Paolo Archiati, OMI, the house



At St. Eugene's tomb

superior who drove to the Marseilles airport to pick up many of us, including our guide Fr. Bonga Thami, OMI from Rome. "This is our home, our family and our community. Our roots are here," he said.

The Foundation House was originally a Carmelite monastery for 150 years before Eugene arranged to take over some rooms for his burgeoning community in 1816. You can still feel the sense of peace, holiness and gratitude that permeates the grounds and house from the love and prayers of the Carmelite nuns. We not only experienced this but also felt that we had 'come home'. There is a spirit of welcome, belonging and care so animated by the Oblates, staff and volunteers in the House.

During the next few days we slept, ate, prayed and reflected together under the guidance of Fr. Bonga, who spoke of the charism St. Eugene de Mazenod received, a charism that has been given to the whole Church since his canonization in 1995. That spirit moved in and among us as we listened, shared, walked and talked with one another. It seemed remarkable that we formed community in such a short time together. We recognize that this is the work of the Holy Spirit animating the grace given to each of us as Oblate Associates.

Fr. Bonga is a wealth of information, understanding and

insight about the life of St. Eugene, the founding companions, and the social, political and ecclesial contexts of post-revolutionary France. We had no real idea of the rough dismantling of the Catholic Church in France as a result of the French Revolution. We would not recognize the church of his time and just how much courage, passion and prophetic grace St. Eugene and his community of Oblates displayed to carry out the purposes for which God called them together.

Fr. Bonga brought alive the suffering, losses and struggles

of Eugene in his broken family amidst the violence and uncertainties of life in France. "As we walked about, I encountered the Oblate charism in a real way. I saw the face of Jesus in the people on the street asking for change," wrote Mark Lich of Saskatoon. We walked to many sites in Aix to awaken the footsteps of Eugene before his conversion experience on Good Friday 1809. We walked to the family home, the homes of his mother, grandmother and married sister, the places where the young men partied, the churches he attended.

One of our most favourite places in the Foundation

Karen Sax at Barjol cross
erected in 1818



House was the room in which Eugene and his first companions lived, prayed and worked. Here in the Foundation Room we too prayed, sang, celebrated liturgy and found the spirit of the founder present in the holy relics housed there.

The scope of Eugene's mission was amazing. We took buses to Marseilles (and its crush of humanity in the Metro!), plus eight small communities surrounding Aix.

The countryside of Provence and nearby districts is rugged with mountains, valleys and water courses. It is amazing that these young men travelled in mission teams by foot, cart and donkey to bring the Good News to these and even more remote little communities. We prayed in many of the churches and chapels the Oblates occupied during a mission. We were also quite taken by the intensity of the missions. Most of us have experienced a five-to-seven-day mission, but the Oblate mission was usually six full weeks.

People not only came for teaching, preaching, liturgy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also had personal home visits to really bring out the suffering, losses, resentments and social strife within a community.

Eugene also initiated dialogues between families that were at odds with one another over choices made during the Revolution. Land, homes and goods were taken. Many were driven out of their homes. Some



University students mingle with the Canadians



Fr. Paolo Archiati, OMI

lost family members to violence. Eugene instituted mediation, restitution plans and acts of public repentance and forgiveness to bring about healing in the communities.

At the end of each mission a large cross, usually of wrought iron, was erected and blessed at the entrance of each village as a witness to the salvation of Christ which the villagers experienced from these intense missions. Eugene even sent Oblates a year later to these communities to look for the follow through on the commitments the community members made during the mission. Fr. Bonga informed us that this was not only a life-changing process for an individual, but a complete rebuilding of families and communities that brought hope, health and civility back to France again.

One of our favourite experiences was supper with about a dozen students. The Oblate community has always reached out to youth. In the present circumstances, students attending Aix-Marseille Université have lodgings and study areas here in the building. Once a month there is an open invitation to the students to join the community for supper and a visit.

They joined us for 'preprandials' in the arched hallway overlooking the joint courtyard, followed by supper, more sharing and laughter at our tables in the communal

David and Karen Sax



dining room. Some had basic English, others communicated in English phrases and gestures, interspersed with Canadians using various degrees of French.

One student expressed her interest in our pilgrimage and felt that France is experiencing a renewal of faith among young adults. She explained that young people struggle with a loss of a moral compass and solid values to base one's life. She asked whether youth in Canada were also experiencing this type of renewal. We explained that we were unsure of such a movement but had hope that the Holy Spirit will bring us such a renewal.

So how are we called to be Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate this year as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Approbation of our Constitutions and Rules? We were gently reminded by Fr. Bonga it is God who does the initiating, God who calls us each personally to accept and know his love for each of us. God does work through us, who are called in humility to serve the poor in varied faces, of making people first human, then saints, fully human and alive in the Risen Christ.

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*





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



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY GERRY CONLAN, OMI

JAN. 24

NAIROBI – I drafted a letter which Kiirua farm manager Euticus and his wife signed stating that the Mission is not liable for any medical costs or compensation if there is an accident or death in his family. That was a task I had been meaning to do for two years.

Fr. Andrew Stendzina, OMI, our new provincial, arrived in Kenya and we spent a few days holding consultations with Oblates as Fr. Fidel's term as superior ends later in the year.

We held consultations about the upgrading work required in Méru Postulancy and Kisaju Postulancy and also started discussing sale agreements with the lawyers for transferring Kisaju Postulancy to the Notre Dame de Sion Sisters.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

JAN. 31

We were very happy to hear that Br. Sebastian renewed his vows in the Philippines and look forward to his return in May. Sadly, we bid farewell to our Australian friend Paul Vorrasi who was with us for a month resuscitating our laptops and establishing the network controller system for the expanded building, and helping us purchase the right network equipment.

During the week I assisted Fr. Daquin with some pictures for a special article on environmental issues for the Italian Oblate magazine *Missio*. One thing I noted was that although we started the beehives project at Kiirua Farm to generate a little income to help cover wages, it is now obvious that it is a positive environmental issue as bees are vital for the health



Blessing of the beehives at Kiirua farm

of agriculture. Euticus and a local Kiirua expert on beehives installed four new hives and did some maintenance on the old ones.

Kisaju Parish held a single mass with Bishop John Oballa and viewed information about the preliminary plans for their new church. The bishop and various parishioners contributed ideas for its construction.

Parish meeting in Kisaju to review preliminary church designs



FEB. 7

We hosted 11 Canadian guests for two days before they left for Maasai Mara and other camps for eight days. Br. Emmanuel was a great help in welcoming the guests late in the evening while I was asleep.

FEB. 14

The week had a good variety, including a youth gathering and meetings for the two big projects on our plate now (Karen, just finishing, and Kisaju, just starting). Our Canadians returned and we enjoyed some small social time each evening.

About 15 members of the Nairobi Oblate Youth Group met for a bit of social time. They arranged takeaway food and came home to eat in comfort and dignity. We had an interesting discussion about the latest teacher training at Kenyatta University where they no longer train new teachers to encourage the students not to have sex, but to protect themselves.

Nairobi Oblate youth group





Blessing at Alfajiri farm

One of the women in the group asked if the Church will change its teaching, so we had a long chat about why the Church teaches what it does, as a way to help young people avoid challenges for which they are not ready, and build up self-discipline and self-control, which are essential if people want to be successful. Of course, respect for children and the partner call us to wait. It was a hard sell!

The women in the group were not impressed with the fact Méru men don't cook, and others say even if the wife is sick, the men expect the wife to cook and clean up! One said she will never marry a Méru man.

Fr. Charles at Méru has been doing a lot of good management work at Kiirua Farm regarding the cutting of trees for a power line, and the subsequent timber processing. He and



Solar structure for water tanks at Karen residence

Euticus stored the cut timber in an abandoned storehouse on the property. Some will be used in Méru and some at Kiirua farm. Hopefully we can sell most of it and subsidize the farm expenses.

FEB. 21

The highlight of the week was our nice celebration of the 200th Anniversary of our Congregation's official recognition by the Church on Feb. 17, 1826. Kisaju Parish and Postulancy communities came over to join us in Karen. The pre-novices were well-prepared, the music was excellent and the meal was wonderful.

We were saddened to hear of major protests in Kitengela (between Kisaju and Nairobi). After the former opposition leader left the rally, people started protesting and two people died, including a teenager. Further protests continued during the week.

We had a bit of drama at Kiirua farm this week. Euticus noticed five chickens went missing while he was at mass. They checked the security camera footage and saw a woman prowling around. Upon consulting the neighbours, they pointed out who she was and the fact that she had been terrorising several of them as well. After consulting Fr. Charles, she was arrested, but Euticus had to use his bike and pay the police to “do their thing.” She eventually agreed to pay Euticus two sheep and was released from jail.

Police arrest woman, with her child, for stealing chickens from Kiirua farm



FEB. 28

Fr. Cosmas left for South Africa to attend a meeting of Oblates interested in higher education. Meanwhile, we heard that Fr. Constant is giving a good annual retreat to the Oblates



Borehole drilling

in Madagascar, and Fr. Constantino Mahana, visiting OMI, continued helping out in Larmudiac parish.

A water borehole survey was completed at Kiirua farm. It looks promising, and the proposed drill location is close to the recently improved road along our boundary. Thank God.

This week heavy rains have started a month early, all over the country. Some local flooding and damage occurred to crops at Kiirua. We thank God the rains have come and, in Karen, I'm grateful they mainly happen overnight, so we still get enough sun for power.

MARCH 7

The rain has been relentless in Nairobi and parts of Kenya. There is widespread flooding in parts of Nairobi and people may have drowned. Many vehicles were washed away, turned over or otherwise damaged. It rained heavily every night for the whole week. Flood mitigation trenches helped to reduce damage at Kiirua farm, and the small forest did its job well.

MARCH 14

As usual the mission is running at high speed, with more rain this week as three of our brothers began their pre-ordination retreat in Nakuru preparing for the March 19 ordination at Larmudiac parish.

MARCH 21

What a joy-filled but busy week we had welcoming a new priest and two new deacons. There was a happy mission gathering from Sunday to Wednesday before the Thursday ordination. The bishop's homily was challenging to the new clerics: to serve the people and not to serve themselves.

Oblates gather before ordination mass



MARCH 28

Our new deacons Benjamin and Elias arrived back in their parishes after the excitement of their ordination, and our new Fr. Moses Khisa has been shepherding some friends from USA who made the big trip to come for his ordination. I like the international connections and networking he is developing.

Pilgrimage Rosary

Pray with the Pilgrimage Rosary to spiritually visit and reflect on five international Marian Shrines. This beautiful rosary combines fine quality materials with a special design. A sturdy chain joins sparkling aurora-borealis beads with a silver-plated crucifix, decade markers and an Our Lady of the Snows centerpiece. Each decade marker is a medal depicting a famous Marian Shrine: Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. To order a complimentary rosary, please indicate on gift form. Quantities are limited.



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A photograph of two stoles hanging on a wall. The one on the left is white with gold and blue stripes and a gold cross. The one on the right is green with gold and blue stripes and a gold cross. The text is overlaid on the white stole.

Remembering

We remember the following Oblates who died in 2025:

January 16	Jean-Paul Isabelle (92)
February 1	Denis Bourbonnais (96)
April 8	James (Jim) Bleackley (77)
April 20	John Greene (89)
April 28	Terrance (Terry) McNamara (89)
August 1	Vaughan Quinn (91)
August 30	Christie Joachim-Pillai (94)
November 15	Bernard Pinet (92)



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*A publication of the
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