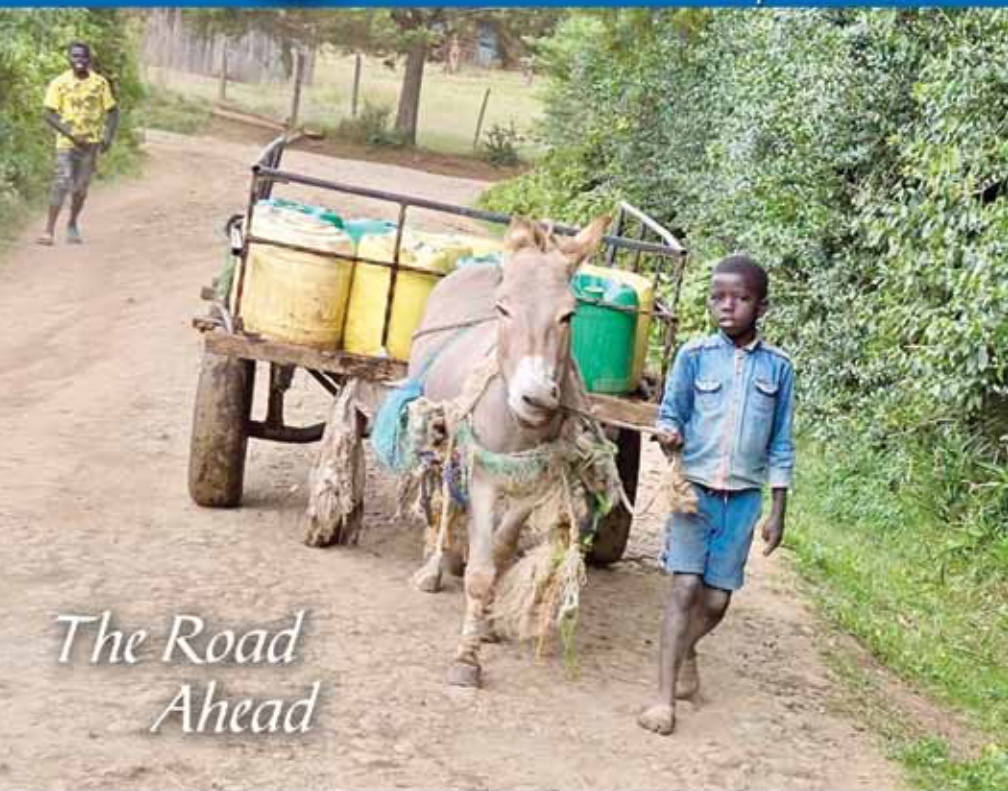


Oblate Spirit

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI



September 2026



*The Road
Ahead*

The long and winding road



Throughout our lives we gather memories that profoundly stay with us, some more than others. For me (John), there was the Kennedy assassination in my 14th year; the first landing on the moon; the Canada-Russia hockey summit series when Paul Henderson provided the winning goal late in the third period of a game in Moscow; the birth of each of our children, and the death of loved ones whose memories we choose to honour on All Souls' Day.

Then there are other memories that seem so unattached, yet are relevant. In 2005, we travelled to Oxford, England, where our daughter was studying. We were encouraged to visit a young Oblate priest in Birmingham where he was part of a new community exploring Oblate mission in a secular, interfaith context. He showed us around the city, explaining the district politics and relevance of immigrant communities as we toured.

Two incidents particularly stood out during that one-day visit. First, he probably saved my life as I was about to step onto a roadway into oncoming traffic because I looked to my left, not the right. They drive on the wrong side of the road in England. Funny how that memory stands out.

The second came when he took us into St Anne's church to the upper level, where he opened a portal to view the church below. It was here that he told us J.R.R. Tolkien often visited as a member of the church. Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, a masterpiece which we both had read several years earlier. He told us Tolkien was buried in Oxford, and thus began our curious quest for his grave, which we discovered. Funny how that memory stands out!



Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, planting trees in Kenya

That began a years-long relationship with Saskatoon-born Fr. Ken Thorson, who was so gracious to us in Birmingham. It came as no surprise when he moved into leadership and eventually into the demanding role of provincial superior of OMI Canada during a time when truth and reconciliation was at the forefront.

Sadly for the Oblates, he was on Rome's radar, and was recently chosen by Pope Leo to be the bishop of the Prince Albert Diocese. We are confident he will handle the position with the same dignity and aplomb with which he has lived his life.

His has been a life well lived, with an Oblate community well-served and with the satisfaction of a job well done. Amazingly, there is so much more yet to come.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators

Where to from here?

BY LUCIE LEDUC

ST. ALBERT, AB – Retreat ministry, like all ministry, changes as we read the signs of the times. In the way of and on the way with Christ Jesus, listening for the Holy Spirit's leanings with community, we discern together, "where to from here?"

It's the start of July on Mission Hill, St. Albert, at The Star of the North Retreat Centre. Clint Porritt, former program coordinator for The Star, who's moved on to facility management nearer to his home in Edmonton, began planting the Star garden with volunteers in May and through June. He has agreed to lead the Star garden volunteers onward and be our master teacher on all things "regenerative gardening".

It's been unseasonably rainy throughout June, and the weather is strange even for July. We watch climate change happening before our eyes and we wait, trusting in a sound

scientific basis for our efforts with regenerative gardening and our faith as we work the Good News into daily life for the poor earth and for the poor of the Earth.

This is a kind of gardening that science internationally today says is one of the most effective ways of capturing carbon to bring healing to earth and soil systems in response to the cry of the Earth,





Clint Porritt working in the garden

and for growing and providing healthy food security for the cry of the poor.

The Star, guided by the Oblate vision in the last chapter document, and their partnership through use of their lands – works and plants just over half an acre, with eight plots and a long berm at the end of the property to catch and hold water in the area for drier seasons.

This year we've added a mulch corral that holds all the mulch we need to keep the soil covered, and a seven-stage compost system. The plan is to make our own compost and to not have to buy any annually.

Mostly the garden is flourishing in this fifth year of



Volunteers help a garden thrive

planting, though tomatoes do not love the overwatering rain we've been having. Otherwise, everything is green and lush and mostly growing in abundance.

For five years, a dedicated group of volunteers – some refugees or immigrants from the Ukraine, are finding refuge in a new way of gardening. They come with knowledge of agriculture and gardening. They work together joyfully, with some hearts still aching and connected to families back at home who are living out the war in hope. Or single parents, the elderly and others seeking belonging to something that makes sense, gives meaning and allows each of them and us a part in giving light in the darkness of our times.

At any given time 30 to 40 volunteers work and learn new ways together to grow an abundance of food that serves the

local St. Albert food bank annually with up to 1,200 kg of fresh produce for a growing population of economically deprived people. The volunteers, staff of The Star, Star kitchen and Foyer Lacombe are also welcome to the produce that grows in the garden.

About five years ago, after years of planting seeds in the hearts of seekers, providing annual programming on contemplative practices, and other spiritual practices commonly known to places of retreat and renewal, we saw a way to put contemplation and action into practice together.

The question that stirred my mind and heart when pondering the missionary thrust of the Oblates, of Pope Francis and now Pope Leo for our times, was how can a retreat centre model both contemplation and action for the abandoned and marginalized? In what way can we evangelize our times through actions and the Word together?

Since the beginning of the Star garden, we live into the

Star of the North chapel





Gathering for a blessing

struggles and crosses, sing “*Laudato Si*,” “Praise be to you,” offer the failures and celebrate the gifts that come as we continue providing a sacred place of prayer and mission. We open – sometimes even pry open – from our inner poverty, a welcoming, hospitable space for others to walk with us so that we all might lead, learn and grow together. We seek to do as God requires, “to act justly, love mercifully and walk humbly with our God.” Micah 6:8

The paths and daily practices of contemplative prayer are what lead us to have faith that we can put our hands to the earth and feed each other with God’s merciful heart, for ourselves, and for all who care to join us.

The Star continues to commit to providing retreats that nourish minds and hearts in prayer and contemplation in relationship with God. We water souls and spirits so they might grow as vessels of light, peace, food, nourishment and blessing, to walk with others in their spheres of influence and to love back to health the earth from which we’ve all come.

Partnerships are another way we spread and receive the seed of God's Word among us. In May this year, we partnered with MAMI to raise funds for The Star of the North and the planned retreat centre for Kisaju, Kenya. Starting in January the Starlight Dinner Fundraiser committee met regularly for planning to unfold. In the end, on de Mazenod's feast day May 21, 200 people gathered for an exceptional evening of connection, good food, and fun. Our keynote speaker, Fr. Ken Forster, OMI, shared the stories of the early Oblates in Western Canada. He told the stories of their sacrifices and hard-won efforts to evangelize in the languages of Indigenous Peoples and immigrant groups as well. The fruits of their works are still seen today in the many dioceses across Canada founded and shaped by their missionary charism for and with the most abandoned and poor.

Reaching out together to MAMI associates and Star community from as far away as Vancouver Island, and throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan, we celebrated and gave thanks in this 200th Anniversary for the Oblate constitution and rules that has guided all Oblate ministries throughout the world. MAMI and The Star, thanks to the generosity of so many, raised a total of \$90,000 split equally between them for Oblate retreat ministry.

Meanwhile, The Star board together with Star staff is discerning a new vision for the future through strategic planning retreats and meetings. We listen for the One who says to us all through the prophet Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, to give you a future full of hope." And we know what it means "to prosper." We participate in the Mystery of Christ; and we become the seed that's planted in the ground and dies to give life.

(Lucie Leduc is the executive director of The Star of the North Retreat Centre.)

Fundraising Gala

EDMONTON – As part of the ongoing celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of the Oblates, AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI partnered with the Star of the North Retreat Centre to host a gala event in Edmonton.

Approximately \$90,000 was raised through the event to support both the ongoing ministry of the Star of the North Retreat Centre in St. Albert, AB, and the construction of a new Oblate retreat house in Kenya. Together, these centres reflect the theme, “Living Mission Through Community.”

Nearly 200 guests attended the event, which was marked by fellowship, conversation, and celebration.

“Our mission in Kenya is a sign of hope in bringing Good News to the poor,” said keynote speaker Fr. Ken Forster, OMI, who has an intimate understanding of the Kenya mission that he once led.

“Today, that mission is growing toward something new: the Kisaju Retreat Center (Whispering Oasis), a multipurpose establishment (that will be) a place of prayer, healing, and renewal for church leaders and communities. This is the next chapter of the Oblate story, and tonight we are inviting you to be part of it - through partnership, solidarity and hope.

Star of the North gala



“Tonight, I thank you. By your presence, you are neighbours to those in need of our outreach in the beautiful ministry of the Star of the North here in St. Albert, and the new development of the Kisaju Retreat Centre in Kenya. We become neighbours who build relationships with those anonymous persons we have never met.

“We can become a Samaritan Church reaching out to the marginalized.”

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/>

Kisaju OMI Centre: *“Whispering Oasis”*

KISAJU, Kenya – “Whispering Oasis” is the unofficial name given to a developing multi-purpose spiritual and community centre in Kisaju, Kenya. The centre is envisioned as a place dedicated to serving youth, women, and families through community programming, spiritual support, and leadership development.

The vision for the project includes a welcoming and dignified space for youth through sports activities and social gatherings, and youth development initiatives and skills training opportunities.

There will be a chapel and meditation garden offering space for prayer, silence, and reflection, and facilities for weddings, funerals, and family gatherings.

Accommodation and meeting facilities will provide a space for retreats for students and community groups, will offer support groups and wellness programs, leadership development and team-building activities, and spaces for conferences, seminars, and graduation events.

Significant progress has already been made on the

Model for the future Whispering Oasis



project. The four-acre property, generously donated by Mama Joyce Katela, has been secured with a stone perimeter wall and gated entrance. A guard house has been completed, with a resident guard and guard dogs on site. In addition, a solar-powered borehole has been installed to provide sustainable access to water.

Fr. Gerry Conlan, OMI, who has served in the Kenya Mission for the past 16 years, continues to provide leadership and technical expertise for the development. Prior to joining the Oblates, Fr. Gerry worked as a mining engineer for 15 years and has since overseen numerous community development projects in Kenya, including the Kisaju OMI Centre.

To date, 16 donors have contributed significant gifts of more than \$1 million in total toward the initiative, with additional funding now being generated through the recent Starlight Gala in Edmonton.

The project continues to move forward as a place intended to foster faith, learning, empowerment, community, and hope for future generations.



Ken Thorson: A new Oblate bishop



Bishop Ken Thorson,
OMI

It was announced by the Vatican on May 28 that Pope Leo XIV has appointed Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, as the next bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert, SK.

He will succeed former bishop Most. Rev. Stephen Hero, who was named archbishop of Edmonton in November 2025.

"It would be an understatement to say I was surprised to receive the phone call from the Apostolic Nuncio informing me of my appointment as bishop. I asked the Nuncio for a few days to pray and discern. These were long yet grace-filled days and in the end, despite my limitations, I found myself at peace and able to say yes, with hope in God's call and abiding presence.

"I remain humbled by it, and I sincerely thank Pope Leo for offering me this opportunity to serve the people of Prince Albert," he wrote.

A member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Bishop-elect Ken has served the church and the congregation with dedication and generosity for many years. Most recently, he completed two terms as provincial superior of OMI Lacombe Canada, providing leadership during a significant period in the life of the province and congregation.

"That I will not be directly involved in the future life and ministry of the province is, and will be, a sadness for me," he wrote. "Even so, I intend to remain closely connected with the Oblate community. I want to thank you, my brothers and sisters in the Oblate community – your support and friendship have formed me for the various ministries I have been assigned over the years, and for this latest one. I ask for your ongoing prayers as I prepare for this new ministry, and I assure you will be in mine."



Archbishop Susai Jesu, OMI, with Pope Leo XIV

Called to shepherd

Archbishop Susai Jesu, OMI, received the Pallium conferred on him by Pope Leo XIV during the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul at St. Peter's Basilica.

Appointed in 2025, Archbishop Jesu shepherds one of the largest and most remote dioceses in Canada. The Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas extends across northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nunavut, an area of more than 450,000 square miles where Oblates have accompanied Indigenous communities for generations. About 90 per cent of the faithful belong to the Indigenous groups of First Nations.

Susai was one of 35 metropolitan archbishops in Rome to receive the special sign of his office – the *pallium* – from



Pope Leo XIV
presents the
Pallium

Pope Leo, an experience he described as a “deeply spiritual moment.”

It was “a profound sign of communion between the local Church and the universal Church,” he said, as well as “a reminder of the bishop’s vocation to carry the Good Shepherd’s mission of guiding, protecting, and serving the flock entrusted to his care.”

The Pallium, woven from the wool of lambs blessed on the Feast of Saint Agnes, is a visible sign of communion with the Successor of Peter. This ancient sign of pastoral responsibility reminds every metropolitan archbishop of his calling to shepherd the flock with humility, fidelity, and generous service.

Susai said his meeting with Pope Leo “was marked by remarkable simplicity, joy and genuine warmth. He received me with great attentiveness, and his concern for Indigenous peoples was evident.

“When I told him that approximately 90 per cent of the faithful in my archdiocese are Indigenous, he looked at me and simply said, ‘Take care of them.’

Susai was pastor of Sacred Heart of the First Peoples in Edmonton when Pope Francis visited Canada and Susai’s parish on a “penitential pilgrimage” focused on reconciliation.



Archbishop Susai Jesu, OMI

Oblate Associates answer the call

BY DAN FRIEDT

EDMONTON, AB. – It is a human desire to belong. It is even more human to belong and respond with actions and energy that makes a difference. This is the call of Oblate Associates. Oblate Associates are men and women who experience a *calling* to share in the spiritual life, mission, and charism of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). While they do not take formal religious vows, they live out their baptismal commitment by supporting Oblate ministries, particularly in serving the poor and marginalized.

Eugène de Mazenod, a French bishop and the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was beatified by Pope Paul VI on October 19, 1975, and later canonized in St. Peter's Basilica by Pope John Paul II. This process, long awaited by the thousands of men who joined him after 1826, could now make an impact on the rest of the world. Eugene not only belonged to professed Oblates, but as a saint he belongs to all of us now.

Through the experience of working together with Oblates in a pastoral setting and sharing in the mission, people who become attracted to the Oblate charism are drawn to live it as associates. Through this attraction grows a desire to deepen and better understand the charism of the OMI and the life and spirituality of St. Eugene de Mazenod. Living the charism and sharing in the mission becomes a way of life and a spiritual home for community life. It is an identity in the Church that expresses itself through an encounter with Christ, a personal call to mission with a special attention and closeness to the needs of the many faces of the poor and marginalized.

When the province of OMI Lacombe Canada was formed

in 2003 from six existing Canadian Oblate provinces, their coming together was seen as an opportunity to renew apostolic and community life. Oblate association was part of that renewal, with the Oblates wanting to provide for the



more active presence and life of associates within the community. The introduction to OMI Lacombe's statutes states: "We actively promote the participation of women and men who share the charism and mission of Saint Eugene de Mazenod."

Association in Canada is built on five major pillars. Following a time of formation, there is also a common ritualized commitment, symbolized in the reception of a small Oblate cross.

Sense of call

The Oblate Associate of OMI Lacombe Canada Province is an individual who recognizes a Spirit initiated call to the Oblate charism, lived intentionally in service to the marginalized and connection to Oblate community.

Formation

Associates are pilgrims journeying along the path of the charism. They desire to learn more about the life and charism of St. Eugene, and the mission and the spirituality of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, especially as lived in OMI Lacombe Canada. This will necessarily involve both initial and on-going formation.

Participation in the Oblate community

Building community is essential to the Oblate charism. Oblate Associates and Oblates find opportunities to share faith and offer mutual support in their day-to-day lives, through formal gatherings such as meetings with the Basic Oblate Communities (BOC), District retreats and assemblies, convocations and Oblate Associate meetings, and informally through day-to-day prayer and communications.

Participation in Oblate mission

Like the vowed Oblates, Associates feel called to service with an Oblate heart. They live the charism in some visible way that unites “head, heart, hands and feet, especially in service to the poor.” Their call to service is lived in their own milieu and as such, Associate ministries are diverse and rich. Wherever they go, they take the Oblate charism with them.

Fostering one’s spiritual life

At the heart of the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod is deep personal conversion, an encounter with the love of God. For St. Eugene, prayer in private or with a community was essential for fostering his relationship with God. Oblate Associates are called to prayer, recognizing the rich tradition in our Church for different methods of prayer, both individual and communal.



Canadian Associates celebrate Eucharist on the tomb of the Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, OMI, in Marseille, France

Benefits

The OMIs of the world are members of the St. Eugene de Mazenod family, living the charism of St. Eugene. As Oblate Associates, we too share in this charism making us all members of this family, called to serve the poor and marginalized. The joy of community, the love of caring brothers and sisters and the coming together in prayer and spirit makes a solid foundation for all who are seeking a family and spiritual support.

What it means to be an Oblate Associate:

Joanne and I made our formal commitments as Oblate Associates 11 years ago. That said, we were both 'associated' and influenced by Oblate spirituality our entire lives. I (Dan) was baptized by an Oblate and babysat by an Oblate. Oblates were my teachers in grade school and high school. I entered

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

the Oblates right out of high school, attending novitiate for one year before my first profession of annual vows. Although I did not continue to final profession, I have never really left the Oblates. They are my brothers. An Oblate witnessed the marriage vows between Joanne and me 47 years ago. An Oblate baptized our children, witnessed their marriage vows and baptized their



children. An Oblate buried our parents, and they continue to be closely connected to all of our family life.

The influence of Oblates in Joanne's life is significant as well. She was born in Kenora, ON, to parents who were closely connected with the French Oblate priests and sisters who ministered at Notre Dame Catholic Church (Fr. Gaston Lebleu, OMI), and also at the Indian Residential School. After moving to Winnipeg in 1964, the Bremault family often hosted dinners and gatherings with visiting Oblates (Fr. Antonio Lacelle, OMI), assisting with ministry throughout the years.

Moving to St. Albert, AB, in 1972, the Bremault family became very involved in the Oblate Parish of St. Albert and its many ministries. Living in this vibrant Catholic community, influenced greatly by Oblate spirituality and mission, was a blessing in Joanne's life. The Oblates were present at the

high school as well as in youth ministry through the music groups PITCH and SPICE, led by Fr. Ubald Duchesneau, OMI. Memories of those significant formative years are still treasured today. A missionary heart was nurtured in Joanne by so many Oblates who lived their faith in Jesus authentically through prayer and ministry to the poor and marginalized, close to the people.

After our retirement from wonderful careers in Catholic education, we are now dedicating more time for prayer and ministry with the Oblate family here in OMI Lacombe Canada. As co-provincial Oblate Associate animators, we strive to foster association by supporting local/district leadership and providing direction for on-going formation and developing materials useful for community life. Ministering among the aging Oblates and hearing their elder stories is a tremendous blessing.

Following our initial pilgrimage in March 2026 to the Oblate Mission Centre in Aix En Province, along with 10 others from OMI Lacombe Canada, we are filled with a renewed and deeper love for the charism of St. Eugene in the mission of the church. We look forward to being part of another pilgrimage to Aix.

Here are the reflections from others of what it means to them to be an Oblate Associate:

- *It means to belong to a wonderful worldwide community of persons (both religious and lay), following the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod. (Greg Saretsky)*
- *To be an Oblate Associate means belonging, sharing, caring, and growing in faith together through mutual love and support. (Debbie Doornbos)*
- *Being an Oblate Associate has been an experience of belonging to a faithful community of prayer and humble service. (Laurel Lutes)*

We are available to answer questions of anyone wishing to inquire into Oblate Association. Despite the diminishment of Oblates ministering in Canada, we remember we are part of a larger congregation of Oblates and Associates, living close to the people throughout the world. May God continue to work in the hearts of all people, calling them to follow the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod, bringing hope and love to the poor and marginalized.

*(Dan and Joanne Friedt, Provincial Oblate Associate Animators, OMI Lacombe Canada
780-964-2953 780-441-1044)*

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*



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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.



Global Oblate fundraisers meeting in Rome

Strengthening mission sustainability

ROME – The Global Oblate Fundraisers (GOF) met June 24-26 to reflect on their mission and establish priorities for the years ahead. Their ministry supports Oblate units facing financial challenges and helps fund projects that serve the poor. Much of this work remains behind the scenes, yet its impact reaches communities throughout the congregation.

The meeting began with a recognition that the world has changed. In many countries, resources are becoming scarcer, donor support is decreasing, and fundraising offices often have less to share. This reality calls for greater discernment so that available resources can be directed where they are most needed.

One of the central themes of the gathering is the growing understanding that funding is not only about responding to immediate needs. It is also about helping Oblate units become stronger, more sustainable, and better equipped for the future.

Among the topics under discussion were professional formation in finance, administration, and leadership, the importance of conducting feasibility studies before projects begin, and the need to connect larger funding requests to a unit's three-year strategic plan. Careful planning at the beginning of a project can help ensure its long-term success and sustainability.

The fundraisers also hope to give special attention to what they describe as the “less heard” units, those that may find it more difficult to seek assistance even when their needs are significant. Ensuring that these voices are included remains an important part of the ministry.

Participants will also reflect on how to communicate their work more effectively. Behind every project and every grant is a story of missionary service, and these stories deserve to be shared more widely.

As the meeting concluded, the Global Oblate Fundraisers strived to renew their common commitment to serving the congregation's mission among the poor by promoting transparency, responsible stewardship, and the long-term vitality of Oblate units around the world.

Check out our Facebook page:



Lacombe Canada MAMI



**Lacombe MAMI
Oblate Missions**

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





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



Kenya

NOTEBOOK

BY FR. GERRY CONLAN, OMI

APRIL 18

NAIROBI, Kenya – It was a great week after being away for finance related work in Rome, which has now concluded for me after seven years of involvement.

While in Rome, it was sad to hear that Simon, our previous carpenter, lost his 12-year-old son to leukemia. It has devastated the family finances these last few years and now the battle is over. I sent him a good donation on top of the help we've already given these last 12 months. May the family find peace.

The Iran war has caused serious cost increases for everyone. Unfortunately, Kenya is suffering economically and so many more people are struggling.



Gerry Conlan, OMI

APRIL 25

Good youth work continues in Méru and Nairobi, where the youth held a gathering called *Sisi kwa Sisi* (*us for us*) where they visit a struggling member of the group and bring practical gifts (cash, gas, food) and cook a lunch for all. The elders of the group shared some feedback about how to get ahead.

Nairobi youth group visit



We welcomed to Kenya the Sisters of the Earth, a community that follows the teachings of Fr. Thomas Berry, and would like to establish a mission in Kenya. They were connected to us by Fr. Peter Stoll, OMI, in Indonesia. We will spend more time together as the months unfold.



Greening the metal steps
at the Karen residence

MAY 3

Fr. Praveen and Br. Zachary collected Fr.

Andrew Stendzina, our provincial superior, from the airport. A friend at the airport whisked Fr. Andrew through formalities and customs, so they arrived home earlier than usual.

MAY 10

Fr. Andrew started his busy Kenya schedule at the opening of the Méru Postulancy, after which Fr. Greg Olszust wrote: *"Today we had a celebration of receiving to the postulancy five guys who are willing to take a chance with us: Peter, Patrick, Alfred, Felix, and Philip. May God grace their commitment and give them wisdom to know His ways."*

MAY 17

I travelled to Perth, Australia, after receiving a ticket from Mazenod College (our Oblate secondary college) for its 60th Anniversary. The main reason I accepted was to have a chance to visit my elderly parents. But it will be great to celebrate at the school. I received the ticket because I'm the only former student who joined the Oblates as a missionary priest or

brother. We pray many more will come. I also travelled to spend time with my mother (turned 89 in July), and my sister and her family.

In Nairobi, the Tatu City Catholic Community met with the Oblates and discussed the possibility of the Oblates establishing a parish there. It has an interesting mix of wealthy people and three slum areas with a population of about 6,000, of which about 1,500 are Catholic.



Fr. Gerry's mother
Colleen Conlan

MAY 30

Fr. Praveen witnessed and assisted the handover of Larmudiac parish from Fr. Faustin to Fr. Wekesa for his first appointment as parish priest. Fr. Cosmas will continue to assist.

We learned that Fr. Ken Thorson, OMI, our immediate past provincial, has been appointed a bishop in Canada. May God protect him. It will be difficult for us Oblates to have one less good man to “run” the mission, but his appointment will help the church wherever he is.

We have a new situation developing where Kenya has agreed to USA setting up a quarantine centre in Kenya for U.S. citizens infected with the Ebola virus. Many people are nervous and one person said, since they are praising the Kenya health system, why can't they do it in USA where they have an even better system?

JUNE 6

I think we are all still alive in the Mission. Lots of activities going on. To me it feels like the *Perfect Storm* movie with so many urgent matters converging on the same deadline. Still,



Karen pre-novitiate vocation candidates

we do what we can. Like many people around the world, the fuel prices are hurting very much in Kenya.

People are investing in some specific zones, including development of a new advanced science university at Konza City. Fortunately, Fr. Fidel had looked ahead and we purchased two acres of land overlooking the main entrance to Konza City. We hope it would be perfect for a big business or a luxury hotel.

JUNE 13

We held a five-day vocations workshop for 11 men (of the 22 invited). The workshop was a bit demanding for us Oblates as we interviewed them all at some length. Now we review and call back those we feel are suitable for a second workshop.

Our community expanded by two members this week: two young Siamese cats. They are not what I expected: fussy eaters and prefer yogurt to milk! Worse, they are not interested in rats, so I think they might have to go if they don't shape up!

A brief update from Kiirua farm manager Euticus: "We are harvesting beans,

Inspecting the bean crop



next week we will be harvesting peas, then maize will follow in August; last week we harvested about 35 kilograms of honey, which has broken honey production records. From little things, big things grow.”



A new heifer at Kiirua farm

I provided some input at a debriefing meeting with the vocation candidates. 1) try to improve English; 2) several can ride a motorbike but never mentioned it in the interview meetings; 3) collect all your important documents (school and birth certificates, awards, parent’s ID, marriage certificate, etc.) and then get them scanned and e-mailed to yourself and another family member for backup; 4) prepare a good C.V. including all your skills, volunteer work at the parish, work experience (paid and unpaid), other qualifications, etc.; 5) create a disciplined

prayer schedule for each day to help confirm if religious life is what they really feel called to.

Each of the candidates was interviewed separately by Br. Zachary, Br. Makori and me. We compared notes and shared impressions and feelings. Our review meeting was eventually interrupted by the arrival of Dr. Aloys, who shared that the church in Nigeria has big problems because of money. The abduction of priests is often motivated by the search



Survey work for boundary marking columns at Kiirua farm

for money because they know the priests have lots of it. They have four collections during each mass.

Back to the cats! I was called outside during our meeting to see one of the cats yowling about 12 metres up a large tree. We had to coax him down and then the other cat headed up but stopped after five metres before retreating. They are still a nuisance with regards to food, but a little hunger is proving a good teacher.

JUNE 20

We also started a big paint job at the pre-novitiate and we noted some major work is needed where the land is settling a little and concrete paths have dropped.

We held a zoom meeting with the next Canadian MAMI group to discuss and share information for their trip to Kenya in September.

New residents in the Karen Administration building



JUNE 27

We warmly welcomed two great men (Mac and Dan), Canadian volunteers in the waste-water management industry here to help the County of Kakamega, 8-9 hours from Nairobi. They were sent here by our good friend in Vancouver, Valerie Jenkinson, Chair of the Board, who is the wonder woman behind Operators without Borders. She recruits volunteer experts from many parts of mainly Canada to travel to developing nations and help train local people in waste-water management. Mac has been here before but his associate, Dan, is new. We know Valerie only sends out the best!

JULY 4

Of special interest, we attended the first mass held on the ground of the proposed new parish of Tatu City, northwest of Nairobi, about an hour drive from Karen. It was well organized and the surrounding parish priests are so happy for its development, and they are also happy to hear the Oblates might be coming to help lead the parish. Now that people have been mobilized, they wish to keep the momentum going to not lose

Choir at Tatu City blessing Mass



the spirit of the time and the pressing need for community support to pay for the land. They are blessed to have many well educated and can-do people in the Catholic community. One woman shared with me how they all pray day and night that our provincial leadership will say yes to the new parish.

Canadian priest Robert Laroche, OMI, arrived for his assignment to the Kenya mission. He joined me on his first full day for the trip to the Tatu City mass, wearing some clothes I provided because of his luggage delay.

I was asked to say a few words after mass, and shared how in Australia most ceremonies begin with a smoking ceremony where we acknowledge that the land we are on belonged to the Aboriginal people. I noted that Tatu City land was originally Maasai land.

Upon returning home, Fr. Robert found the energy to join Mac, Dan and others in our community to watch the Canada-



Model of the future Tatu City

Morocco World Cup game. We enjoyed the strong performance of Canada for most of the game and were disappointed when that clever No. 8 on the Moroccan team scored two amazing goals. I made a hasty retreat to leave the Canadians to share their disappointment.



Mathare slum volunteers are helping to feed the children

JULY 12

For the first time in Mathare, the youth helped feed children rather than adults. This happened because Anthony, one of the vocation candidates familiar with the Mathare slums, became involved in the feeding program. They prepared food for 120 kids, but fed about 200. I was very proud of them.

We enjoyed having Mac and Dan with us for the week. The two Canadians were assisting a waste-water plant near Karen and working on reports before returning to Canada.

We were able to compile all documents necessary for Fr. Robert to get a work permit.

JULY 19

Fr. Praveen was named the new Kenya mission superior, while those selected to mission council were Fr. Constant, Fr. Wekesa and Fr. Cosmas.



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