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## **The General House: still moving toward a decision**

The mandate of the 2004 General Chapter asking that “...*the Central Government and the General Finance Committee undertake a comprehensive study regarding the possible sale of the General House and the relocation of the personnel and services located there*” (Resolution C 2) has received serious attention for more than two years.

Over the past two and a half years, there has been much research, consultation, and study of the questions mandated by the Chapter.

At the Intercapitular Meeting in South Africa in October 2007, the participants heard an explanation of what were deemed “possible directions:”

1. Stay at the present location but try to lease part of the property to a lay group.
2. Stay at the present location and try to lease part of the property to another religious community.
3. Lease the entire property and relocate the Oblate communities.
4. Sell the entire property and relocate the Oblate communities.

During the October 2007 Plenary Session, the decision was made to “test the market” to see if any of the four directions listed above is feasible. Letters were sent to the conferences of major superiors of men and women congregations in Rome; the Union of Treasurers Generals (French and English sector; Spanish and Italian Sector); a number of property development companies; and to a real estate lawyer. The local group responding to interested parties was made up of Fathers Eugene KING, Paolo ARCHIATI, Rufus WHITLEY, and Clyde RAUSCH.

Between November 2007 and February 2008, there were many inquiries. Many groups, both religious and lay, visited the house and asked relevant questions. During the January-February 2008 Plenary Session, Fr. General and the Council visited several sites that could possibly serve as future locations for the communities presently living at the General House. Included were properties owned by other religious as well as lay-owned properties that could be developed.

As a next step in the process, Father General and the General Council, in its January-February 2008 Plenary Session, decided to move the process a further step. Without making a final decision to sell the General House on Via Aurelia at this time, they have, nevertheless, decided to study further and consider seriously some of the more substantial offers made by various groups interested in purchasing the property. They will also study more closely some concrete possibilities for subdividing and selling only a part of the property. While the future space requirements for the General House, International Scholasticate, and Studium have been considered in a general way, there is need for a more concrete and specific analysis of future space needs.

While some of the financial offers are of interest, it nevertheless needs to be determined that relocating or subdividing would not consume so much of the profits that there would not be the hoped for “endowment” left over to assure the financing of our Oblate mission in the future.

The generosity and hard work of our Oblate missionaries throughout the world have, in the past, been supported also by the missionary spirit and

generosity of the older Oblate provinces in Europe and North America. But with current demographic trends, those provinces will not be able to provide these human and financial resources in the very near future. At the same time, the costs of maintaining the present General House and providing resources for the Oblate mission continue to rise.

With that in mind, the 2004 General Chapter added to its mandate: *“That the Superior General in Council undertake the sale of the General House facility if the comprehensive study concludes that such an action would contribute to providing a more efficient and effective service to the Congregation, reducing the costs of the present complex, and providing an endowment to be used to fund the General Administration and thus reducing the financial burden on the Congregation.”* (Resolution C 3) (*underlining added for emphasis*)

In some ways, this mandate calls to mind a situation mentioned by St. Eugene de Mazenod when he

wrote to Father Tempier from Rome on January 22, 1826: *“I would wish you not to overlook a matter which preoccupies me constantly and that is that no one of our company has a penny and that the day when certain sources will dry up, it will be quite perplexing to know how to feed and clothe so many people; I know that we must count on divine Providence as Christian wisdom counsels us. That is why my purpose has always been to set aside a fund which could furnish the most pressing necessities of life, not of course with a thought of hoarding, but in order to supplement the endowments that all Congregations have in all countries of the world, for should it happen that one day we are reduced to mass stipends, there will not be enough to keep our communities going. If we were to use this money for building, that would reduce us to zero. Think well on this, for those who give themselves to God in our company have a right to have their needs looked after. If they have brought nothing with them, that is not their fault; it was with our knowledge and consent.”*

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## Africa-Madagascar

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### CAMEROON

#### Cows, hens and pigs: a growing enterprise

Father François CARPENTIER has published the very first edition of a little newsletter called *AMI\*M\*O\*CAM*. The new publication (*Ami des Missionnaires Oblats au Cameroun* – Friends of the Missionary Oblates in Cameroon) informs friends of the Oblates of Cameroon about the province’s efforts to become financially self-sufficient. The province includes not only Cameroon but also neighboring Chad and a mission in Nigeria. The new provincial is Fr. Cornelius NGOKA from Nigeria.

With 73 young men in various levels of formation for the province and 77 missionaries hard at work, it demands much creative energy to work for the desired self-sufficiency and, at the same time, be attentive to the needs of the poor.

The strategy for doing this includes helping some of the people learn to help themselves. In Maroua, a developing city of 250,000 inhabitants, there is a

carpentry workshop where young men with little or no education can learn a trade in view of someday having their own workshop. Profits from the sale of products from the workshop help finance formation programs. At the end of 2007, they began to construct a new and larger workshop.

Farming has also begun to give some good results, especially in the production of milk, eggs, and pork.

Many Africans depend on expensive powdered milk imported from Europe. The Oblates began to produce milk when they bought two “European cows” born in Cameroon: Charlotte (Dutch Holstein) has produced Marguerite. Caroline (Jersey) gave birth to Camille. The daily 20 liters of milk are turned into yogurt, milk curd, and cheeses.

The Oblates bought two farms for laying hens near Maroua in 2004. They ran into major difficulties in 2006 with the wave of bird flu. The balance for 2007-08 looks quite positive. Some 1500 hens lay about 375,000 eggs per year. Young women are able to

buy the eggs and resell them to earn something for their own families. Construction is being planned now for two hog farms, one at Ngaoundéré and the other at Maroua.

A young woman from Maroua gives this testimony of how the Oblates' egg industry has helped her: "My father is dead. I told of my problem to Brother Pierre and he helped me. Thanks to him, I manage to pay my rent, buy food and take care of my brothers and sisters. I began selling eggs in May. Brother sells me a carton of 360 eggs for 20,400 cfa (31 •). In six months, I have earned a profit of 144,000 cfa (220 •).

## **KENYA**

### **Update on a dangerous situation**

First of all to assure you that we are all safe. Since we live in the lands of the Kikuyu and the Meru, the violence has not affected us directly. Someone said in a Peace and Justice conference I attended on Saturday: "We are all affected and infected by these events." The participants in this conference were mainly Religious women and some among them were grieving the deaths and sufferings of family members.

Of course, the social life is changed for everyone. Now Kikuyus are seeking revenge and last night, we gave shelter to our grounds keepers and security guards who feared to go home because they are Luos or Luhyas in Kikuyu country. The assassination of a Member of Parliament this morning was only eight kilometers away and I had to circumvent the area this morning to go downtown.

Some weeks ago, I started to open my gate and lend an ear to people coming to my gate. In sympathy for their desperate causes, I gave assistance. Just as people had warned me, the numbers of pleaders multiplied fifty-fold. I have to stop and turn people away because the numbers would continue to increase exponentially. I learned that I have to be better prepared before I open to such causes. What I learned was worth the price. (*Submitted by Alfred GROLEAU in [www.omilacombe.ca](http://www.omilacombe.ca), 31 January 2008*)

## **ZAMBIA**

### **Oblates build dormitory for schoolgirls**

"I want to go to school. I want to be a doctor, a teacher, an artist or a musician. I could be anything!"

These are words that come from the lips of many youths in the missions.

Even though some children might not see the need to wake up every morning to go to school, they realize that school is very important when they see other families move out of poverty because the families have invested in education.

For most families, however, this is only a dream, since they are not able to afford to take their children to school. In Lukulu district, the boys and girls whose parents can afford school fees face many difficulties since they have to look for accommodation in nearby compounds.

The problem is worse for the girl child. Besides the hardships of having to cook their own meals, and having their food stolen while they are in class, the girls are usually sexually abused and a good number of them drop out of school as a result.

One of the girls, Namonda Akufuna, age 17, says: "Most of my friends grow tired of moving back and forth to fetch food. They get exhausted walking long distances over weekends and the fact that they have to be in class the following morning. As a result, they get themselves men who are able to offer them an easier way out."

The girls start living in houses with electricity and they do not have to go back to their parents for more food when it runs out. Unfortunately, when they become pregnant, they are sent back to their homes until they give birth and have weaned their children. This is a big set-back for the girls because they lose about two academic years. Only a few manage to come back to school.

Sancta Maria Lukulu mission's parish priest, Fr. Kennedy SAMPA, said that the rate of girls falling pregnant before they finish school is very high. He said that of the twenty girls that were sponsored by the Oblates in January this year, four of them had left school by March 2007 owing to pregnancy. He said it was because of this that the Oblates decided to begin the dormitory project for the three secondary schools in Lukulu. The Oblate project will provide the only boarding house for all the secondary schools in the district.

Father Sampa said that it has taken the community five years to raise the K120 million that has so far been used to build the hostel. He said that even though the Oblates and the local community have managed to do 80 percent of the work, it has been a strain on the local people as they do not have the capacity to raise that sort of money in a short period of time.

The dormitory will accommodate about 48 of the over 400 girl students in its initial stages of operation. Thereafter, bunk beds will be introduced in order to accommodate more girls.

In the next five years and when funds are available, the Oblate community in Lukulu plans to build another girls' dormitory. (*OMI Zambia*, December 2007)

## **CAMEROON**

### **Dedication of a shrine**

*And Holy Mary, Mother of God in Figuil...* From now on, that is how one will need to close a listing of Marian shrines served by our religious family. On January 1, 2008, there took place the consecration of a Marian shrine, dedicated to Holy Mary, Mother of God and entrusted to our congregation, in Figuil, Cameroon.

In 1946, when our Congregation received from the Holy See the mandate to evangelize the peoples of Northern Cameroon and Chad, the area was a barren landscape. Father Yves PLUMEY, first superior of the delegation, and his French companions took on the difficult task of laying the foundations of what the region has become in our own day.

Then, in 1969, the first team of Polish Oblates arrived. Very quickly, Figuil appeared to be the ideal place to locate the new delegation, since it was midway between Garoua and Maroua and at a crossroads with the route to Chad, and especially because of the presence of a lime factory and a modern cement plant which made it an important city.

It is quite difficult and maybe even impossible to give a precise date to the original idea of a Marian shrine in Figuil. Nevertheless, according to some sources, at the very beginning of the mission, the Fathers had nothing better to do in the evening than to sit around and share the joys and the sorrows of the mission

and try to foresee the future. It was during one of these sessions that they got the idea of organizing a Marian pilgrimage in Figuil, similar to those at Czestochowa in Poland, especially since the mission in Figuil had that name at the beginning. Since the people found it difficult to pronounce that word, Father Josef LESZCZYNSKI decided to change it, without any clear idea of what name to use. He thought about it for a long time, until the day when Bishop Yves Plumey came to Figuil on January 1, 1975, for the blessing of the first church. Since this day had been chosen by the Universal Church for the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, that name was given to the mission. Furthermore, because a decree of Pope Paul VI had made January 1 a World Day of Prayer for Peace, the Fathers thought it would be a good idea to begin the new year, not in drinking, but rather in prayer and recollection. For that January 1, 1975, they invited the Christians to come together on the eve, December 31, 1975, for a prayer vigil.

In view of the success of that first evening and the huge crowd that came to sing the Lord's praises, thank Him for the year that was ending and put the new year in His hands, the Fathers decided to repeat the experience to the point that it became a tradition. But, according to Father Charles EKO, "none of them imagined that in reality, the pilgrimage would surpass all expectations; year after year, the pilgrimage brought such crowds that it was necessary to make other arrangements." Therefore, in 1983, Father Joseph Leszczynski decided to have Mass outside of the church in the open air, under a big tree that can still be seen today. Then, in 1986, they built a platform. In 1987, under the leadership of Father Wladyslaw KOZIOL, the sanctuary was surrounded by trees. The construction of the big new building began on March 14 2001, when Archbishop Antoine Ntalou of Garoua laid the cornerstone. On January 1, 2008, there was the consecration ceremony presided by Archbishop Ntalou, in the presence of Bishop Philippe Stevens of the diocese of Maroua-Mokoa in the extreme northern part of Cameroon. Also present were Fathers Cornelius NGOKA (Provincial of Cameroon) and Alfons KUPKA (representing the Province of Poland), as well as about 15,000 faithful from far and wide. (Bertrand AZIZ, *Scolastique omi*)

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## Latin America

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### **BRAZIL CENTRAL**

#### **Paranaiguara's newest church**

Last December 8, a huge assembly gathered in Paranaiguara for the blessing and opening of the community's new parish church — the third since Oblates from the Anglo-Irish Province came here 45 years ago to begin the "Brazil Mission" in this very place.

The first church here was opened in 1964, two years after we arrived in Mateira, the original name of the town. The old town of Mateira was engulfed by the rising waters of the giant hydroelectric dam at São Simão in the 1970s.

A few years ago, the first Oblate to arrive in Mateira, the late Fr Pete MORIARTY, spoke of his impressions: "When I saw this small remote town. I wondered why our provincial had opted for a mission here rather than in one of Brazil's huge and densely populated cities. As it turned out, it was a great grace for us to start with those simple and wonderful people. They couldn't do enough to help us. Many were illiterate; all were poor and hard working. A few had farms; the majority had their own little ways of making a living. They would get an area of land from a large rancher, clear it, cultivate it as their own for three years and then put it in grass to fatten the rancher's cattle, and move on to another plot of land".

Before the flooding of the valley, the population of Mateira was transferred to the new town of Paranaiguara where a new parish church was built. This was a low, beautifully compact glass-walled building. The stifling heat was a problem from the beginning, however. Even with the wings of all God's angels flapping furiously, it was extremely uncomfortable.

Planning for a replacement church began when another member of the founding group, Fr Jeremiah DONOVAN, was reappointed to Paranaiguara after years of missionary work in the City of Uberlandia.

Attentive to the community's plea for a new church, he set the process in motion. Plans were drawn up and fund-raising was organized. Now, more than two years later, the church is built, consecrated and filled to the rafters.

Like Mary Immaculate Church, Inchicore, it features twin spires, but there, comparisons end. The roof tiles, each 13 meters long, are designed to disperse heat. Murals in the sanctuary depict the Last Supper, the Baptism in the Jordan and other themes from Jesus' life, adding marvellous colour to the interior. Fr Jeremiah's attention to even the minutest details is evident throughout.

Thanks to the town's Mayor and local government, the area around the church is now landscaped to form a most attractive setting. This beautiful place of worship is a great tribute to the united and purposeful spirit of the people of Paranaiguara. Their new church is dedicated to Mary's Immaculate Conception. We pray that it will always be a powerful sign of God's Kingdom present among us. (Colm O'FLANAGAN in *Oblate Missionary Record*, Autumn 2007)

### **COLOMBIA**

#### **A swamp becomes a home**

In 2000, Paul HUGHES, an Oblate priest from the United States, arrived to Cartagena, a city on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. Currently home to more than one and a half million people, its population has trebled in the past 20 years as people from surrounding areas seek the relative safety it provides from the violence of the country's cocaine trade.

Many of the new residents are from farming backgrounds. They have fled the land to escape the demands of FARC guerrillas, who force them to grow cocaine — or else.

Paul began work in Pozon, one of the rapidly expanding new districts that these migrants come to live in. The word 'pozon' means literally 'swamp' and the area still floods for a number of months every year.

He arrived to take over a parish of 80,000 people, squeezed into an area of just three square miles. It contained virtually no churches or schools and few community amenities. His predecessor had been shot and killed, one of the daily victims of the gun culture in the region.

"The area was largely without hope and this is

precisely the type of vacuum in which gang culture begins to take control. One of the first tasks was to build a spirit of community among the people," he says.

With a religious community of just one priest and three nuns serving a population that has now risen to 120,000, the task of responding to the needs of the community is achieved in a manner unimaginable to many people in the developed world.

"Firstly the government was embarrassed into providing at first one and later a number of schools in the area. The desire of young people here to learn is immense and the schools operate two shifts each day in an effort to cater for demand.

"A big priority has been working with young people, who are very often the victims of crime and violence.

Recently five young people were shot dead in a random shooting at a pool hall. Providing education services is a means to tackle the pervasive sense of hopelessness. We have also launched a scholarship programme, assisting three or four young people a year to study science or medicine in university.

"Our churches and schools are used for community purposes as well as places of study and worship. Contact is maintained with the community through regular community meetings, saying mass in houses or attending to the needs of bereaved families where often no formal funeral ceremony is possible. Slowly a sense of community spirit is developing. More and more people now want to live and work in Pozon. The 'swamp' is becoming a home." (by John Gallagher in *Oblate Missionary Record*, Autumn 2007)

## Asia-Oceania

### COLOMBO

#### A "Ministry of Presence" in Sri Lanka

Last September, seven Oblates on the JPIC team from the South of Sri Lanka visited Jaffna to get a first hand experience of the reality there and to express their solidarity with their suffering brothers and sisters in that part of the country. They were able to witness the hardships suffered by ordinary people in the war-torn areas of the island.

The Jaffna peninsula is heavily controlled by the Army. Similar to what happened in 1988-89, when there was an uprising by youth of the South, there are abductions and killing taking place everywhere in the peninsula. People are rounded up and some are identified by a Billa, a secret agent, who might accuse them of having had contact with the rebels. People can be taken away by the authorities and simply "disappear." Due to the heavy presence of the armed forces, people live in utter fear. A curfew is in effect everyday from 7:00 p.m. to 4.30 a.m. The main road is closed twice a day for the army convoy. People have to wait sometimes over three hours simply to cross the road. School children are occasionally held up for three hours after school.

The Army has begun to issue Identity Cards. Several

questions are asked, including about membership in a political party. Families are also asked to provide photos of their whole family; they must keep one at home and give one to the army. If someone in the photo is missing when there is an inspection, the family will have to answer.

In Jaffna, the group met with the bishop and a group of priests and religious to discuss the situation. They also visited families who have lost someone due to abductions and killings. They had a sad visit to a school near the border. The whole school has been displaced and it is functioning now in a makeshift location. The children study under huts and trees. In case of bombing, there are bunkers prepared near the school to provide shelter for the children. They also met with the teachers and some of the parents. Their main plea was for PEACE. They have had enough of this suffering and mental agony.

As a follow-up to their visit, the Oblate JPIC team from Colombo has a plan which they call a "Ministry of Presence." They have invited other men and women religious to join a "Task Force for Peace" which will, after a period of preparation, establish an actual presence among their suffering brothers and sisters in the North. As part of this "Ministry of Presence," they will organize series of seminars to

study the history of the problem and the solutions proposed by different groups. This level of discussion will focus on networking with other interested groups to lobby for a political solution. They will also establish exchange programmes between the children and youth of both sides, aimed at building bridges among them for a peaceful Sri Lanka. (From the Oblate JPIC Team in *Colombo Province Newsletter, November-December 2007* )

## CHINA

### Chinese children meet St. Eugene de Mazenod

Over a dozen Notre Dame secondary school students performed what we think is the first dramatization of the life of St. Eugene in China in Chinese. They enthusiastically gave four performances...one at each of the schools and the parish. Recently, they gave the final one to the students of the Oblate primary school. It was a very lively presentation with the young audience. Afterwards the teenage cast was mobbed by the primary school students like Hollywood stars. It was quite a hit! The students know who Eugene de Mazenod is now and what he stood for! (David ULLRICH)

## COLOMBO

### Novices ask: What can we do?

The novices from the religious Congregations of the Holy Family, the Marists and the Oblates met with their formators on Friday, January 4, at the Holy Family Novitiate, Diyatalawa, for a group reflection on the current situation in Sri Lanka, and to see what they could do as novices.

Possible actions which the novices suggested are the following:

- Creating awareness through sharing one another's needs and pains in mutual trust.
- Solidarity of compassion with the novices whose family members suffer great hardships.
- Sharing one another's ideas and feelings lovingly and gently (non-violently).
- Learning one another's language (Tamil/Sinhala) to facilitate mutual understand and unity.
- Living and working together as novices belonging to different ethnic/racial groups in the houses of formation and thereby giving

positive witness.

- Learning to forgive and heal hurts.
- Respecting and affirming one another's human dignity and equality
- Affirming and appreciating one another's talents, giftedness and capabilities.
- Using the media to make known the problems the people undergo due to the ongoing war situation.

"Coming together for such a group reflection and mutual sharing was a hope-producing experience," says Fr W. Emmanuel FERNANDO, the Oblate novice master, who facilitated the group reflection.

## INDIA

### A growing Oblate Unit

The Provincial Council of the Colombo Province in Sri Lanka recently had a meeting with the major superior and one of the councilors of the Provincial Delegation of India. The purpose of this joint meeting was for better understanding of the life and mission of the delegation and its relationship with the mother-province of Colombo.

Fr. Francis NALLAPPAN, the Delegation Superior of India, briefed the Provincial Council about strategic planning of projects and finances for the Oblates of India. In 2008, the Oblates will celebrate 40 years of presence in India. There are now 84 Oblates, including 19 scholastics in temporal vows. In the last ten years they have increased greatly as 37 Oblates made their perpetual profession of vows. There are six formation houses and about 16 mission communities, as well as one administration community. (*Colombo Province Newsletter, November-December 2007*)

## LAOS

### Thousands Attend First Ordination in Pakxan

PAKXAN, Laos (UCAN) — More than 3,000 people attended the ordination here of a Laotian Oblate priest who will serve in Vientiane vicariate.

Most came from neighboring Thailand or the Philippines for the ordination of Father Benedict BENNAKHONE INTHIRATH on Dec. 29. Besides laypeople, those present included 36 priests,

16 of them from Laos, as well as Religious sisters and brothers.

Also among the guests were officials of the Lao Front for National Construction, a Communist Party-affiliated organization that is responsible for supervising religious practice. The Laotian Church had obtained the front's approval to hold the ordination.

Oblate Bishop Jean KHAMSE VITHAVONG of Vientiane vicariate presided at the ceremony at Our Lady of Lourdes' Church in Pakxan, Bolikhamxai province, 120 kilometers northeast of the capital.

Father Bennakhone, 36, is the first Pakxan parishioner to become a priest, and the ordination ceremony was the first to be held in the parish. Meanwhile, a few diocesan priests also have been ordained, usually in Thakhek, the base of Savannakhet vicariate, where the national major seminary opened in 1998.

Assisting Bishop Khamse were the heads of the other three vicariates in the country: Monsignor Tito Banchong Thopayong of Luang Prabang, Bishop Louis Marie Ling Mangkhanekhoun of Pakse and Bishop Jean Sommeng Vorachak of Savannakhet.

Also present was Bangkok-based Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, who serves as apostolic nuncio to Cambodia, Singapore and Thailand, and as apostolic delegate to Brunei, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar.

Father Bennakhone, the fifth of 11 children in his family, was born on Aug. 31, 1972, in Pakxan Neua (north) village. He finished primary and high school in Vientiane and then studied in Australia, where he earned his Master's of Business Administration from Melbourne University. He was ordained a deacon in Sydney, Australia, on June 14, 2007.

Bishop Khamse told the new priest: "Please learn from Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and always keep in mind that Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." The advice fitted well with Father Bennakhone's priestly motto, *I am among you as a servant*, taken from Saint Luke's Gospel.

When Father Bennakhone celebrated his first Mass

on Dec. 30 at Our Lady of Lourdes, he acknowledged the support he had received on his journey to the priesthood. "Thank you for your prayers and help. I believe my ordination would not have happened without these. May God bless all of you for ever," he told everyone present.

Vientiane vicariate has 12,348 Catholics, about 7,200 of them women, served by a bishop, four priests and 38 nuns. Most of the lay Catholics are farmers, but some are vendors and state enterprise employees. (*For full report, go to <http://www.ucanews.com>*)

## PHILIPPINES

### Holy Father expresses condolences for death of Father Rey Roda

Pope Benedict XVI, on January 18, expressed "great sadness" over the death of Oblate Father Jesus Reynaldo RODA, and asked his killers to "renounce the ways of violence and to play their part in building a just and peaceful society where all can live together in harmony". Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone sent the pope's message to the bishop of Jolo, Angelito LAMPON, and to his fellow Oblates.

Fr. Roda was killed by a group of at least ten persons, when he resisted a kidnapping attempt on the evening of January 15 in the chapel of the Notre Dame school in Tabawan (Tawi-Tawi). The kidnappers fled, taking with them a Muslim teacher, Omar Taub.

Cardinal Bertone added that the pope "was saddened to learn of the brutal and tragic killing" of Fr Roda but grateful that he had been an "example to priests and people throughout the region, and especially to the young". "Entrusting the people of Tabawan to the maternal protection of Our Blessed Lady, the Holy Father is pleased to impart his apostolic blessing as a pledge of comfort and strength at this time of sorrow". (Thanks to: AsiaNews.it at <http://new.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=11297>)





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## Europe

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**UKRAINE****A new church for Krivyi Rih**

On October 6, Bishop Stanislaw Padewski of Kharkiv-Zaporizhia solemnly consecrated the new Oblate parish church of the Assumption of Mary Immaculate in Krivyi Rih, Ukraine. He also blessed the Oblate community's house and that of the sisters who work in the parish. Present for the three and a half hour ceremony, besides the Oblates, were many sisters, laity, priests of the Orthodox Church and a Lutheran pastor. The parish is in the care of Fathers Waldemar MEYKA and Artur STRONCZEWSKI.

Krivyi Rih (a name which means "crooked horn") is a large, industrial city in Southern Ukraine, with about seven hundred thousand inhabitants. The Oblate parish is located in a very poor section of the city. Drug addiction is a major problem among the people there. (*Ukraine Delegation newsletter*, November 2007)

**ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE****A parish without a "home"**

Amlwch, on the northeasterly tip of the Island of Anglesey, is the centre of the Catholic parish of Amlwch, and home to what may be Britain's most unusual parish church. Built in the 1930s in the shape of an upturned ship, the Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea and St. Winefride is a landmark on this rugged coastline, which has seen many shipwrecks over the centuries.

Three years ago, parishioners at Sunday morning Mass heard that, due to safety concerns, their church would have to close immediately.

Parishioner Irene Darby tells the story: "There was stunned silence. It was strange to think that our close-knit community would not worship together again for a long time. Flakes of plaster had been falling from the ceiling and walls making it impossible to keep the church clean, but the news came as a shock.

"Fr Declan O'KEEFFE, our parish priest, asked us to attend one of the other churches: St David's, Camaes (5 miles) or Our Lady of Lourdes, Benllech

(9 miles). Sadness descended as he locked and secured the church that last time. We were now a 'homeless' community.

"Some do not drive and bus services are inadequate, so we set about organising transport to Sunday Masses at the other churches. The warm welcome we received on the following Sunday did much to help us feel at home again.

"Today, we use every opportunity to keep our community together. On holy days, parishioners crowd into the presbytery for the celebration of Mass. Twice yearly, we come together for a 'gathering Mass'. Social events also help as we seek a solution for our church. Not having our own church has perhaps given us a new appreciation of the ecumenical spirit that exists among Christians in Amlwch. During the annual week of prayer for Christian Unity, we have come to know each other better and to share our faith, as we meet and pray in a different church or chapel every night. We can worship once more in our own locality as part of the wider Amlwch Christian community. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who have shown a missionary commitment to the people since coming here in 1944, are today emphasising 'partnership in mission' as we look to the future together, people and priests. Our parish is actively involved in planning for the future of parish ministry here at every level. We are part of the Island Mission Group, formed in 2003 to work for the continuation and promotion of the faith on the Island of Anglesey.

"Thanks to the support we have been receiving, we retain our sense of purpose as a parish community and our determination to witness to Christ's love through our various ministries to people in need. Chief among our concerns are the distances to the other churches and issues around transport to Mass. Of course, we miss our church, the occasional visits for quiet prayer, the Stations of the Cross, and much more. But we look forward in hope to the future. We want to be, *'people of hope, reflecting the attitude that God never abandons his people.'*" (Oblate General Chapter of 1998) (*Oblate Missionary Record*, Autumn 2007)

**FRANCE****A bit of fresh air in a world that is overheated**

*(The author is Brother Bertrand EVELIN, Novice Master at the Oblate Interprovincial Novitiate in Lille.)*

Since last October, the chaplains at the *Lille I–Lille II – Grandes Écoles* (University) have gone “pamphleteering” a word conveniently coined to describe the distribution of pamphlets on the public streets.

Confronted with the difficulty of sharing information and the dizzying shrinking of attendance at our centers, we decided to mount a huge “communications operation,” to speak somewhat pretentiously. More concretely, it’s a question of locating ourselves on a the sidewalk in a strategic spot and distributing to the students, for two hours, our salads...pardon...our publicity about our campus ministry.

Let’s start at the beginning. The first problem was what to include. This was our line of reasoning: the two universities which we serve have about thirty-five thousand students. Among them, it’s rare that we find even one percent of the students who are interested in coming to our university chaplaincy to nourish their faith. We have to invent some places where we can be seen, keeping in mind the “secular” character of the university. So, here we go with our “Operation Pamphleteering.” (...)

Let’s admit it! It was not easy for us to leave our four walls, even though they were empty. We had some prejudices to overcome (*It seems like carpet selling or...worse?!?...Jehovah’s Witnesses*). We had to get beyond some fears (*We might as well just toss the pamphlets in the street...that will be quicker!*). We had some bridges to cross (*Twenty years of religious life and this is what I amount to!*). These qualms were stronger than we wanted to admit at the beginning. We were being invited to set out, full-sail, to experience the joys of navigating new waters, but not too far away from our port of safety, in this case, Romero House (for those who know it). In that way... *just in case*...one could always make a quick get-away. (...)

Almost imperceptibly, in the course of our

distributions, something happened within us. The scary questions disappeared on their own. What’s more, we had some wonderful surprises. Whether it was because of an acute religious awareness or the “Nicolas Hulot” effect (he’s an ecologist), we had to pick up off the ground no more than 5 pamphlets. But especially, we experiences some personal changes of status and identity. From “pamphleteers,” we became (or became again) persons. Every distribution of pamphlets is, before all else, an exchange of looks, of smiles, an unspoken involvement (of belonging or of polite refusal), a word uttered (“Thanks!”, “Good morning.” “Courage!”), a relationship. (...)

What results can we expect from this venture? You’ve probably gathered by now that the question itself has vanished, along with the other “fears” we spoke about above. On the other hand, in the course of our distributions, we ourselves have experienced a greater ability to observe, and, who knows?...one day gather the fruits which the springtime of life never stops making burst out around and in us. So with little Thérèse and a few others, I will focus on this contemplative dimension of the mission which the pressure and the pace of our pastoral preoccupations regrettably cause to disappear. (...) (*OMI France*, January 2008)

**FRANCE****The Oblates and Lourdes**

*This year, we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous. From the very beginning of its history, Oblates have been involved. Fr. Bernard DULLIER, Provincial of France, speaks here about what he has learned.*

**First description of the apparitions:** It was in a letter written to an Oblate, Fr. Ferdinand GONTRAND, that Bernadette put into writing for the first time, in 1860, what had happened two years before. The apparitions had not yet been recognized. While passing through Lourdes to preach the retreat of the diocesan priests, Fr. Gontrand had been immediately fascinated by the seer and he was convinced that she was speaking the truth. Therefore, he started an on-going correspondence with her and he asked her to write about the

apparitions. She did just that and it is that report which one reads in the Office for February 11.

**Consecration of the upper basilica:** In order to build the basilica, the Bishop of Tarbes began a campaign in all the dioceses of France. Several bishops did not appreciate the fact that someone was “going hunting” on their land. A single bishop responded favorably and sent 200 gold francs: it was the Oblate, Joseph GUIBERT, at the time, Bishop of Tours. Accordingly, fourteen years later, they would ask him to come to consecrate the basilica. In the meantime, he had become the Bishop of Paris and a cardinal. At the time of his death, three of his colleagues could write that he was “one of the very first to believe in the importance of Lourdes.”

**Pilgrimage to Lourdes by Oblate bishops:** In the Annals of Our Lady of Lourdes, one finds mention of the visits of several Oblate bishops: in 1878, Vital GRANDIN, Bishop of St. Albert in Canada; in 1880, André MÉLIZAN, Apostolic Vicar of Jaffna in Ceylon, and Christophe BONJEAN, Bishop of Médéa, likewise in Ceylon; in 1885, it was Charles JOLIVET, Apostolic Vicar of Natal, who came to Lourdes; and in 1887, Isidore CLUT, Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie.

**First diocesan pilgrimages:** “Go tell the priests that people should come here in procession,” said Mary to Bernadette. In 1872 and in 1873, the diocese of Marseille was the first to bring to Lourdes more than 300 pilgrims, led by the Oblates of Notre Dame de la Garde. And people still talk about the living Stations of the Cross conducted on the mountain in 1880 by Fr BENEDIC and in 1883 by Fr. ROUX, both of them Oblates. The second diocesan pilgrimage, in 1873, was from Aix en Provence, led by Fr. GARNIER, o.m.i., who, of course, preached in Provençal.

**National pilgrimages from abroad:** The Anglo-Irish Oblates were the first ones, in 1883, to organize and lead a national pilgrimage to Lourdes. For two years, they circulated among all the Catholic parishes a scroll more than eight meters long, covered with prayer intentions.

Finally, we note that in 1874, for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the statue at the grotto, there was an Oblate from

Pontmain (another Marian shrine) who preached. (*Audacieux pour l'Évangile*, January 2008)

## ROMANIA

### Do you like the crib?

Here in Romania, we tried to repeat the question we heard for the first time in the famous film by the director Eduardo De Filippo: “Do you like the nativity scene?”

Romania is so rich with icons and frescos of the Nativity of Christ – new-born but majestically lying in a little tomb – nothing like the centuries-old tradition of the Christmas crib of the followers of St. Francis.

So we gave it a try. First of all, the shepherds arrived from Italy, after a long pilgrimage, and therefore, not in very good health! Once upon a time, they took part in the very much visited Christmas crib of St. Pius X in Vico, province of Caserta. Most of them move their arms: some sawing wood and others chopping wood; some working with iron; some drawing water or feeding the hens; some fishing or playing the flute; some preparing a delicious pizza and, of course, turning the handle on the rotisserie or grinding coffee. There’s also a donkey that never tires pulling the grindstone to make flour for bread, without which, Bethlehem, “the city of bread,” would not be Bethlehem. So around the Bambino’s cave, there is a lot of movement; there’s even water in the river!

Brother Andreuccio PALLADINO, besides repairing the shepherds that arrived in pieces, also saw to it that the newborn baby could enjoy the stars at night, the light of daytime activity, and the changing colors of dawn and dusk.

It takes a bit of time to really take in this handiwork. All those who have visited it so far have truly appreciated it. “We have never seen anything like it.”

Whoever is aware of how much work Fr. Vincenzo BASSO put into the making of each one of these “shepherds” can also be sure that he is now smiling down from heaven as he sees that his work lives on.

## SPAIN

### Jun Mercado addresses United Nations forum

The United Nations Secretary-General announced the *Alliance of Civilizations* initiative in July 2005.

This initiative responded to the need, felt in many circles, for the international community to make an effort to build bridges and overcome mistrust and errors of judgement, which could threaten world peace and stability.

Part of this effort was the Alliance for Civilizations Forum in Madrid, Spain, January 15-16, 2008. The Forum gathered political leaders, representatives from governments and international organizations, and members of civil society and the business world. The meeting offered its participants a unique international setting for exploring the most effective means of dealing with the growing polarization between nations and cultures.

Fr. Eliseo “Jun” MERCADO from the Philippine

Province was invited to address the Session on Conflict Prevention, Religion and politics at the Community level. This session included insights from experts and activists who organize, facilitate, or study on-going dialogue processes with diverse religious-political movements in the hopes of contributing to conflict prevention.

The UN invitation to Fr. Mercado was in recognition of his crucial role in the peace process in the Southern Philippines. His letter of invitation pointed out that he is “a critically important speaker in session 6 , given both his role on the National Peace Commission and the fact that he brings with him experience from a country and region that would enrich the dialogue in that session and the broader Forum.”

## Canada-United States

### OMILACOMBE On Eagle’s Wings

When Jesus sent his apostles and disciples to preach the Gospel to the ends of the world, I imagine that in his human limitations, he did not know that his disciples would eventually reach the Canadian Arctic and would have to paddle canoes and drive dog teams to obey his command. He did not know either that they would eventually fly planes to reach the ends of the world. But the blessing he gave them in the Spirit contained all possibilities.

The first Oblate missionaries who arrived in the southern parts of the Mackenzie Diocese about 150 years ago really believed that they had reached the end of the world. They were in for a surprise, as, with the years, they pushed north, finally to reach a country where the sun does not set and where winter does not end. The Mackenzie Diocese then could literally be considered as “the end of the world”. Still today, in spite of vast improvements in communications, transportation and lifestyle, it still remains an largely unknown and lures hardy souls to come to its conquest.

One such group of “modern apostles” is *On Eagle’s Wings Ecumenical Ministries*. For years now they have spread the wings of their faith over the Northwest Territories. They have enlightened the

minds of many faithful and conquered the hearts of all who come in contact with them.

Every summer, they come from the South on the “eagle’s wings” of their faith and love. They land at *Trapper’s Lake Spirituality Centre*, our diocesan retreat centre on the outskirts of Yellowknife. They come as faithfully and tenaciously as the ducks and geese that fly into our skies in the early spring to nest and hatch new life into the world. They too, after a moment of rest at *Trapper’s Lake*, spread their wings to go further North where they nest for a week in different native communities. There, they help hatch the life of Christ in little ones who are hungry for religious knowledge and rejoice at being told how much Jesus loves them. Witnessing a class being taught, one has a good idea of what the Gospel meant when saying that Jesus, surrounded by children, “put his arms around them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.”

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has been strong on ecumenism. Ecumenism in the North is not so much a question of meetings and discussions, but rather a question of doing things together. The members of *On Eagle’s Wings* have given the Catholic Church a wonderful opportunity to practice ecumenism. The missionary spirit of *On Eagle’s Wings* is the fuel that helps many lamps to burn a bit more brightly in the dark night of our northern society.

Respectful of Catholic theology, and inviting and encouraging local cooperation, they have shared the Good News of Christ with hundreds of children who have responded in kind.

At the center of that “miracle of love,” there is a man whose heart beats to the rhythm of the North. Lutheran Pastor-Pilot Lee Berry, founder, has been the driving force that keeps *On Eagle's Wings* in full flight. For years, he has shown intelligence, determination, generosity and vision. He has been and will remain a true friend of our northern missions. At the pulpit, his love for *On Eagle's Wings* and its missionary work inspires, convinces and makes people dream dreams. At the control of his plane, he delivers on what he had promised. The Good News is preached to the poor. The Catholic Church of the Mackenzie Diocese is very grateful to all the members of *On Eagle's Wing* who, in the course of the years, have been part of our missionary team. We also are proud to have such partners working in the same mission field. May that ecumenical association flourish for years to come to the greatest glory of God. (Bishop Denis CROTEAU, OMI of Mackenzie-Fort Smith in *Oblate Connexions Oblates*, December 2007)

## UNITED STATES

### Young Associate group in Florida

A mission support and prayer club, sponsored by the students themselves, has formed at Cardinal Newman High School in Palm Beach, Florida. Under the direction of the school's religion teacher, Chris DeMicco, a former Oblate seminarian, and Marilyn Lawrence, a member of the National Committee for Oblate Associates, the club meets on Friday afternoons for prayer and discussion of the Oblate charism and its application to the lives of students today. Fr. Art OBIN, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Riviera Beach, serves as Oblate moderator of the club. Fr. Henry LEMONCELLI, who began his Oblate ministry as a teacher at this school, was present for the club's first meeting. He now works at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the Vatican.

The name of the club - OSANA - was the inspiration of one of the students: it stands for “Oblate Spirituality at Newman Associates.” Another student suggestion was for a ‘prayer box’ to be placed outside a

classroom door, where any student in the school can place a prayer request anonymously. It is exciting to see and to work with young people who are hungry for spiritual growth and direction, and to begin to experience the many ways in which Oblate spirituality takes root and grows in them. (Marilyn Lawrence in *OMI-USA*, January 2008)

## NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP

“Oh how the snow snowed!” (Nelligan)

The second half of December 2007 left 150 cm of snow on the ground; that's a lot of snow in so short a time and it must be moved.

The poet, Émile Nelligan, found inspiration in the snow. At the provincial house in Montreal, some of the brothers were also suitably inspired. We can get rid of the snow, thanks to an ingenious system they created some 45 years ago in the basement of the carpenter's workshop. The old coal bin serves beautifully as a “snow bin” where it can melt. Three “young” Oblates (Gaston MORIN, Luc FORTIN, and Gérard LANDREVILLE) get busy, as needed, to make the parking lot of the provincial house as clean as a new penny. The “melter” has been working at full force since mid-December. Do you want to see how it works? Come and take a look at the provincial house...or grab a shovel...

## OMI LACOMBE

### Solidarity with Myanmar

In September 2007, people around the world held their breath as the Burmese people mobilized in huge public demonstrations to demand a return to human rights and democracy. Burma (called Myanmar by its current government) has been under the rule of a brutal, military dictatorship since the 1960's. For the first time since the regime took power, Buddhist monks, who came out by the thousands, led the protests. Buddhism is a powerful force in this Southeast Asian country.

A few days after the demonstrations began, the regime launched a brutal crackdown, attacking the protesters and sending soldiers into monasteries during the night to beat and even execute many of the monks. Many more monks, it has been

reported, were forcefully expelled from their monasteries by the military.

In the days following the attacks, Brother Thomas NOVAK met with a small group of Burmese who are living in Winnipeg to pursue their studies: Aung Thein, Aung Tun and Nyi Nyi Sai. Together with Sandra Stuart, of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Mission, they organized a march of Manitoba Church leaders and other people of faith to express solidarity with the persecuted monks and other citizens of Burma.

Thomas, Sandra, numerous Christian ministers, an indigenous elder and three monks from the Laotian Buddhist temple in Winnipeg led the march. It began with Christian, Buddhist and Ojibwa rituals in Augustine United Church in downtown Winnipeg. From there, the participants marched to the Manitoba Legislative Building. Like the marchers in Rangoon and other Burmese cities, they walked in silence – the quiet broken only by the sound of prayer and chanting. The march received good coverage in the local media. (Source: [www.omilacombe.ca](http://www.omilacombe.ca))

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### Anniversaries – April 2008

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#### 60 Years of Priesthood

1948.04.12	07621	Fr. Denis Buliard	Lacombe
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#### 25 Years of Priesthood

1983.04.06	12492	Fr. Ambrose Antonisamy	Colombo
1983.04.06	12495	Fr. Pathinathan Missian	Colombo
1983.04.06	12494	Fr. Pragasam Paniadimai	Colombo

## Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 9-14

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. John Cardo	OMI Lacombe	01/02/1933	Vancouver	23/01/2008
Fr. Kasper Klein	OMI Lacombe	03/11/1920	Saskatoon	23/01/2008
Fr. Joep Mayntz	Belgium/Netherlands	12/12/1921	Heerlen	25/01/2008
Fr. Henryk Tomys	Poland	07/11/1933	Katowice	27/01/2008
Bro. Daniel Hayes	Brazil	11/03/1916	São Paulo	07/02/2008
Fr. Stanislaw Kowal	Assumption	04/02/1953	Ottawa	10/02/2008

*“They are before God, bearing the sign, the kind of character proper to our Institute, the vows common to all its members, the firm habit of the same virtues. We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our main residence. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them.” (Letter of Founder to Fr. Courtès, 22 July 1828)*

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