

an important asset for the religious is their world-wide expertise in a moment when, for better or for worse, globalization and interdependency are bound to increase. I find this analysis describes very well the present moment of religious life and also what we Oblates are experiencing as we celebrate this February 17, 2009.

Let us proceed to our second question which we have already touched: ‘which way are we to go in the future?’

The working theme of the upcoming Chapter is ‘conversion’. To my mind, it would be wrong to interpret the theme in the sense, that from now on we should be turning inwards, trying to ignore as much as possible the context as described above. I believe that would be a big mistake! According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus began his ministry with a call to conversion - literally a change of mind (“metanoia”, in Greek) - and to faith. This call is linked to an interpretation of the historic moment (“kairos”) which lets him exclaim: “God’s Kingdom has come close!” The text says: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mc 1: 15)².

If we follow the gospel it becomes quite clear that our conversion will get its strength from an accurate reading of the signs of the times. It suffices to look at the Preface to our Constitutions and Rules to understand that the congregation of St. Eugene was approved by Pope Leo XII on February 17, 1826 because it offered an

² πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ· μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεῦετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.

enlightened reading of the signs of the times at a moment when the church and society were passing through a crisis. The first Oblates were people who had gone through a conversion that was connected to a proper understanding of the troublesome historical moment.

Since then, history has moved on. It does so year by year, and the slowness of its pace bears with it the risk that we do not notice the changes, get sleepy and wake up late. However, today it should be easy to see that we have reached a moment of major transitions. Let us then sharpen our eyesight! “For thus says my Lord to me: Go, station a watchman, let him tell what he sees” (Is 21:6). The new vision will not be found either in playing safe, doing just the same old thing, or in innovations that would mean renouncing our identity; the new vision will be found in clearly reading the ‘signs’ of our present times and committing ourselves to conversion. The ‘sign’ in the time of Isaiah was the fall of Babylon (Is 21:9: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon, and all the images of her gods are smashed to the ground”), and in the time of the gospels, the closeness of God’s Kingdom. What name must we give to the ‘signs’, today? Let us become watchmen, let us tell what we see! Only the clear recognition of today’s reality will drive our personal and communal conversion to a point that it brings about a new missionary, prophetic zeal. We are sent as prophets to this world, a world loved by God but in need of alternative ways of life.

I wish us all a happy February 17 in this year of salvation, 2009, as we prepare for our 35th General Chapter.

General Administration

OMIWORLD.ORG Historical Dictionary in English “on line”

The first volume of the *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, published in English in mid-2008, is now “on line.” It can be found on our congregational web site at www.omiworld.org, by clicking the link “Oblate History” under the image of St. Eugene

de Mazenod, on the right side of the primary English page.

The first volume of the *Historical Dictionary* was published in French in 2004 by the Association for Oblate Studies and Research. Most of the English translation was made by Fr. Albert LALONDE. The printed volume is subtitled *In France at the time of the Founder*. The second

volume, which will be published in French in 2009, will be subtitled: *Outside of France at the time of the Founder*.

Oblates and houses can order these printed volumes for 30 Euros (45 US\$) plus postage, from:

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Latin America

COLOMBIA

Putting Oblate values into practice

We are two Oblate priests: Fr. Antoine ST HILAIRE and José Narciso JIMÉNEZ GAVIRIA. We exercise our ministry in four communities, not counting the streets and villages: the parishes of San Marcos in Malagana and San Cayetano and the chapels in Sincerin and Palenque; there are about 15,000 inhabitants in these places.

In these towns, the people have many challenges to face in order to move forward. Many work as teachers, others in growing yucca, corn and yams. The women work in their homes, for the most part; some sell fruit and sweets; others sell lottery tickets. There are not many professionals and the few that there are live in Cartagena to get better jobs.

These communities give great importance to their culture: San Marcos parish with the festival of the Mango and the feasts of the Virgin of Carmel and the Immaculate Conception; San Cayetano parish has the festival of the Yams and its patronal feast, San Cayetano; the Palenque chapel has the festival of the Drum and its patronal feast, San Basilio; Sincerin has the festival of the Bull and the patronal feast of Santa Catalina.

The majority is Catholic but when we arrived,

there were not many practicing. We work hard to address this situation because, at times, there are only five persons at Mass. We began by visiting the families house by house in order to build-up small communities, even with only 5 persons. The church is full for Masses for the dead.

Now there are more women and fewer men at the celebrations. The reason for this is alcoholism. They drink a lot of alcohol and spend their weekends drunk. This weakens the families; the result is that the women have to be the authority figures in the homes.

We concentrate more on ministry with those of African ancestry as our preferential option. There is also our sacramental ministry, ministry with children and youth, with the sick, with families in conjunction with the plan of the Archdiocese of Cartagena whose central focus is the “permanent mission.” We barely find time each day to rest as we must go from one town to the other for whatever pastoral need arises. What energizes us a lot is the welcoming of the people. We get to know them well and we realize that our ministry must be ever more missionary because, for the missionary, his primary task is to go out to the people. (By Fr.. *Antoine St Hilaire, OMI, in the bulletin of the prenovitiate, January 2009*)

Africa-Madagascar

NATAL

Skype Solves Passport Problem

Congolese Oblate Provincial, Fr. Mane Macaire MANIMBA accepted some months ago to be one of the speakers at the Natal Provincial Congress 2008. His presence as a relatively young Oblate

African leader was considered critical to address the question of obedience and initiative in today’s world. This is the theme of Oblate Constitution 26.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has recently had problems with the supply of passports and a long waiting list has developed. Fr Macaire

was one of those affected by this problem and eventually it became clear that he would not be able to attend Congress.

One of the younger Natal Oblates came up with a creative solution to the problem using the computer programme Skype. Skype is software that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet. Calls to other users of the service are free.

The programme allows video conferencing if both sender and receiver have a broadband internet connection. Using this software, we were able to project a large image of Fr Macaire onto the screen of the venue and he was able to give his presentation and answer questions from members of Congress. We were able to see him and he was able to see us. This virtual presence of one of our keynote speakers was a real highlight of the Congress. (*OMI Natal Update*, December 2008)

LESOTHO

Oblate receives Quality Performance Award

Father Jacob Ramosa SALOEE has received the High Quality Performance Award from the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, Correctional Service, Law and Constitutional Affairs of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

According to Minister Mpeo Mahase Moiloa, Fr. Saloee deserves this award because of his active involvement in the “rehabilitation and social reintegration of the offenders.”

The Minister further stated that Fr. Saloee “also contributed by putting Lesotho Correctional Service in the International World by making it possible for Lesotho prisoners to participate in the International Art Contest which was organized by the International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care. There were more than 1,500 contributions from 49 countries competing. And one inmate from Lesotho won the fourth prize.”

Fr. Saloee received his award in a ceremony held at the Central Correctional Institution, to mark the International Prison Day, on October 24, 2008. (*Ma Oblata*, November 2008)

ZIMBABWE

The Mission Celebrates 25 Years

The Oblate Zimbabwe Mission celebrated its 25th Jubilee on Wednesday, December 10, at a newly refurbished Mazenod House in Bulawayo. Guest of honour was Archbishop Emeritus Henry Karlen, CMM, who first planted the seeds of an Oblate Mission in his diocese with former African General Councillor, Paddy HOGAN, in 1981. Paddy grew up in Zimbabwe and used to visit his mother in Bulawayo and pay his respects to then Bishop Karlen.

In 1982, the Natal Province consulted the Province on the proposal of a mission in Zimbabwe: 57 were in favour, 5 voted against and there were 3 abstentions. Nineteen Oblates of the province were ready to volunteer if asked to do so.

The Zimbabwe Mission was established in 1983. It was confided to the Transvaal Province and the Natal Province. Since then, 23 Oblates have lived and worked in Zimbabwe. The highest number together in the Mission at any one time is seven. Currently six are living there but two others are waiting for documents to enter the country.

There have been four Mission Superiors; Robert DE SYLVA (1983-1994), Hugh DALTON (1994- 2001), Michael FOLEY (2001-2007) and Siphon KUNENE (2008-). Paul HORROCKS was the longest serving missionary, giving 20 years service, mainly in the rural missions at St. Luke’s and Regina Mundi.

Although some efforts were made earlier, it was with the purchase of Mazenod House in 1992, that the formation of Zimbabweans began in earnest. These efforts have borne fruit and the future is promising. The first Zimbabwean to make final vows did so in January 2004. We presently have six Zimbabweans in final vows, four of whom are already priests.

The oppressive political and economic climate, deteriorating as it is on a daily basis, has a strong impact on our lives and ministry, but even more so, on the lives of the people we are sent to serve. Nevertheless, we refuse to

lose hope and see an important aspect of our ministry as keeping hope alive in the hearts of our people. Oblate ministries in Zimbabwe today include Parish ministries, Youth ministries, Aid

against Malnutrition Programmes and Youth Employment Programmes. (*OMI Natal Update*, December 2008)

Asia-Oceania

SRI LANKA

Assistant General encourages Caritas/SEDEC

Colombo (AsiaNews) - "After 40 full years of existence, Caritas/SEDEC should ask itself, not merely what this institution has done, but what this institution is expected to be in the eyes of God and the people." The former director of the charitable institution of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church, Fr. Oswald B. FIRTH, tells *AsiaNews* about the future of Caritas in the country: "There is much to be done in the area of building peace and reconciliation. I get the feeling that people are exhausted with the war and are seeing through the terrible corruption of which they are the victims."

One of the founders of Caritas/SEDEC, Fr. Firth indicates among its objectives for the near future a commitment to making peace in the country, where the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Colombo army has been going on for 30 years. "There is a moral obligation on the part of the Bishops and Caritas to prepare the way for a new future and for the emergence of a new Sri Lanka."

The forty years it has spent helping the population has brought the Catholic organization respect and recognition. Fr. Firth says, "Maybe this is the time when SEDEC could lead such a campaign calling for a just political solution to the crisis. Vision, wisdom and courage will be forthcoming once the initiative is launched. We need to trust in the goodness of people, that they all want peace for their families and for the country."

The former director of Caritas adds that the institution "does have the capacity to mobilize competent lawyers, university professors, members of the business community and right thinking politicians to study and propose changes to our constitution that will guarantee freedom

in all its richness and opportunities to all citizens irrespective of language, racial or religious bias."

Fr. Firth affirms that SEDEC must not only "play the role of the Good Samaritan," but must "train people to listen to God's word that comes to us through the Bible as well as through events in daily life." The former director of Caritas explains that "only when we learn to listen to God speaking to us through daily events will be able to read the signs of the times in faith and respond accordingly." (by Melani Manel Perera for www.asianews.it: December 12, 2008)

THAILAND

Christmas for Priccia's grandmother

At this time, the mystery of Christmas is somewhat overshadowed as Thailand is going through a tense situation that distracts us from the birth of Jesus. A few days ago, we saw on television a hurried image of a child lighting the Christmas tree in downtown Bangkok; then they switched to what was going on in the streets of the capital. For the first time in its history, Thailand is on the brink of a civil war. Two different factions are controlling two different parts of the city, ready to battle one another at any moment.

When I see these images, when I go into the city and come across the police who are ready to intervene and I run into the demonstrators, whether the reds or the yellows, I begin to think that Christmas is still a long time coming.

Then I turn back and think about these eight years spent in the land of smiles and kindness and I see a different story. I think of the many times I have seen God being born in the hearts of the people, even when they were not aware of it, as He brought hope even in the midst of so much hard work, disappointments and failures.

I think of the grandmother of Priccia, a poor old woman who has toiled her whole life long to raise her children; at the age of 70, she thought her work was over and that she deserved a bit of rest, because here, usually the children take care of their elders who can no longer work. They are the support of the parents. However, this dear grandmother had a surprise in store for her: some time previously, her son-in-law had died of AIDS, something rather common among the poor folks who have to work in the big cities, alone and uprooted from their homes. Then it was the turn of the daughter, dead from the same disease, and this too is rather common. That's Christmas for the grandmother of Priccia: suddenly, she found herself with the child of her daughter to take care of and to raise.

But she did not become discouraged; she did not ask too many questions. She simply rolled up her sleeves, took the child into her home, and by

herself, has raised him the best way she could. I met her during one of my trips up and down Thailand to meet the school children. When I went to her village, she came to find me; she told me her story, always with a smile on her face, happy for what she had done for her grandson, happy that Priccia is a good little boy, polite and affectionate. During that meeting, I told her about our house in Bangkok where we take in poor boys and help them to study; she asked if we could take in her grandson. The boy likes to study, but she cannot send him to school because her income is barely sufficient for their survival.

Next school year, Priccia, 12 years old now, will be with us to begin his high school. With the gifts we receive, we too can give a gift to Priccia and to so many other little boys like him and give him the opportunity to make something of his own life. (Taken from the Christmas letter of Domenic RODIGHIERO.)

Europe

FRANCE

Mission school for youth

The Oblates of the Province of France, along with some young professionals, have begun a new project at Aix-en-Provence; it is called "The Mission School." The place chosen is symbolic since it is the house of the founding. For the first year, the idea is to present the youth with three weekends of formation to help them live the missionary aspect of their daily lives. The Oblates and the youth are invited to live the project together.

The formation covers two aspects: the first is rooted in the Bible, in Church teaching about the mission and in the spirit of St. Eugene de Mazenod. The second is putting the mission into practice by giving witness to other youth during the summer or in another country, while living in Oblate communities.

The group that started the project is international. Among the Oblates, there are three Poles (Wojciech KOWALEWSKI, Mariusz LORENTZ and Damian KOPYTO), three French (Jo BOIS, Vincent GRUBER and Jacques LANGLET), a

Belgian (Benoît DOSQUET), a Haitian (Kennedy LÉON), an Italian (Alfonso BARTOLOTTA) and a Nigerian (Chrysogonus UZOR). The youth are Mexican, Ivorian, Senegalese, Colombian, and French. This internationality is a symbol of the mission in today's world. In our world, we can fulfill our missionary vocation and give witness to our faith in Christ.

For three days, the group reflected on the theme: Loved by Christ the Savior...but how? For example, "looking at Christ and letting ourselves be seen by him" and "looking at the world through the eyes of Christ."

The team also visited the places dear to St. Eugene in his native city. In that way, the youth discovered how Eugene was touched by Christ's love and how he began his missionary commitment.

The idea of "The Mission School" might be an incentive for new programs in other countries of Europe and on other continents.

Next March and May, the youth will gather around the following themes: "Touched by

the world's situation" and "Brought into a community." (Aurélie Feix and Damian Kopyto, OMI)

BELGIUM/NETHERLANDS

Fr. Joseph Ricaille: a long life, lived well

In the last issue of OMI Information (No. 483), we published the names of our elders. Just before publishing this list, we learned of the death of one of these Oblates, Fr. Joseph RICAILLE, who had heard the Lord's call to leave for the house of the Father. Fr. Ricaille died on November 29, a month after his 101st birthday. Here are some excerpts from the funeral homily given by Fr. Christian HOET.

In order to be welcomed by God our Father, our dear departed did nothing so special other than that he tried, day by day, to live as a servant of his God and of all his brothers and sisters on earth... and that is what is exceptional!

Already at the age of 11, he left his village, Les Bulles, to begin his studies with the Missionary Oblates at Nieuwenhove, near Waregem, where later he made his first religious vows in 1927.

Ordained a priest at Velaines five years later, he was a teacher for four years. Then he left for the Congo in 1936 where he lived for 28 years.

A nun who, with three other sisters, arrived at the mission of Fr. Ricaille at Koshimbanda some years later told me how much the priest was a real leader, one who knew how to make decisions, always at work, completely devoted to and close to the people, all the while commanding their respect.

Thanks to these women who had just arrived at his mission, he was able to establish a clinic which, each day, received about a hundred people who came from quite far at times to be healed.

Like every true missionary, Fr. Joseph organized the mission in such a way that he was able to welcome thousands of young catechumens to prepare them for baptism...

In 1964, upon his return to Belgium, Fr. Ricaille

agreed to go to work in service of the parishioners of Oppagne for the next 34 years. Some among you could say a lot about his service there.

Throughout his long life, by his good personality and his smile, he spread around himself much joy. Joseph loved life, riding in the car, taking walks, meeting with his confreres and friends. His family had a special place in his heart and they loved him in return.

Finally, we can say that Fr. Joseph was a happy and peaceful old man. I tell myself that when one is a hundred years old and can still be friendly and smiling, which he always was, that indeed is an accomplishment! Truly the Lord achieved beautiful and great things in his servant Joseph... and we truly thank Him for that. (*Bulletin de Liaison, Belgique Sud*, December 2008)

ITALY

Make way for the future

Twenty-five years ago, in 1983, the Missionary Oblates in Messina (Sicily) saw the urgent need to respond to the drug problem that was rampant in the city. Thus, with the support of the local Church, the F.A.R.O. Center was established (F.A.R.O. stands for *Fraterno Aiuto Riabilitazione Orientamento* or Fraternal Help for Rehabilitation and Guidance). Its aim was to work toward both the healing of those young persons who wanted to put an end to their slavery to drugs and to be of support to their families. The Center has always been inspired by a method called "The Persons' Project," begun in 1978. This is a therapeutic program which centers on the potential of the individuals, on their internal resources, which, if properly channeled, can help them to confront their personal difficulties.

Fr. Sante RONCHI, now in the mission of Romania, together with a small group of collaborators who then became the founding members, began this experience of solidarity which continues even today.

Fr. Antonio CANNATÀ was Fr. Sante's successor; he was followed by Emanuela De Domenico who has long been part of the Oblate family in

Messina. Following the charism of St. Eugene to reach out to the poor and the abandoned, they and many others who have been inspired by the Oblates, have lived an extraordinary experience. There have been wonderful moments and sad ones too, joys and doubts, discouragement and enthusiasm, but always with perseverance and fidelity to the original idea.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary, on November 11, 2008, the current President of the Center spoke these words:

“To speak of ‘dependencies’ comes too easily today: it’s a topic that is overblown and the messages we get about it are usually not very helpful. I am convinced, on the other hand, that we don’t speak enough about the Person and the new difficulties of the Person in modern society.

“We should be talking about the adolescent Person, growing up amidst so many things, amidst so much nonsense which even their parents support, but with little enthusiasm and an inadequate idea of the meaning of life. We should be talking about the parents who cry out in their helplessness: ‘It’s difficult to be a mother, to be a father!’

“And that’s the truth! But what are we doing to help the family really be a family? And are parents capable of asking the right questions and seeking help? Or do we all move forward, defending our own selfish positions?

“To say that everyone uses drugs is wrong, because fortunately, that is not the case, but we must stress that there is a dangerous normalization of behaviors that lead to dependence. It is not the lower prices that make drug use possible, but the indifference, the scant attention to passing on values, at least if they are not financially productive.

“At any rate, the root of these problems is not difficult to see: we are a society that is not very credible nor coherent. We have made of incoherence and confusion the foundation of negligence and indifference: from the father on the motorcycle with his child, not wearing helmets, and going through a red light to the government that does not take care of its own territory.

“If the business sectors of a city do not care about the weak and disadvantaged members of the populace, there will never be complete healing. If we want youth to stop taking drugs, if we want them to go into rehabilitation programs so that they can change their lives, all of us must work at it. We are all in this together, co-responsible for one another. We must all be valid alternatives to drugs so that the youth will be able to say: ‘It’s not worth it! I can find within myself and around me all that I need to be happy.’”

POLAND

Evangelical Radicalism: a Missionary Requirement

The Polish Oblate Province held a congress from September 23-26, 2008 in Odra. The topic of the congress was *Evangelical Radicalism: a Missionary Requirement*.

Sixty Oblates participated, from Poland and abroad. A number of delegations sent representatives: Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Ukraine, Madagascar; guests of honour included Fr. Janusz BLAZEJAK, Provincial of Assumption Province; Fr. Thomas KLOSTERKAMP, Provincial of the Central-European Province; and Fr. Maciej MICHALSKI, General Archivist representing the General Administration.

The Congress was opened with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Edward Dajczak of Koszalin-Kołobrzeg, Poland. Bishop Dajczak also gave the first seminar, which was on the subject of *Radicalism of religious life in the context of the life of the Church*. In his seminar, the Bishop spoke about new ways of connecting with people today, especially with youth – the future of the Church. He confirmed that we need conversion in addition to a certain radicalism in our lives of service to the most poor. Without the sort of radicalism as practiced by St. Francis and St. Eugene, it is not possible to get to today’s youth (those living in poverty or those who rebel), to drug addicts, or to those disinterested by traditional forms of piety. Bishop Dajczak’s talk was followed by a lively discussion and a positive tone was set for future meetings and conferences.

The next days were spent working on specific topics which were set down by the congress committee after earlier consultation with the Province. The topics were: The role of superiors; evangelical poverty in practice; evangelization of those away from the Church; vocation animation; service in shrines. These topics were discussed in small groups with ideas presented later at a plenary session, together with suggestions for the Provincial Administration.

On the second day of the congress, Fr. Janusz celebrated Mass and gave a homily before the congress participants and scholastics. He said that people in today's materially affluent and consumption-oriented societies do not practice deep spirituality; religion is often relegated to something of a cultural tradition. In a way, Oblate radicalism can address this issue. Radicalism leads to authenticity, whereas authenticity gives certainty that what we preach is true and is worth following and believing. If Oblate's radicalism has faltered, a return to the source of our vocations is needed: i.e. to prayer. Christ called us and gave us His authority and power, not for our own satisfaction or to take care of our own business – but to preach the Kingdom of God. (*Assumption Province News and Views*, December 2008)

FRANCE

Circles of Silence

Several months ago, the French Government and the European Parliament announced a harder stand on immigration laws. Several Christian Churches and associations involved in the fight for human dignity have subsequently mobilized.

In Toulouse, Franciscan Friars have created

the “circle of silence” which is also occurring in several French cities. Hundreds of persons concerned about the welcoming of immigrants gather in a big circle for an hour on a certain date...in silence.

The newspaper, “La Croix” had brought this to our attention. Also the Migrant Ministry of the diocese of Strasbourg put the issue on the agenda of pastoral councils. The first “circle of silence” was organized in Strasbourg on the magnificent Kleber Plaza on April 30, 2008.

Two of us Oblates were there, perhaps more sensitive than others to this witness of the gospel spirit. “He has sent me to evangelize the poor.” We were Jean PHILIPPE from the Ministry with Migrants and Olivier PEYRAT from the student chaplaincy and from ACAT (*Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture* – Christians in Action for the Abolition of Torture). Our older brethren, unable to join us physically, were one with us in prayer. There, we met several priests and committed Christian laity, as well as our friends from CIMADE (*Comité intermouvements auprès des évacués* – Cooperative Committee for the displaced) and our Reformed Lutheran confreres.

These are anonymous men and women for whom the defense of human dignity is an inviolable right. The “circle of silence” gathers on the 30th of each month from 6:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. On June 20, our Archbishop himself was present (a Franciscan who is very committed in social spheres, a former leader of Pax Christi and other charitable works). The local press supports the “circle of silence” with a monthly article after our gatherings of about 200 persons. The Oblates, as much as their time permits, assure a discrete but concrete presence. (Olivier Peyrat in *OMI-France*, 15 December 2008)

Canada-United States

NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP

New home for Oblate bishop

On January 5, 2009, the Vatican announced that Bishop Claude CHAMPAGNE had been named to the See of Edmundston, New Brunswick, in

Canada. Since 2003, he has been the auxiliary bishop of Halifax.

Bishop Champagne was born in 1947 in Lachine, Quebec. After his scholasticate in Ottawa and in Rome, he was ordained in 1975. He obtained

a doctorate in Missiology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1984. From 1975 until 1996, he was a member of the Missiology faculty at St. Paul University in Ottawa. From 1996 until his being called to the episcopate in 2003, he served as provincial of the former St. Joseph Province in Montreal.

Edmundston, according to 2006 statistics, had 49,368 Catholics among a population of 51,609 persons (95.7%). There were 27 diocesan priests and 10 from religious communities. The city of Edmundston was originally called Petit-Sault. It is located at the junction of the Saint John and Madawaska rivers, just across from the State of Maine in the USA. The logging industry has been very important to the citizens of Edmundston; on their side of the river, they produced the pulp that would be turned into paper at a mill on the US side of the border.

UNITED STATES

Anatole Baillargeon: 1914-2008

In 1973, Fr. Anatole "Benny" BAILLARGEON became a member of the General House community where he served as the director of **Oblate Information Services**. On December 18, 2008, at age 94, he died at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Residence in Tewksbury, Massachusetts.

Born in the province of Quebec, Canada, he joined the Oblates in the former St Jean-Baptiste Province in the United States where he pronounced his first vows as an Oblate in 1936. After his ordination in 1941, he worked in several levels of formation in his province.

In 1953, he became a full-time preacher of retreats but interrupted that ministry in 1961 to teach homiletics to future preachers at the Oblate scholasticate in Natick, MA. In 1967-68, he preached for several months in South Africa.

In 1968, he was asked to serve on the U.S. Catholic Mission Council in Washington DC. This lasted until he was called to Rome to the General House in 1973 to work with the Oblate Information Services. In this position, he was able to develop a global view of Oblate

activities. He traveled considerably and made friends everywhere. While in Rome he was also appointed Ecclesiastical Assistant to UNDA, the international Catholic organization for radio and television. He held this position from 1978 to 1994. His final return to the United States was in 1997; he retired from active ministry in 2001 because of failing health.

OMI LACOMBE

150 years in British Columbia

(The Vancouver Sun, December 11, 2008) While this year marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of British Columbia, it marks a similar milestone for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Catholic religious order whose involvement in B.C.'s history is visible in all corners of the province. On Sunday, the Oblates celebrated their 150th anniversary with a mass in St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Kitsilano.

"It seems all the celebrations this year have been secular, with no mention of the part played in the formation of the province by the various Christian denominations," said Oblate Father John BRIOUX, pastor of St. Augustine's. "And it's not just the part we played but the Anglican Church, too, which was here before we came," Brioux said.

In 1858, the Oblates opened their first church in the new colony -- St. Joseph's Mission -- in the Songhees village in the harbour of Victoria on the spot now occupied by the B.C. legislature, Brioux said. If that church is nothing more than a historical footnote, many of the Oblates' later churches, missions and residential schools -- from the grand to the humble -- remain part of the landscape.

Thousands of people working in downtown Vancouver pass by Holy Rosary Cathedral on Dunsmuir Street, perhaps the most beautiful example of Gothic Revival architecture in the city. It was built in 1900 by the Oblates, who mortgaged their headquarters in Rome to raise the money. It would later be wrested from them and claimed by the Vancouver archdiocese as its cathedral with the Oblates being given perpetual rights to what is now St. Augustine's parish.

There are only 65 Oblate priests and brothers in B.C. today, about a third of what there once were. Brioux spent many years as a priest in the Cariboo, Chilcotin and Shuswap regions. He was stationed at St. Joseph's Mission Ranch, south of Williams Lake, and would drive an old truck from one village or ranch to another, staying in a series of little houses built for priests on a circuit that would take a week or more to complete. Then he was sent to the Chilcotin Plateau and the native community of Anahim near Alexis Creek, where he stayed for 19 years, ministering in an enormous area that stretched west to Bella Coola and south to the Nemiah Valley.

A lonely existence? Not at all, he says. "I was too involved in the lives of the people. It was tremendous being there," he said. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, visiting the sick, saying mass, it was a busy time.

In the fall he would sometimes accompany hunters and one night while sitting around a campfire, one of his companions tossed a handful of .30-30 cartridges into the flames, causing panic with everyone -- except the prankster's wife -- scrambling to hide behind trees as bullets zipped haphazardly through the camp. "She sat there without flinching, bullets flying everywhere. I was terrified and when her husband came back she gave him such a thump for 'scaring Father.'"

He saw first-hand the "miraculous healing" at Alkali Lake in the late 1970s when the aboriginal community rejected alcohol after an Oblate brother convinced the chief and his family to join Alcoholics Anonymous. "I'll always be thankful for being there and seeing the transformation that took place as people totally turned their lives around and how this healing moved from village to village," Brioux said.

As the effects of Alkali Lake took hold, Brioux found himself on a spiritual journey he could never have imagined taking. Intrigued by the smoke from the sweat lodges he would see rising in the forest as he travelled from village to village, Brioux asked to take part in the sweats, the fasting ceremonies and vision quests of this reviving Indian spirituality, caused, he said, by

a loss of faith and a desire by some native people to find healing. Other Oblates were doing the same.

"When you journey with people who are seeking sobriety and serenity you will share in their pain, and they in yours. You leave yourself vulnerable. You meet people on their level and you embrace their suffering. As a priest you are changed forever," he said. "Some of the most profound spiritual experiences I've had were in those sweat lodges and the sense of peace was unbelievable."

He once did a 14-day quest that included a four-day fast, no food, no water, no talking, no reading and sitting up all night alone in the forest. "I remember the first time I spent a night like that. I was placed under a tree in the dark and the spot I was on was smudged with smoke and I said to the medicine leader, 'Can I have a candle?' and he just said, 'Don't you worry, Father, there's going to be plenty of light here soon.'" (Author: Gerry Bellett)

UNITED STATES

Mass for healing in Alaskan community

On November 27, 2008, an angry former employee entered the Soldotna, Alaska, community hospital where he shot two of the directors, killing one and seriously injuring the other. He himself was killed by the police after a shooting spree in the hospital parking lot.

On December 4, the Oblates who work on the Soldotna peninsula offered a healing Mass for the hospital staff at Our Lady of Perpetual Church. Three Oblate priests concelebrated the Mass: Fathers Andrew SENSENIG, Anthony DUMMER, and Joseph DOWLING. The Oblates have worked closely with the hospital's spiritual care coordinator to help bring comfort to Soldotna after the shooting.

"Nothing separates us from God," said Fr. Sensenig, during his homily. "We may have been tempted in these last eight days to feel that we are (separated), but I have seen not only horror, but also the gentle, courageous spirit of this community hold us together."

Meg Zerbinos, the spiritual care coordinator and a Catholic, organized an ecumenical approach during several events that were meant to bring healing and comfort. "From the very beginning, God's hand was with me. By sheer grace I was in a different building when the shooting started," Zerbinos said. "In the last eight days I've had such inner peace; I know God worked through me so that I had the strength to work with everyone at the hospital from the very first day."

The shooting reminded many of a unique aspect that only those who work in critical service positions can fully understand: they can't stop providing those services, even when tragedy hits home. Minutes after the attack, health care providers went right back to work: this time on members of their own staff. Holly West, an emergency room technician at CPH, was scheduled to work only hours after the shooting. She recalled Father Sensenig gave her a big hug before she went about her "business-as-usual" duties. "That meant a lot to me," West said.

She said she felt the healing Mass did her a lot of good, especially the anointing with the consecrated oil. "It's still with me, I can feel it on my hands," she said. "It's a reminder to me that Father Andy prayed for us to heal."

The healing Mass ended with the passing of candlelight from the Advent candle to each parishioner. Zerbinos said the Mass reminded her that "we are so lucky to be Catholic, because of all our rituals. I love our rituals." (*The Catholic Anchor*, Archdiocese of Anchorage, December 2008)

UNITED STATES

Helping newly-arrived priests adapt

Today's Catholic, the San Antonio Archdiocesan newspaper, carried an extensive article on Oblate School of Theology's International Priest Internship program.

Launched in 2003 with a \$1 million grant from the Lily Endowment, the program has seen more than 70 priests attending the training sessions. Last year, priests came from the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Nicaragua, Poland and Tanzania.

The internship provides a series of presentations assisting the priests to meet the challenges of acculturation. This means not only studying historical, political and religious realities of the country, but such mundane matters as improving diction and pronunciation. As one participant put it, "I may preach a beautiful homily, but if nobody understands what I said, I haven't put the message across."

Bishop Edmond Carmody of Corpus Christi, Texas, has enrolled priests in the program practically every year it's been available. "Having (the internship) for them in San Antonio is a great blessing. It makes a huge difference in the way they minister. It gives them great confidence and enables them to minister more effectively," he commented. Fr. Ron CARIGNAN has directed the program for three years. He sees it as a way to help priests become part of a *New Evangelization*. "They're missionaries, not substitute priests. The church has to be revitalized, and they are part of a new reality of a globalized world. The New Evangelization tries to address the needs created by increasing globalization." Fr. Henry WALKER has assumed directorship of the program. (*OMI USA*, December 2008)

OMI LACOMBE

Adventures of an Oblate Brother in the Great White Canadian Northwest

Prologue: Get comfortable, grab the drink of your choice, sit down on your favorite chair, perhaps near the fireplace, and read this short story entitled, "*The Adventures of an Oblate Brother in the Great White Canadian Northwest*".

Chapter 1: Once upon a time, long, long ago, in a previous millennium – in the year of our Lord 1998 to be exact – an Oblate Brother still in temporary vows, named Kurt STANG, being forty years old to be exact, lived in a land called Saddle Lake, Alberta, in the Great White Canadian Northwest. Being a not-so-rugged individual, he thrived in community with other Oblates of that great era, namely Sylvain LAVOIE, Steve ANDREAS, and Garry LABOUCANE. It was these three Oblates along with icons of a previous era like Albert LACOMBE and Roger VANDERSTEEN

who planted the seed in Kurt's heart to live and minister to and with the First Nations' Peoples of this great land. Within four years, that seed had taken root and grown strong enough to be transplanted in the neighboring land called Waterhen Lake, Saskatchewan, home to about 800 First Nations' People. It was here that Kurt would live, and minister to and with the people up to the present time.

Chapter 2: Let's get a "GPS" on his location and ministry. Waterhen Lake First Nation is located one hour northwest of Meadow Lake Saskatchewan or four and a half hours northwest of Saskatoon. His "castle", sometimes referred to as a mobile home, is nestled among trees only a stone's throw away from a lake of great legend known for its waters teeming with pickerel and northern pike of immense size (just ask any of the not-so-sober fishermen who have trolled these waters). Getting back to his home - did I call it a "castle"? Well, it is more than that because while "castles" tend to be cold and damp, Kurt's "castle" is very warm and comfortable, even in the dead of winter.

As is sometimes the case, those who live in castles have a second home. This is true for Brother Kurt who also lives in a grand house two to three days a week with Nestor GREGOIRE in Meadow Lake. Community life with Nestor is accented by monthly gatherings of the Oblates living in the area, namely John ZUNTI, Wendelin ROLHEISER, Mark BLOM, Robert LAROCHE, Bob STANG, Richard DOLL, and Ron DECHANT.

Now, as you know, people who live in "castles" often travel to far, distant lands. Kurt too, sets off to places like Victoria British Columbia, Prince George BC, Edmonton Alberta, Saskatoon and Regina Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg Manitoba to help bring peace and reconciliation to peoples throughout the land by means of a program called "Returning to Spirit" healing and reconciliation. As a member of a team of seven or eight people, Kurt helps deliver five-day workshops geared to bring deep healing and reconciliation between former residential school students (and their offspring) and the Oblates/

Church who administered these residential schools. While some people on both sides of the residential school issue have had predominantly good experiences, these workshops are designed for those who are "stuck" in some form of hurt or resentment. A vast majority of those who participate in these workshops experience a deep and genuine understanding, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Chapter 3: As is often the case, those who live in "castles" act as or employ an ambassador. The dictionary definition of ambassador is: "An important official who is sent by his or her government to live in a foreign country and to represent his or her own interests there." Let's re-phrase that: "As an ambassador, Bro. Kurt is sent by his own community to live in a foreign country/mission and represent his faith there". About half of Brother Kurt's ministry takes place on the great lands of the First Nations' Peoples of Waterhen Lake, Flying Dust (adjacent to Meadow Lake) and Ministikwan. A majority of this ministry takes the form of adult faith-development, sacramental preparation, and forming laity to lead such things as Sunday liturgies. All this is designed to help us live happily ever after. *(Submitted by Kurt Stang, OMI for www.omilacombe.ca)*

UNITED STATES

National Oblate Youth Encounter 2009

In July 2008, several young people and adult leaders from the San Fernando Valley of southern California participated in the International Oblate Youth Encounter in Melbourne, Australia. During that week they met and shared faith with more than 700 young people and leaders from Oblate parishes in every part of the globe. As friends and partners they traveled together to the World Youth Day with Pope Benedict and Catholic youth of the world.

Upon return, they shared their experiences with the Oblates and parish communities, and conceived an idea for an U. S. Oblate Youth Encounter in which youth from Oblate parishes across the country might gather, celebrate faith and generate energy for Christian commitment in the spirit of our Oblate charism.

The idea was adopted enthusiastically by the San Fernando community of Oblates at Santa Rosa, Mary Immaculate and St. Ferdinand. Receiving a favorable response from other Oblate youth leaders, a leadership group of parish youth ministries was enlisted to help plan a week of reflection, prayer and celebration to take place in San Fernando from July 13-17, 2009. An outing

to Universal Studios in Hollywood is in the plans. With the Holy Spirit's help, this can lay the groundwork for the International Oblate Youth Encounter preceding the 2011 World Youth Day in Spain. (*OMI USA*, December 2008. For more information, contact: Fr. Stan ZOWADA: email: stanzowada@yahoo.com)

Anniversaries for February 2009

65 Years of Priesthood

1944.02.27	06913	Fr. Fernand Estève	France
1944.02.27	06915	Fr. Pierre Mercier	France

60 Years of religious life

1949.02.17	08608	Fr. Charles de Campigneulles	Lacombe
1949.02.17	08605	Fr. Roland Tessier	Lacombe
1949.02.28	08609	Fr. John de Nobrega	Northern S. A.

60 Years of Priesthood

1949.02.05	07711	Fr. Joseph Juaire	United States
1949.02.17	07724	Fr. Jean Guéguen	France
1949.02.20	07887	Fr. Giangiacomo Coati	Italy
1949.02.20	07729	Fr. Jacques Delpierre	Belgium/Netherlands
1949.02.20	07751	Fr. Joao Hébette	Belgium/Netherlands
1949.02.20	07713	Fr. Gerard Heimerikx	Namibia
1949.02.24	07628	Fr. Armand Mathew	United States
1949.02.24	07678	Fr. Lucien Sawyer	United States
1949.02.27	07771	Fr. André Didon	Colombo
1949.02.27	07743	Fr. Anthelme Reignier	France
1949.02.27	07742	Fr. Hubert Sarrazin	France
1949.02.27	07727	Fr. Lucien Wisselmann	France

50 Years of Priesthood

1959.02.15	09393	Fr. Antonio Di Benedetto	Italy
1959.02.15	09394	Fr. Romualdo Lopardo	Italy
1959.02.15	10039	Fr. Walter Verzeletti	Italy

25 Years of religious life

1984.02.17	12953	Bro. Dariusz Wajs	Poland
1984.02.17	12952	Bro. Zygmunt Wolniak	General Administration

Suffrages for our Deceased

2008: No. 87-91
2009: No. 1-4

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Norman Racette* <small>*Not reported here at time of death.</small>	United States	10/11/1910	San Antonio	12/06/2008
Fr. Jacob Szwarc	Assumption	02/06/1934	Toronto	19/12/2008
Fr. Brian Flanagan	Anglo-Irish Province	28/02/1928	Dublin	20/12/2008
Fr. Arnold ten Tusscher	Belgium/Netherlands	14/12/1917	Hengelo	26/12/2008
Bro. Bernard Pauwels	Belgium/Netherlands	24/10/1932	Bruges	29/12/2008
Fr. Jean-Louis Arel	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	06/09/1914	Trois-Rivières	05/01/2009
Fr. Robert Braun	United States	29/08/1925	Belleville	10/01/2009
Fr. Luis Romero	Argentina/Chile	30/05/1953	Buenos Aires	19/01/2009

“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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