



Fr. General's Missionary Meditation

“Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice”

On December 24, before midnight Mass, in some places the solemn announcement of Christmas is sung. The old, medieval version of the Announcement, called “kalenda”, taken from the Roman Martyrology, proclaims the news that “in the year 5,199 of the creation of the world”, so many years after the flood, so much time after the birth of Abraham, etc, when Caesar Augustus reigned ... “Jesus Christ, the eternal God and the Son of the eternal Father, desirous to sanctify the world ... nine months after his conception was born in Bethlehem of Judah, made Man of the Virgin Mary”.

Every time I hear it, I am impressed by this announcement. The old text contains, of course, some factual inaccuracy. Centuries have gone by since the Middle Ages and science has discovered that creation happened much earlier than 5,000 B.C. Revised versions of the Announcement of Christmas now read “millions of years after the creation of the world ...”, etc. In fact, we should even say “billions”. According to what we know today, the universe is 13.7 billion years old and planet earth dates back 4.5 billion years, with life beginning around 4 billion years ago. But be it in the medieval or the actualized form, I find the Christmas announcement impressive because it connects the whole history of the universe to the one event of Christ's birth, which finally has happened in space and time. What we are touching here is the cosmic dimension of Christ's birth.

Here on earth, the vast universe has brought forth a beautiful flower which we have not yet observed anywhere else. Yes, creation has flourished here on our planet in an amazing way and the wonder appears even greater now that

we are discovering the much larger dimensions of all things in space and in time.

With the perspective of modern science, the faith vision of the cosmos should also become even more compelling. On Christmas, God himself visits a universe he has been sustaining and continuously creating for billions of years – from the “big bang”, to the galaxies, to the first and second generation stars – and has, in Christ, become part of his work. God did this here on this unique planet earth; right here he has become close to us.

The mystery also can be seen from another angle in Mary. She is the most beautiful, the Immaculate flower that has finally blossomed in creation after all this long time, and it was given to her to become the mother of the Eternal Word who made all things.

What should our response be to all that is implied with the cosmic perspective of Christmas?

For anyone who is able to admire God's work, it is firstly something that needs to be recognized and celebrated. With us human beings, or better: through our mouths, the earth and the whole universe need to enter into a festive mode as the Psalms suggest: “The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice”(Ps 97:1) - “Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice” (Ps 96:11)!

Secondly, the cosmic view of Christmas also requires our commitment to take care of creation. We human beings, flower and fruit of the universe, realize more and more that we bear responsibility for the planet that has brought

us forth. During this present Advent season, an important summit of world leaders is taking place: The United Nations Climate Change Conference of Copenhagen (December 7 to 18). The event is receiving much public attention and rightly so.

Our heritage, the earth, is in danger of irreparable damage. Some Oblates who are in connection with the UN have passed on to us a recent declaration of non-governmental organizations. It says: "Human beings are not distinct from nature, but are part of nature, and are now affecting nature in an alarmingly negative way". To avoid further destruction of our habitat – for instance, a further disappearance of species – decisive measures must be taken. One of the answers requires of the world powers to put numbers on the table and to reach a concrete and binding agreement is greenhouse gas reduction.

One motivation to do something decisive now, can be political urgency. If parts of the planet become inhabitable, damage is done not only to mother earth,

for instance through rising oceans, mass migrations but also armed conflicts can be expected.

For us disciples of Christ, in the light of Advent and Christmas a much deeper motivation is at hand. The traditional Announcement of Christmas tells us that since the dawn of creation – although not just 5,199 but 13.7 billion years ago – everything in the universe has been preparing the present time of a flourishing earth. And then at the fullness of time, this earth has brought forth its most precious fruit: Jesus Christ. This is the deeper reason for us Christians to be concerned about the integrity of creation. Planet earth was given to us so that we live on it and use it and from the faith point of view we should not consider it as a quarry of resource material we can exploit and then leave abandoned. Creation is a wonder of which we are part and in which God Himself has become tangible. Earth has even become God's own habitat, His true temple. We human beings must behave on earth as if we were walking the sacred grounds of a shrine!

General Administration

GENERAL HOUSE JPIC Convocation

Convened by the General Service of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation the following Oblates met in Rome on October 20-25th 2009.

The Regional Representatives were the following: Africa-Madagascar: Singini NACIDZE and Prosper NDJOLI; Asia-Oceania: Rohan SILVA and Joseph GOMES; Canada-United States: Walter BUTOR and Paul FEELEY; Latin America: Heinner PAUCAR and Guido ACOSTA; Europe: Tomas VYHNALEK and Kevin MCLAUGHLIN.

Other participants were: the OMI JPIC Committee Executive Board: Oswald FIRTH (Portfolio Holder), Luis Ignacio ROIS (General Councillor), Camille PICHE (Director); and Daniel LEBLANC (United Nations, New York), Seamus FINN (DC-USA Office), Jeevendra PAUL (Grant Director), Francisco O'Conair (Facilitator).

The JPIC Vision/Mission Statement as well as "Essentials for JPIC Animation" will be posted on our website: www.omi-jpic.org. Working groups are preparing a document to be presented to the Chapter Commission.

We affirmed that one of the biggest challenges we face today is to live in right relationship among ourselves, with all peoples and with the whole of creation in a sustainable and reverent manner. That statement as well as the reaffirmation of all JPIC ministries that Oblates are involved in at many different levels guided us in setting the following priorities:

Ecological and economic sustainability

- Committed to the cause of the poor in an unequal, unjust and devastating world, we Oblates understand that economic and ecological sustainability means a just and respectful relationship between humanity and creation that safeguards the earth, all

its inhabitants and resources for future generations;

- Recognizing that the actual social, political, economic and cultural structures have caused a breakdown in the relationship that must exist between all elements of nature, including human beings;
- Recognizing also that the actual economic system is creating an ever growing division between rich and poor both at the inter-personal level and between nations;
- We recommend that we work towards a style of life that will assure an integral relationship between humanity and nature; the protection of the ecology; a sustainable economy; ethical and responsible investments.

Human Rights

As Oblates with a mission to work with the most abandoned in whatever form or situation, we affirm that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. We are committed to work especially in promoting the rights of all people, as individuals and as communities, with special emphasis on Indigenous Peoples and migrants. All people should be respected and have access to basic human needs as well as enjoy the free exercise of civic, political and cultural rights, and a healthy community to live in.

A Commitment to Reconciliation

1. Identifying and acknowledging the nature of the historical divisions and animosity which exists between regions, countries, ethnic and racial groups, and
2. Exploring opportunities and learning tools and processes that can make a positive contribution to the peacemaking process, our commitment to reconciliation includes the following actions:

- That specific training in the work of conflict resolution and reconciliation at the social and political levels, for instance between ethnic and racial groups, be included in the initial and ongoing formation curriculum.
- That the training also include the rupture that has been identified and recognized between humankind and the earth in various and sundry situations and contexts.
- That the General Council create a team of Oblates and laity that could be assembled to be a resource for Oblates and others for the work of reconciliation especially in zones of conflict where Oblates are working.

An emphasis on Education and Formation

- We consider the promotion of basic literacy and education to be fundamental in involving people in their search for greater dignity and opportunities.
- We have reaffirmed the priority of JPIC in many General Chapters and declared in our Constitutions and Rules that “action on behalf of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is an integral part of evangelization.” We believe that preparation and updating for this dimension of our mission should be included in all of our formation programs. This includes the different stages of initial formation, ongoing formation and leadership training programs that are planned at different levels of the congregation.
- We also consider that people deserve the right to assume responsibility along with Oblates as an integral part of our mission. Catholic Social teaching and JPIC training needs to be an integral part of formation programs for the laity.

Europe

SPAIN

CEM Congress in Pozuelo

Some 38 persons took part in the CEM (European Mission Conference) Congress held

in Pozuelo (Madrid), Spain, on October 20-23, 2009. All but one Unit of the European Region were represented. Oblate and lay participants enjoyed a fruitful and enriching meeting in a very friendly atmosphere.

It became clear to us that there is a great variety of ministries in Europe. Yet we share a common mission in parish ministry. Many Oblates and associates work directly or indirectly in or with parishes. During the meeting, we shared many experiences of parish work in the different Units.

Parish ministry is currently experiencing a time of change, a time of transition. This change and this transition are taking place in society, in the world and in the Church. In his presentation, Father Daniel CORJIN explained this situation to us very clearly. The delegates also shared their own experiences of parish work, leading to new life, hope and vision.

We were able to identify the essential elements of an Oblate parish in different settings. One of the questions we discussed was: "What vision do we, as Oblates, have for our mission in and with parishes?" At the end of our meeting, we were able – assisted by Fr. Corijn - to create a vision of parish ministry for the near future. In Unit groups, we considered the next concrete steps to put this vision into place. Now it is important to work and make the results and experiences of this meeting fruitful in the Units.

Some of the aspects of this vision for parish ministry are the following:

Concerning the involvement of lay people in parishes, already a lot is being done on the level of liturgical service, charitable commitment and administration through Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Committees. More could be done on the level of sharing in leadership roles. For that to happen, certain obstacles have to be overcome: lay people are generally not enough aware of their common priesthood, and priests seem to be afraid of losing power.

Concerning youth, it was agreed that everywhere, faith is transmitted from one generation to the next through the witness of parents and/or grandparents, enhanced by the catechetical programs of the parish. However, it seems rather difficult to keep in touch with young people once they have received Confirmation. Youth movements are in place in certain parishes and activities such as pilgrimages

and action for Justice and Peace are organized by both parishes and movements. But more needs to be done if we want the youth to remain in touch with Christ and his Church.

Parishes served by Oblates need to have a missionary attitude, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Generally speaking, people in parishes do reach out to the poor, the sick and the old. More could be done to reach the unchurched and the unbelievers. In many parishes, there exist mission groups that help overseas missions and thus create a missionary spirit within the parish. Oblate parishes should be seen as permanent missions. (Felix REHBOCK)

FRANCE

"20 years in the freezer: that really preserves!"

Each year, usually in November, OMI-France, the bulletin of the French Province, publishes a brief account of the life of the members of the province that have died in the past year. While each of these is a beautiful story of an Oblate life well-lived, we have chosen to share with our readers something about Father Robert HARAMBURU who served the General Administration as Secretary for the Missions, beginning in 1966. In that capacity, he was able to meet many Oblates throughout the world. He died at the age of 96 on April 10, 2009.

There are men who gain something by being known but whom others also gain something by knowing them. Father Haramburu is one of those. This Basque powerhouse was born at Biarritz in 1913, and if he had not taken Holy Orders with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, it's an easy bet that he would have had a brilliant career as a professional athlete. This colossus with porcelain blue eyes was, nevertheless, a model of humility, generosity, modesty and kindness. One must add that the Oblates make a vow of obedience above all. But to return to the story, Fr. Haramburu was, first of all, a 1930 finalist in the French junior championship of Basque hand-ball. During his military service, he was French army rugby champion at Paris, Infantry Regiment in 1933-34. That shows that he was in shape and had, perhaps, the physical endurance to face the great adventures that were awaiting him.

Ordained a priest in 1939, he was part of the regiment of Moroccan sharpshooters at Nice. “I was a prisoner for five years in Germany,” he tells, “and then I left for Canada and that’s where I stayed... for 20 years as a missionary priest. For 10 years, I was in charge of a parish 400 km long with 700 residents of Mackenzie. There was wide-open space,” he adds, smiling, “then I was in charge of the whole district of Mackenzie: three times the size of France with 25,000 inhabitants. From there, I moved to Hudson Bay: three times the size of France with 7,000 inhabitants; I was provincial there for four years. There, I had nothing more to do than one thing: to learn to speak some words in Eskimo in order to communicate just a little bit with my neighbors.”

But that’s not all. Fr. Haramburu continued to obey, and when they called him to Rome in 1966 as Secretary of Missions for his congregation, he left the ice for the Roman sun. “This gave me the opportunity to visit our missions in Africa, North America and Central America. I really made a trip around the world, beginning in Sri Lanka, passing through Laos, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Japan. I came back through Canada. That way I gained an extra day in my life: I met the sun coming up in the east.” Then he adds, always in a joking tone, “That’s why I don’t know my age! And after five years at the very tip of South Africa, they called me back to Nice, and since I am obedient, here I am!” In his great wisdom, Fr. Haramburu recognized that all these experiences were for him a constant source of privilege and enrichment. When asked to what he attributed his youthful allure, he laughingly answered: “20 years in the freezer: that really preserves!” No one would dare contradict him since few men could pride themselves in having succeeded with such cleverness in stealing a day from the good Lord.

BELGIUM/NETHERLANDS

In memory of Fr. André Nottebaert

For the occasion of the 100th birthday of Father NOTTEBAERT, the Oblate review “Vie Oblate Life” (No. 68 – 2009, I, pp. 87-100) published an article by Fr. Jean-Pierre CALOZ (former General Councillor for Europe) where he compiled a number of testimonies of persons who

knew and lived with the centenarian. It was only after the preparation of the article that the death of Father André was known and announced by the review. Fr. François DUPONT, in charge of the Bulletin de Liaison, Secteur Belgique-Sud, shares with us a few excerpts from that edition.

Superior of the Roman scholasticate.

In 1947, André Nottebaert became Provincial of Belgium and at the end of his term, in September 1953, he was named superior the Roman scholasticate.

Thus, he succeeded Father Jean DROUART, who was elected Assistant General by the Chapter of May 1953. He had already preached the community retreat at the scholasticate in 1950. Father Alexandre TACHÉ was called to Rome at that time to be one of the formators and to pursue doctoral studies in theology. He was with Fr. Nottebaert during the whole period of his mandate and he is a privileged eyewitness of that era.

At that time, there were as many as 100 scholastics in the community. That called for some important physical re-arrangements in Rome as well as at the vacation house in Roviano. It was also a time when they were beginning to think about a new building, larger, healthier and quieter. Little interested in the administrative aspects of his role, Fr. Nottebaert left those, for the most part, in the hands of his associates, in order to dedicate himself almost entirely to the ministry in which he felt most at ease, preaching and spiritual formation.

The great contribution of Fr. Nottebaert would be the spiritual animation and formation which he gave to several generations of scholastics, or, in the words of Fr. Taché:

“Since his personality was rather reserved and he was very busy with his ministry, Father did not get involved much in the community of scholastics and did not spend his vacations with the community in Roviano. He left those concerns to the staff who also took over the relations with the universities and the writing of various reports. I can testify that he had complete confidence in them.” (...)

Concerning permissions, Fr. Hubert LAGACÉ notes:

As an amusing yet very revealing example, Fr. Nottebaert was not afraid of telling us that he granted all permissions because he knew that we had considered them seriously before asking. Some were not afraid to make a joke, even at his expense, in asking for peculiar things.

For example, they tell the story of Donald Blackwell who came to him one day and asked for permission to go to the ordination of a relative. "Of course, go ahead," said Father, but in rethinking it, he asked: "And where is this ordination?" "Boston," responded Donald, laughing. They understood each other!

Another anecdote: during the coulpe at the beginning of the 1958 school year, after having commented on the Rule, the superior took the list of scholastics and began with the first one on the list (editor's note: the youngest of the new arrivals in the first year). He said: "Brother MATSOSO, would you make your coulpe?" Everyone began to laugh. Surprised, the superior asked: "Didn't I pronounce it properly?" "No," everyone responded in unison, "but Brother Matsoso has not yet arrived!"

Concerning spiritual conferences, Fr. Hubert Lagacé continues:

As scholastics, we knew Fr. Nottebaert through his spiritual conferences. For many of us, these were high energy, far from the earthy realities of daily life in Rome. For others, they were a course in spiritual and mystical theology. In fact, and in retrospect, these conferences were a bright spot on our journey as men, as religious and as future priests... For him, a spiritual conference was not limited to a "fervorino," or to a disciplinary reminder, or to casuistry and exegesis. He was no prefect of discipline or teacher of children. (...)

The formation that he gave was addressed to adults. For him, a scholasticate was not a nursery nor a greenhouse nor a trade school... His priority was that we would grow in our "being," more than in our knowing and our having... Finally, Fr. Nottebaert was no athlete, nor jaded

administrator, nor born communicator; he was first of all a man of God. If he insisted on studies ... it was to free us from ready-made formulas, from dogmatic securities and from superficial guesswork.

SPAIN

To promote youth ministry in Europe

This past November 13-17, we had a meeting of the European Committee on Youth and Vocation ministry; it took place at our Emmaus Spirituality House in Pozuelo de Alarcón. At the same time, a group of six Oblates who make up the European Formation Bureau joined us. We shared one day of our meeting with them. Also with us were Fr. Chicho ROIS, Counsellor for Europe; Fr. Fernando DE LA PAZ, provincial delegate for this committee; and Fr. Wojciech KLUJ, secretary of the CIE (Interprovincial Conference of Europe).

For us, these days were an historic moment for various reasons.

First of all, there was the presence of delegates for youth ministry from the various provinces of Europe (Italy, France, Central European Province, Anglo-Irish Province, Poland, Ukraine and Spain); several youth that accompanied the Oblates; as well as the presence of two Oblate Sisters and a member of COMI. We discussed ministry not only for youth but with youth.

Secondly, the Region of Europe took ownership of the preparation and programming of the next Oblate Days prior to World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011. The cordiality and the family atmosphere set the tone for these days of sharing among ourselves. Over the weekend, part of the Organizing Committee for the Oblate Encounter of 2011 joined us and helped us to understand the event. We spent the whole weekend discussing it. We concluded by voting on an Oblate logo.

Over the following three days, we tried to share about the reality of youth ministry in each of our provinces. Over the course of the year, we will continue to show the various displays that our brothers left us concerning the activities going

on in each Oblate Unit. We then planned next year's formation meeting for Oblates involved in youth ministry and for youth in mission with us. This will take place in Marino (Italy) during the week of July

5-11. We will try to delve more deeply, with St. Eugene, into our work with youth. We would like three or four representatives from each Oblate Unit. (<http://jovenesoblatos.over-blog.es/>)

Africa-Madagascar

CONGO

“Rise up, take up your pallet, and walk!”

Antonietta Mongiò, a member of the Italian secular institute, Oblate Cooperators of Mary Immaculate (COMI), writes of the poverty she sees every day in Kinshasa, DRC.

The rains have finally arrived in Kinshasa. We were expecting them for at least a month, after the dry season and the first really hot days. Word was going around that the Chinese had worked magic in order to block the rain, because the streets of Kinshasa are huge construction sites and the water would have caused problems for the outcome of their work projects.

In fact, the city is one big construction site in the control of the Chinese who are building streets, hotels, hospitals. It's all part of a political-economic collaboration plan between the governments, whereby, on the one hand, there is a country rich in natural resources but in need of infrastructures and without the means to build them, and on the other hand, there is an immense power in full growth, hungry for the mineral wealth of this land. I won't go into things beyond my competency, but one must ask how much all of this will be a real advantage for this country.

Why in the world are they building so many hotels? And so many monuments? Why are they thinking of a superhighway while the only access roads to the outlying districts are impassable? Why install a fiber optic system when only 15% of the population, obviously the rich, is able to enjoy a stable flow of electricity? They are building a mega-hospital, but if you go to the university clinic, which should be at the heart of professional competency and research, you want to run away because of the lack of care, the filth and the lack of resources.

The contradictions go on, and the poor stand there wondering where all of this will lead. For example, to widen the boulevards, they have cut down all the trees (waiting for a taxi on the edge of the street has become a calvary, not only because of the means of transport, but also because there is not a bit of shade to stand under); they have also destroyed many homes. The Chinese have begun to struggle with the Congolese over the little food stands on the edges of the streets. The cost of living is growing, as is the lack of jobs. The doctors go on strike in order to have a bit of regular wages, and in the meantime, the people die: the strike ends with nothing resolved and with the awareness that it will begin again, sooner or later.

One could become discouraged, especially because at times one gets the impression that, in this sea of misery, everybody thinks only of himself, not excluding betrayals, compromises and exploitation on various levels. They lose sight of their grand feeling of solidarity which is, on the other hand, a characteristic value in Africa.

Following a bit the work of the Synod, I was struck by something the bishops said and wrote in their final message: “In all this, Africa is the most hit. Rich in human and natural resources, many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crisis and chaos. These are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good and this often through a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests....

“In most cases, we are dealing with greed for power and wealth at the expense of the people and nation. Whatever may be the responsibility of foreign interests, there is always the shameful and tragic collusion of the local leaders. ... The

negative consequence of all this is there before the whole world: poverty, misery and disease; refugees within and outside the country and overseas, the search for greener pastures which leads to brain drain, clandestine migration and human trafficking, wars and bloodshed, often by proxy, the atrocity of child soldiers and unspeakable violence against women. How can anybody be proud of “presiding” over such chaos? What has happened to our traditional African sense of shame? This Synod proclaims it loud and clear: it is time to change habits, for the sake of present and future generations. ... Africa, rise up, take up your pallet, and walk!” (Jn 5:8)

Typical of our daily experience is to make of this Gospel text “rise up, take up your pallet and walk,” the slogan at the root of our presence and of our service among the poorest of the poor. I believe it is possible to express the heartfelt feelings which spring up at the sight of children who are poorly nourished, sick, dirty and abandoned such as we take in at Siloe: rebellion and sorrow, love and helplessness. Much could change if each person became responsible for what little he has been given; if people were more able to become involved and to act. It’s important to form people to become responsible and we try to do our part, but our poor words become lost in the pressure to find 500 francs to buy a bit of food, or the money for school tuition, or to pay the rent. Our words quickly go unheard in the midst of the sea of words preached by pastors of sects that sell an impossible happiness and a mythic future, confusing hearts and consciences (what they are really doing is robbing the people of the little bit of money that they do have).

Nevertheless, this is the reality where the Lord has put us and, at times, perhaps nails us to it so that our being here, our remaining here might mean something beyond what we ourselves can see. And what gives us strength and joy are the little things which come along, not always every day, as something positive to counterbalance and neutralize all that which seems false and empty. To side with the poor is at times possible; to put oneself in their place is not, because one cannot even imagine, at least I believe, the thoughts and feelings that fill the heart and mind of someone

who sees her own children dying of hunger. We can only try to be instruments, at times a bit out of tune, certainly small, but who give everything in order to serve and to love. For life goes on, at times heavy-handedly, and forces us to hope and to believe.

NATAL

Website in honor of Archbishop Hurley

A new website has been inaugurated to tell the whole world the story of the great Oblate Archbishop of Durban, Denis HURLEY (1915-2004). The following comes from the homepage of this site (<http://www.archbishopdenishurley.com>).

Archbishop Denis Hurley was the most significant Catholic leader in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. During this time, he gave himself unstintingly to promoting freedom, justice and peace in this country, as well as Church renewal, especially through the implementation of Vatican II.

He wrote numerous articles and gave addresses on a wide range of issues, as well as engaging in countless initiatives to promote these causes. His prophetic witness made him a significant contributor to the downfall of apartheid. It is fitting that his legacy should be made known to as wide an international audience as possible.

This website therefore includes writings which have not previously been accessible (such as several scholarly papers on Teilhard de Chardin, a complete collection of all the hymns Hurley wrote and "The Protest", a play that has not previously been published). We provide information about organisations and initiatives which seek to keep alive his vision (such as the Denis Hurley Peace Institute, in Pretoria, and the Denis Hurley Centre, in Durban). There is also information about the two major archival collections of Hurley papers (the archives of the Archdiocese of Durban and of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Denis Hurley Library at St Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara).

In the course of research for the recently-published first full-length biography of the

Archbishop - *Guardian of the Light* - Denis Hurley: *Renewing the Church, Opposing Apartheid*, published by Continuum of New York and London, many people were interviewed in South Africa and overseas. An edited version of some of these interviews is published here, and will be replaced by others as time passes.

ZAMBIA

Bringing hope to prisoners in Mongu

Prison ministry has been very interesting and enriching for Bro. George MANDONA, a Zambian scholastic in his regency year in Mongu. He describes the times and visits he has spent with the prisoners as being gracious.

In the beginning, the Silozi language was the biggest obstacle for effective communication with the inmates. Through the ministry, he has learnt the language and the cultural gestures permitted in the Western Province.

The inmate's desire for the word of God has made Bro. George search deeper for the answers to the many questions they have. Most of the questions have been answered not only with the help of scriptures but also through the introduction of some programs such as legal aid, education, sports, health care, raising pigs and garden projects. These programs have made the inmates feel self-sustained.

The prison has inadequate funds to enable it carry out certain programs such as reformation of the inmates and refurbishing of structures. Despite this, Bro George was happy to observe that the prisoners are being provided with basic needs. He is most grateful to the lay faithful who have proved to be helpful all the time. Most of these lay groups are from parishes within the Mongu Diocese. They render help in prison pastoral care through Eucharistic celebrations, counseling, teaching the catechism and linking inmates with their families.

Bro. George hopes to see the Mongu prison become self-sustaining through various projects and activities from which the inmates and staff will benefit directly or indirectly. (OMI-Zambia, November-December 2009)

CONGO

A visit to Kinshasa

During the month of August 2009, four auxiliary members of the Oblate Cooperators of Mary Immaculate, visited the COMI members working in Kinshasa DRC. The following is an account of this visit by one of the women in the group, Raffaella, who traveled with her husband, Gianni.

The idea of a visit to Congo had been germinating since the departure of the small COMI community for Kinshasa, and the thought of actually doing it matured simply and spontaneously, both for me and for Gianni.

For my part, ever since Ada put me in contact with the COMI, the OMI and the Auxiliary, and having always been taken by the allure of the mission, by the Oblate spirit, and by the stories of those who went there and returned, I felt it was the moment for a hands-on experience of the mission and the life of those who had left home to be with the poor. Gianni, after getting to know the COMI and Antonietta in particular, and having heard her stories of a distant place, was curious to learn how the Oblate spirit is lived out among the poor. Therefore, united as we are by a sensitivity and special concern for the little ones, we told ourselves that perhaps the moment had come to be more resolute with ourselves and to get going! And then too, we were moved by a desire to be able to live an experience of charity together, as a couple, and to be able to make a journey that might, among other things, give a different tone to our own union, and then to our family: a togetherness that would always have within it a touch of the Other, the touch of charity!

From the moment we got off the plane, the impression of the city of Kinshasa was shocking; we immediately noticed that poverty was everywhere, on every corner, in every neighborhood, on every street, in every place, right beside you.

In the two weeks we stayed there, we came to understand a truth that we had not realized until that moment; we realized that there is no such thing as a dignified and serene poverty.

Real poverty, the poverty that is suffered and endured and lived every moment of one's existence, is simply UGLY. It goes with one, step after step, like shackles, leaving one very little gracious and social respectability. It leads one to brutal and undignified behavior that is annoying because you expect the poor person, besides being unhappy, to be also sensible. Poverty shatters your principles and leads to all sorts of compromises; you pretend to be deaf-mute; you sell yourself short. Surely, in every darkness there is some hint of light, but it was really troubling us and after a few days, we were tempted to tell ourselves that there is nothing to be done against misery that is as widespread, as all-embracing, as immense as can be seen in a city like Kinshasa, with about 10 million inhabitants.

Yet with all the effort to get up each day and deal with one more poor person knocking at the door, of accepting the other person, different and poor as he is, the COMI work moves forward, in a simple but dignified house in Kinshasa; they make the effort not only to accept those poor persons but to love them, even to the point of being with them every day in some new way.

August 15 was a special day because we organized a lovely party for the children at the Siloe Center. After days of seeing these children looking sad and always somewhat passive, we finally succeeded in getting them to dance and sing and smile. We arrived in the morning to prepare a few balloons and put out the chairs; we had invited 50-60 children but in the end, we counted at least twice that number.

The most powerful moments of our stay in Congo were the days we spent at the Siloe Center, between seeing a baby being born and preparing food for the malnourished children in the Selembao neighborhood; there we experienced the beauty of giving, but also came into contact with illness, the people in the clinic suffering from malaria. The most wonderful moments and also the most relaxed were those that we spent at home with the COMI of Kinshasa, Antonietta, Giovanna, Josè and Josephine, where we shared the daily life of the mission.

We take home with us from this experience the sweetness of the COMI in welcoming us with simplicity and with so much attention to our needs, our difficulties, but also our being a couple; we admire the energy of those who stay behind, knowing that they need a real interior strength and a special grace from God to continue amidst so many difficulties and not just human ones; we remember our contact with the poorest of the poor but also the more practical difficulties such as the electricity that comes and goes; the cold and irregular water supply, the flies that are so welcoming of everyone that no one is spared. We remember having the courage to put each new day into God's hands, without expecting too much, knowing that we were dealing with a people who, while truly good and different from ourselves, were far from our way of seeing, doing and explaining things. (COMInsieme, October 2009)

BOTSWANA

An historical mission

Father Stephen MOLEFI describes the historical significance of St. Conrad's Mission in Botswana, a mission of the Province of Lesotho.

"St. Conrad's Mission at Ramotswa, in Botswana, is of great historical significance. First, the mission was founded by the Oblates in 1935. Father Victor KRESS was the first resident priest. The Oblates were coming from Kimberley, in South Africa. Due to problems of personnel, the Oblates left Ramotswa on April 6, 1952; and were replaced by the Passionists.

"Now the Oblates are back at Ramotswa. They arrived in January 2008, to replace the Passionists. At present, Ramotswa is served by two Oblates: Fr. Raymond LEUTA and myself.

"Another point of great historical significance is that the first Motswana ever to join the Oblate Congregation came from Ramotswa. He is the late Father Joseph MOTSUMI. Furthermore, Father Motsumi was ordained to the priesthood by the late Archbishop Emmanuel MABATHOANA of Maseru, in 1958.

"The final point of great significance is that 10

members of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (M.A.M.I) from Lesotho visited St. Conrad's Mission, at Ramotswa, on June 26-30, 2009; to introduce the Association to Batswana and to recruit new members. Thanks to their efforts, now M.A.M.I. exists in Botswana." (*Maoblata*, December 2009)

LESOTHO

An African missionary for Canada

Father Pascal Pali PITSO left Lesotho on Monday, November 16, 2009, for the Oblate Province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap, in Canada, where he is going to work as a missionary. It is our expectation that a few more Oblates from the Lesotho Province will follow him in the near future.

When speaking about this new missionary challenge, Father Jean-Claude GILBERT, Provincial of Notre-Dame-du-Cap, states: "We are very happy to receive Oblates from Lesotho. It is a good sign of missionary collaboration. I think our predecessors never thought, seventy years ago, that one day you would come to our country as

missionaries. We thank you very much."

According to Father Gilbert, Basotho Oblates will work mainly in the Amerindian missions which are located in the James Bay territories. Fr. Gilbert explains: "These are 'poor people' looking for their fair place within the Canadian society. The missionary challenge is immense because we are dealing with small human groups scattered over large territories. We are dealing with fairly small Christian communities, profoundly injured by different dependencies (alcohol, drugs, etc.) and their resulting consequences. Even though some significant progress has been registered in the last few years, there is still much suffering."

Fr. Gilbert further explains: "Since a few years ago, some churches, especially the Anglicans, and more recently, the Pentecostal and Evangelicals, have come onboard. We must therefore put in place and promote with them an inter-religious dialogue; and we must take this into account in our pastoral and missionary work." (*Maoblata*, December 2009)

Asia-Oceania

PHILIPPINES

Two Oblates honored by Cotabato City government

The government of Cotabato City, on its 50th anniversary as a chartered city on June 19, 2009, has honored 50 of her illustrious sons and daughters for their achievements and contributions to the city.

There were hundreds nominees, both dead and alive, who are considered outstanding 'Cotabatenos' for their life achievements, work and lives during the 50 years of the city's chartered existence.

Among the 50 so honored in the last 50 years, two Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were cited for their work and contribution to the City of Cotabato.

The late Canadian, Archbishop Gerard

MONGEAU, the first Oblate Mission Superior and Bishop of Cotabato, was recognized for his contribution to the city in the field of education through the Notre Dame School system and the Church's social action work that gave rise to two housing projects, the Notre Dame Village and the Krislamville.

Fr. Eliseo "Jun" MERCADO, former President of Notre Dame University and presently the Director of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) is cited for his contribution to peace, development and clean elections as NAM-FREL Chair for Mindanao; He is known as an eminent peace advocate, both on the regional and the national levels, and for the continuing round table discussions, forums and debates that seek to shape policies that affect genuine autonomy and good governance in Mindanao, particularly in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. (OBCOM Phil --- 8/31/2009)

Latin America

URUGUAY

At least a Hail Mary...

Mission roads are sometimes unpredictable. Always when we set out to visit the countryside, we need to be wary of mishaps: sometimes it is the rain that turns the roads into rivers of mud; sometimes there are gorges impossible to cross; sometimes there are wooden bridges which, to pass over them, it is necessary to pray at least a Hail Mary, unless you want to be a guest of the fish; at times, the car stops before going through a gate and you need a tractor or a horse to pull it.

This time, just as I was about to cross over a bridge to the town of Los Furtado, my pick-up truck stopped. In spite of all my efforts, it would not move. What to do? Furthermore, I don't know anything about motors. Well, I had to wait about two hours, time enough to pray not only a Hail

Mary but the whole rosary. Fortunately, some local people came along. When they learned that the Padre was stuck on the road, they came to encourage me and they went to find someone who could do something about the motor. While they went to find help, a child stayed behind to be with me and, as if that were not enough, they gave me some delicious lettuce from their garden. Really, the waiting time passed before I knew it since I could divert myself over *mate* (*South American beverage*) with one or the other of the workers coming from the fields. Finally, the mechanic arrived to solve the problem and then, thanks be to God, I could go back home.

Of course, I was unable to meet with the local community. A lost opportunity? Time wasted? No! The mission of preaching the Gospel happens in that way too. Until the next adventure.... (Fr. Luis D'ANGELO)



Anniversaries for January 2010

65 Years of priesthood

1945.01.06	07401	Fr. Jean Colson	France
1945.01.06	07402	Fr. Noël Savina	France

60 Years of religious life

1950.01.03	08767	Fr. Louis Fournier	Lacombe
1950.01.25	08795	Fr. Carmelo Iuculano	Italy

60 Years of priesthood

1950.01.29	07852	Fr. Louis-Philippe Roy	Lacombe
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50 Years of religious life

1960.01.06	11011	Fr. Gerard Lodi	Northern S. A.
1960.01.06	11364	Bro. Gerard Ramokoatsi	Lesotho
1960.01.07	10822	Fr. Joseph Samarakone	Colombo
1960.01.25	10823	Bro. Oscar González	Argentina-Chile

25 Years of religious life

1985.01.06	13075	Fr. Joseph Morena Koetlisi	Lesotho
1985.01.06	13000	Fr. Innocent Mojaho Phangoa	Lesotho
1985.01.06	13001	Fr. Ernest Khothatso Pheku	Lesotho
1985.01.06	12999	Fr. Laurence Mokhali Takatso	Lesotho
1985.01.25	12852	Fr. Robert Berroa	Paraguay
1985.01.25	12835	Fr. Alberto Ghiglia	Mexico
1985.01.25	13334	Bro. Pascual Jiménez	Bolivia
1985.01.25	12840	Fr. Hugo Oliva	Mexico
1985.01.26	12859	Fr. Reginald Anthony	Northern S. A.
1985.01.26	12841	Fr. Sylvester David	Natal
1985.01.26	12842	Fr. Alan Henriques	Natal

Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 92-103

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Angelo Bennati	Italy	12/03/1931	Cazzano di Tramigna	04/11/2009
Fr. Remigio Salzillo	Italy	02/08/1919	San Prisco	05/11/2009
Fr. Josef Mateus	Namibia	01/12/1966	Otjiwarongo	06/11/2009
Fr. John Hann	United States	02/07/1926	Tallahassee	07/11/2009
Fr. James Mac Donell	Lacombe	30/12/1928	St. Albert	11/11/2009
Fr. Louis Martin	France	05/01/1940	Charleville-Mézières	12/11/2009
Fr. Leo LeBlanc	United States	11/03/1941	Mission Hills	16/11/2009
Fr. Ephraim Mailula	Northern Province, South Africa	04/04/1940	Moroka	20/11/2009
Fr. Fausto Pelis	Italy	04/06/1942	Vercelli	20/11/2009
Fr. Giovanni Galperti	Italy	14/07/1931	Onè di Fonte	23/11/2009
Fr. Lawrence Deery	United States	29/05/1915	Tewksbury	23/11/2009
Fr. Hermann Moring	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	24/11/1917	Richelieu	26/11/2009

“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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