



Father General's Missionary Meditation God's Word finding new ways

In number eight of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules we read: "We will always be close to the people with whom we work ... [we] seek out new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts".

In December, I spent four weeks in Sri Lanka. On the Island, the Congregation boasts of two vibrant Oblate Provinces totaling 260 members. I was happy to see Oblates being close to the people and seeking out new ways for the Word of God.

Most of our confreres are young. Youthful energy as well as the wisdom of the elders is much needed in the present situation of the country, a few months after the guns of war have fallen silent. A great multitude, numbering nearly 100,000, still live in camps and need to be resettled; psychological help must be offered to those depressed by grief and haunted by traumas; animation programs for affected children and youth are urgent; and above all there remains the task to bring about a deep reconciliation that could overcome 30 years of war and 60 years of strained relationship between two ethnic groups. Where to start? What to do next? How to give momentum to a movement of reconciliation broad enough to bring about healing of relationships, trust and a proper, lasting peace for a whole country?

This is the present context of our Oblate mission in Sri Lanka, which of course needs to follow its ordinary work as well. Many responses are already being given or are in the process of being worked out. Let me recount to you just one conversation we had among Oblates at Trincomalee in the north-east of the Island. I was told about the hardships people in our parish had

gone through: five years ago the tsunami -- since they live close to the sea -- and this year, the final phase of the war which killed tens of thousands and affected almost every family. I asked the local Oblates the question: how can people cope with all these disasters, and for those who are Christians, how does their faith resist? Are we able to help in any way?

The answer I received was twofold. Firstly, the Oblates admitted that they often remained without words after listening to peoples' grievances. All they could offer was a compassionate presence. They were told by the people that this helped them more than words to cope with desperate situations. Constitution 9 calls this being "close to the people with whom we work".

I must say that when visiting several places in Sri Lanka that had suffered, in both of our two provinces, but especially in the north, and listening to stories that were told, I too, found it hard to say anything. I could only offer a listening ear.

Secondly, the Oblates in Trincomalee explained to me that in extreme situations, it would not be in human words where the Christians would find answers to their questions. People had learned to listen directly to the Word of God, without much need of interpretation; they could apply it to their lives. It found an echo in their hearts when they heard biblical words, for instance about earthquakes and wars that are to come, but that this is not yet the end; and when they listened to exhortations like "when these signs begin to happen, stand upright and raise your heads

because your redemption is at hand” (Lk 21:28).

Does this not give us a clue for dramatic moments when so much needs to be done and we do not know where to start? This simple parish community in Trincomalee made us Oblates understand that the best service we can offer to people does not come from our own strength. They do find help if they can get into an immediate connection with the very source of hope, grace and strength, as it can be found in God’s Word. Constitution 9 speaks of seeking out “new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts”.

God communicates not only with Christians. In many of the Oblates’ activities in Sri Lanka, the largest number of beneficiaries are people of faiths other than Christianity. The Oblates work with children and youth at large; they run orphanages, have started an English academy, continue to establish counseling centers (I saw three or four of them), are getting more deeply

involved in JPIC activities and all these benefit a cross-section of the population with a majority of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. Also, in these activities, God’s grace can be seen at work, since what people receive is clearly more than our limited, human contribution can warrant.

During my visit, I discovered anew the secret of any missionary work: it lies in becoming intermediaries so that people come into contact by themselves with the very source of life. Especially in a post-war situation like in Sri Lanka, it becomes evident that reconciliation and peace can only be God’s business. God alone can forgive our sins and make us forgive the offenses of others; God alone can give new life after so much death. In these circumstances, we realize that we are missionaries, not so much through what we can do as effective helpers, but more for what we are as persons, consecrated to God’s ways; what we are is what helps people to find the source of reconciliation, peace and life by themselves.

General Administration

GENERAL HOUSE

Reserved for General Chapter

Father Gilberto PIÑON, Superior of the General House, announces that the ability of the Oblate community at via Aurelia 290 to offer hospitality will be somewhat limited in 2010 because of the General Chapter.

Consequently, the General House and the Guest House (Foresteria) are reserved between **August 15 and October 31, 2010**, for Oblates whose presence in Rome will be directly related to the General Chapter, either as Capitulars or auxiliary personnel.

If Oblates coming for the Chapter should have personal guests, the staff of the General House will offer suggestions as to where they might stay, but there will not be space available for them at the General House itself. The contact e-mail address is pinon@omigen.org or guestmaster@omigen.org.

AIX – INTERNATIONAL DE MAZENOD CENTER

De Mazenod experience in Spanish

The De Mazenod Experience in Spanish began on September 7 and concluded on November 24. The animators were Fr. Frank SANTUCCI and Fr. Hugo OLIVA from the Cuba Mission. Helping them in the animation of the experience were Fr. Diego SÁEZ from the Ukrainian Delegation and Fr. Eutimio GONZALEZ from Spain.

There were 10 Oblate participants: 3 from Mexico: Daniel GAGNON, Enrique PEÑA and Octavio ROSALES; 2 from Paraguay: Rossalino THOMPSON and Carlos María BARRETO; 2 from Argentina-Chile: Manuel PÉREZ and Santiago REBORDINOS; from Brazil: Paulo EHLE; from Uruguay: Jorge ALBERGATTI; and from Venezuela: José Manuel CICUÉNDEZ. It was a good representation of the Oblate mission in Latin America. For one and all, it was an intense time of renewal in the charism and an opportunity to know better the places where the Congregation was born.

The month-long Ignatian Exercises at the Oblate house at Notre Dame de Lumières were an important component of the experience, a graced moment for renewing our Oblate vocation and our identification with Christ. We shared these Exercises with a Missionary Oblate Sister from Spain, Sister Patricia, who participated in the retreat with us in preparation for her perpetual oblation. In that way, we were able to discover a “feminine view” of our charism.

There were also other important moments: the visit of Fr. General, Guillermo STECKLING,

who spoke to us about the Congregation and the next Chapter and also responded to our concerns; also, there was a visit by Fr. Oswald FIRTH, Assistant General for the Mission, who helped us reflect upon the Oblate Mission today.

We thank the community at Aix and at the International De Mazenod Center for the wonderful welcome they showed us during our whole time there. All of the participants in this experience will remember it as an important moment in our Oblate life. (P. José Manuel Cicuéndez)

Asia-Oceania

COLOMBO

A cherished part of the Oblate Congregation

(The Oblate Superior General, Father Wilhelm STECKLING, visited the provinces of Colombo and Jaffna during December 2009. What follows are excerpts from the welcoming address of the provincial of the Colombo Province, Fr. Clement WAIDYASEKARA, and Father General's response to Oblates gathered on December 1 at the Gerard House in Colombo.)

Fr. Clement Waidyasekara, OMI, Provincial of Colombo

Sri Lanka is a beautiful country in South Asia where one fourth of the population of twenty one million people lives below poverty line, struggling to eke out an existence worthy of human dignity. There is a widening gap between the few rich and the majority poor. Lack of job opportunities has made many people, especially the women, both married and unmarried, seek jobs abroad, thereby causing also break-down in family life.

Globalised consumerism, ecological crisis, violence, information technology and sex tourism are factors that are causing erosion of our genuine cultural values, attitudes and customs.

Though Sri Lanka is blessed with the four major Religions – Buddhism, Hinduism,

Islam and Christianity, the core values of these living faiths do not appear to influence the socio-economic, religious, cultural and political institutions in Sri Lanka. For example, in the ongoing conflict we had between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), non-violence as a value has not been effective to bring about better understanding and harmony between the different ethnic groups. Non-violence as means to achieve justice and peace was not strongly affirmed by the Institutional Leadership of the Catholic Church.

A gradual mounting of religious intolerance by certain Buddhists particularly against the Christian Fundamentalists, affecting also all the Christian denominations, has created a feeling of insecurity and fear among the Christians who are a minority in Sri Lanka.

In the context of the above-mentioned realities, we, the Oblates of the Colombo Province of Sri Lanka, do make concerted effort to respond to the emerging challenges with creative fidelity to our Oblate charism, in the light of the **Immense Hope** project. This means identifying and naming the categories of people who are excluded and evolving a new way of evangelizing the abandoned people and the injured natural environment. Though it is not an easy task, we are called to be the bearers of **hope and transformation**, centered on Jesus Christ and his spirituality.

**Father Wilhelm Steckling, OMI,
Superior General**

During my visit, I will try to keep my eyes and ears open to know and appreciate what you are doing with the poor as missionaries of the poor. Your Province exists from the time of our Founder. It is an old, well-established Oblate Province with its merits in the Church history of Sri Lanka and also in the church history worldwide.

The Church has today a special mission in the field of reconciliation and it also is a big task for the Oblates in Sri Lanka. It is an essential mission of the Church. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation". (2 Cor 5: 18-19). It would be a great mistake to mix up reconciliation with pacifism – being nice to each other. We have to work for justice too, but for us Christians, there is more to it. Reconciliation has to do with the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI, writing in his letter, "Spe Salvi" (42), says, "There can be no justice without the resurrection of the dead." Reconciliation cannot bring back the dead but it can pave the way for new relationship between victims and perpetrators based on the example of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus did not use power, become violent or revengeful. He pardoned all and it is right there that resurrection of Jesus happened. Once reconciled, Christians become ambassadors of pardon and peace.

At the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, a Sister from Rwanda had come forward to bear testimony to an incident in her life. She had lost her family in the war. One day she went to see the prisoners and there was a man who knew her since he had been a neighbour in her village. But she did not know him. He fell at her feet and confessed, "I am the one who killed your family." The Sister forgave him. She is now working wholeheartedly for the reconciliation in her country. The Synod of Bishops for Africa has said that the Church in Africa has the duty to be an instrument of reconciliation and peace after the heart of

Christ, who is our peace and reconciliation. The document, "Ecclesia in Asia" had already spelled out on the same mission some years earlier.

Pope John Paul II, when he visited Sri Lanka in 1995 said, "This is God's will for Sri Lanka! Forgiveness, reconciliation and peace." How can we put into practice what the Spirit of the Lord suggests to us through the voice of the Church? It is good for your Province to renew the missionary priorities. They need to be re-defined, taking reconciliation into account. The last Chapter wanted to be practical. Among the suggestions put forward, there was one regarding Pilot Communities. Pilot communities dedicated to new ministries are needed. Such communities will have more power than individual work. You need to encourage such communities.

Your Province is very strong in academia. You have a good number of Oblates qualified in Higher Studies. You need to find out what you want to do as a Province and in view of that, send Oblates for Higher Studies. Emphasis must be laid on the importance of community life. The aspect of mission should come natural to us. But our Founder before on his death bed insisted on community life. He said three times, "Charity, Charity, Charity among you." But only once he said, "zeal for the salvation of souls."

I appreciate very much what you all are doing for God's mission. You are a cherished part of our Congregation. You remind me of our Founder. Every time I go to Aix, I try to visit the tomb of Bishop Semeria who is buried in the family tomb of the De Mazonod's. Let us continue to keep alive the flame of our charism entrusted to us and through which we are called to produce some results.

PHILIPPINES

A crime that cries out to Heaven

On November 23, at least 57 unarmed civilians were slain in the province of Maguindanao, in the southern Philippines. The Oblate Archbishop of Cotabato, Mons. Orlando QUEVEDO, wrote the following condemnation of this wanton act of violence.

To all People of Good Will:

Last Monday, 23 November 2009, the shocking news of a horrifying massacre began circulating through radio, text messages, and word of mouth. Twenty four hours later, there were still no complete and accurate reports on what really happened along the highway between Shariff Aguak and Kauran, Ampatuan, Maguindanao. The number of people massacred continues to rise even now, family-members, friends, legal advocates, journalists, and civilians who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

From the beginning there was no doubt that we were hearing or reading of a tragedy unprecedented in the history of the once empire province of Cotabato, unprecedented in its ferocity, brutality and brazenness.

People cry out to God and to one another, "How could this thing happen?" And as more and more bodies were unearthed from that now infamous "killing field," the wailing and grieving of hundreds of families related to the victims as brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, cousins, nephews and nieces, in laws or friends are turning into righteous rage and the natural desire for vendetta. For the sake of humanity we must not give in to this desire to seek vengeance that can so easily spiral into a cycle of violence.

From the depths of my soul as a religious leader, I condemn in the strongest possible way this barbaric act of massacre as a conscience-less crime that cries out to heaven.

As a citizen I demand that the government, without fear or favor, use all its powers and decisively act to identify and arrest the perpetrators and apply the full force of the law on them.

As a believer in the God of all, I pray for the souls of the victims and ask the Lord to console, comfort, and give strength to their families. I grieve with them and express my deepest sympathies.

Many politicians and non-politicians have quickly blamed others for this shocking tragedy.

This is only partly right and conveniently absolves us from any culpability. My sense of history leads me to believe that somehow we all share the blame to a certain extent. A culture of impunity has, indeed, grown through the years. Political administrations and officials from all parties from the 1960s to the present have cultivated and exploited to their own advantage a social structure of traditional leadership that was meant to be for the good of the people. This was so with powerful political families in other parts of the country. We have not tried to change this culture of political convenience and thus allowed a culture of impunity to endure through successive administrations. Elections have not and will not change this situation. We simply get more of the same.

We need to change from the bottom-up, from individuals to families, from families to communities. We need to change our values that tolerate evil or choose the lesser evil. We need to learn new values that will transform our cultures from within. For Muslims the Koran, faithfully and correctly followed, will be a guide. For Christians, the Holy Bible, also faithfully and correctly interpreted, will provide direction for value transformation.

Beloved People of Good Will, yes, indeed, we must condemn. We must demand decisive action for justice. We must pray. But we also must begin to change. With the grace of God, we can.

+Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Cotabato
November 26, 2009

THAILAND

The God whom we await is already with us

(This is a story of the mission of Fr. Domenico RODIGHIERO.)

In November, I went with my seminarians to meet the children of Father Thonciai and to speak to them about consecrated missionary life. Our destination was Mee Thoo, in the province of Meonson, a lovely area in the North of Thailand near Burma, about 800 km from Bangkok. Mee

Thoo is small village of farmers, hidden in a narrow valley of the mountain. It's impressive to venture along the narrow, curving, overhanging road that leads to Mee Thoo. Upon our arrival, Fr. Thonciai was there waiting for us; he warmly welcomed us and invited us for supper. His parish extends for kilometers across the peaks of the mountain. He has been assigned a mountain tribe that is accustomed to a poor and hard life. Many would want to become Catholics, but he cannot do the follow-up in all 36 villages, some relatively near the center where he lives, but others, hours away; others, reachable only on motorcycle or on foot.

On the next day, early in the morning, we went to celebrate Mass, an hour and half drive from the Center. Fr. Thonciai celebrated in the local language, "Pakhaio," and I preached the homily in Thai. Everyone looked at me a bit surprised; then I understood that what seemed strange to them was the presence of a foreigner, a priest, in that remote mountain area. After the Mass, we spent about an hour with the people... extraordinary! At about noon, we had lunch. At the home of the family who had invited us, we ate plentiful local food, but for me, new flavors. But after the meal, a surprise! Another family had prepared lunch for us, and then another one. The Pakhaio are really masters of hospitality and one cannot refuse their welcome.

Afterwards, Fr. Thonciai accompanied us to a little village a few kilometers from the Center: about 30 families, houses built on top of each other, the rough streets barely passable, an isolated world, far removed in space and time from the world of the city. The catechist, expecting our visit, was waiting for us, very happy that on that Sunday, Mass would be celebrated in his village. Prichia is his name; he invited us to his house to chat a bit before the Mass. Seated on the ground before glasses of rice alcohol, kept for the occasion, Prichia began to tell us of his life and of his love for his village. He told us about how catechism is organized in the area assigned to him and he spoke about developments in his work.

After chatting for a while, we went out and, I would say, nearly climbed to the front of the

little church. The catechist rang the bell to summon the faithful and to announce that they were gathering for Mass. There was no schedule, just the sound of a gong made from the old hubcap of a Toyota. In front of the church, it was a wonderful sight; little by little the people began to gather, first the children, then the young mothers with their babies tied to their bosoms with special cloths, then the men. Everyone was festively dressed in the traditional costume, happy to be able to celebrate Mass. Again Fr. Tonchiai used the local language and I preached the homily in Thai. That Mass, among those poor people, was a stupendous experience. I felt like I was in the stable; the expectation of the Lord was strong; the encounter with him was enthusiastic, like the shepherds at the grotto; the fruits of his coming were obvious.

The next day, I returned home, with renewed enthusiasm for the mission and with a heart filled with gratitude because the God whom we are awaiting is already here with us, is already at work in the hearts of the simple people, making these men and women new persons, full of joy and zeal. (www.rodighierodomenico.org)

SRI LANKA

Oblates: Agents of peace and reconciliation

A deadly war which lasted for nearly thirty long years in Sri Lanka, draining the country of its financial resources and creating feelings of enmity, suspicion and hatred between different ethnic communities, was brought to an end with the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) on 19 May 2009. But the final days of the war left in its wake a horrendous trail of death and destruction of unimaginable proportions. The number and names of those who died or disappeared as the conflict reached its final stages will remain an unsolved mystery for many years to come. One of the saddest episodes of this war has been the fate of 350,000 Tamil civilians who were trapped in a narrow strip of land between the advancing government forces and the LTTE in the north-eastern part of the island. Considered by the Sri Lankan government to be a phenomenal hostage rescue operation, these displaced civilians were soon herded into 'welfare centres', which were in fact detention

camps surrounded by barbed wire. Except for International Caritas and certain UN Agencies, all other international relief organizations and the press have been refused entry into the camp premises.

Despite these restrictions, Fr. Rohan SILVA, head of the Centre for Society and Religion, the Oblate Research and Action Centre for Justice and Peace and Reconciliation, was able to establish cordial relations with government officials. This permitted him and his team of religious to have access to the Cheddikulam and Vavuniya camps and to the Vavuniya hospital in the north where he has been able to establish what he refers to as a 'Ministry of Presence' among these forsaken and helpless displaced civilians. Already, over 90 religious sisters have served in these camps organizing children into 13 pre-schools and befriending and consoling particularly the women and young girls who are in great need of healing.

Recently, Fr. Rohan went one step further. On 16 December, with the help of 40 boys and girls from the La-Kri-Vi children's movement, a special Oblate apostolate for young leadership affiliated to the International Movement of Children (IMAC), led by its vivacious and dynamic director, Oblate Father Joe COORAY,

permission was obtained to conduct a full day's reconciliation and interactive programme with young residents in the camps where the Oblates and religious sisters serve. This unique and historical event consisted of songs focused on peace and interracial harmony and Tamil and Sinhala cultural dances and skits. The events which gave rise to expressions and emotional feelings, resulting sometimes in tears, went beyond words and straight to the heart.

Even though the children coming from outside and those in the camps spoke two entirely different languages, this was not experienced as a barrier since both communities spoke a language against violence and of shared values of co-existence of and ethnic harmony. Children were seen as the best protagonists for building a new Sri Lanka where the diversity of cultures, religions and languages would bring all communities to unite in forgiveness for the past and craft a harmonious future for generations to come. Fr. Oswald FIRTH, the Assistant General for Mission, joined in the day's events and appreciated the witness value of many religious congregations working with the laity of all religions to promote harmony among communities that were once at war with each other. (*Fr. Oswald Firth*)

Europe

BELGIUM-HOLLAND

The words of the Founder: always up-to-date

(The *Bulletin de Liaison* – Belgium Southern Sector [December 2009] assures us that the words of the Founder are always up-to-date.)

The review "Goliath Hebdo" (No. 103), well known to some of us, wrote about the intervention of certain Tarn prison chaplains who "had published their thoughts (critique) about the policy of 'total security' in penitentiary law." In its No. 105, the same review continued this idea by publishing "a letter of Bishop de Mazenod to his fellow bishops in Digne and Fréjus. The objective of this letter: the situation of persons in prison, especially regarding the pressure being exercised by the local authorities on priests who were judged to be too

much concerned for the welfare of the prisoners. It is a document dated March 4, 1847; but it is, in a way, a meditation for today."

Your Excellency,

Would you happen to have received a particularly extraordinary letter from Chief Prosecutor Borelly, who would want us to forbid our priests from intervening in any way favorable to the miserable persons indicted by the courts? Thus, if they are innocent, we would be forbidden to defend their innocence, and if they are guilty, we would not even be able to beg mercy for them, in so far as circumstances might allow some leniency in the severity of the laws or their implementation! But this magistrate does not know then that we are, by our office, men

of mercy. We do no more than exercise mercy, not only in the prisons and on the scaffolds toward the greatest of criminals, but always and everywhere. That is our ministry. If that contradicts the inflexible justice of the Chief Prosecutor, if his more or less well intentioned pursuits fall short because of the charitable action of a priest, that is no reason for us to abdicate our charitable responsibility which is given to us by the spirit of our vocation.

It is true that there are some conspiracies in which we would be wrong to get involved, even in view of mercy toward these unfortunates, but to petition, to get the attention of the judges, to state the reasons for acquitting the accused or which attenuate their crimes or infractions, that is not conspiracy.

Finally, Your Excellency, it seems to me that if, as I believe, you have received the same letter that I did, we would do well to plan our response together. We must not lend ourselves at all to certain pressures that would serve the purpose of those who want to confine the priest to the sanctuary without his being able ever to show his face elsewhere and exercise upon society the least influence. They would like so much to limit this influence which, in their eyes, is an encroachment, so that we should not exercise all of our rights as citizens which they ignore. Here, it's question of a universal right they would deny us.

Eugene, Bishop of Marseille.

ITALY

That chemo “offered” by Father Fausto

L'Avvenire is a daily, nationwide Italian newspaper founded in 1968 in Milan. The paper takes its inspiration from the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but in full autonomy from the hierarchy, even though one often hears it called the newspaper of the CEI (Italian Bishops' Conference). Some months ago, there were some accusations against its director, Dino Boffo, by the director of another paper, Vittorio Feltri, raising enormous controversy that led to the resignation of Boffo who was, among other

things, a personal friend of our former Superior General, Marcello ZAGO. At the beginning of December, Feltri admitted his error: “... Dino Boffo was not involved... In spite of all that was said and written, he was able to keep a dignified and calm demeanor which can only inspire admiration.”

Surprisingly, the December 5 edition of L'Avvenire published a letter that Father Fausto PELIS, recently deceased, had written to Boffo. Here is the text of that article.

He too was from Bergamo. But when Father Fausto Pelis, Oblate of Mary Immacualte, saw that Feltri (for whom he had “much esteem and confidence”) was undertaking initiatives “that had little to do with journalism,” on September 2, he wrote to Dino Boffo to reassure him of “my fraternal support in the sad events which, these days, are giving you so much grief.” He was “proud” of his fellow “bergamasco,” but he admitted that “I am astounded and upset at the stubbornness” with which Feltri “persists, in spite of the explanations you have offered with so much clarity and truth.” Transparent in the message of this religious are exceptionally rare tact and foresight.

“I foresee for the director of *Il Giornale*,” wrote Father Pelis, “much pain: it's like quicksand – the more you struggle and move, the faster you go down. He would have been a true ‘professional,’ before all the evidence and clarifications, to honestly admit his mistake.”

“I promise my prayers,” he concluded with kindness, “and offer up as much as I can the suffering from the chemotherapy I must undergo in these months.” These words touched Boffo profoundly. In his response, he wrote: “The closing of your letter leads me to confide with you in this. In the end, it is also due to you and to your ‘chemical’ if something happens by way of reconciliation, still far off, but who knows?” But Father Fausto was unable to read this message: a few days ago, his brother, Father Angelo, also an Oblate, announced his death, at Vercelli on November 20.

Latin America

COLOMBIA**A mission inspired by the Founder**

In the life of our Founder, he held a special fondness for youth, as we notice in his biography and in his writings. When St. Eugene began his ministry in Aix, he cared very much for the youth and he began a very beautiful pastoral ministry with them, a ministry which has continued among his Oblates for a long time and has expanded to those places where they are now present.

I remember that the first time I met the Oblates was at a youth meeting. Remembering that moment always makes me feel good and inspires me to one day become part of this marvelous ministry of working with youth.

Thanks be to God, we have had the opportunity to work with youth in our ministries, and thanks be to God, the seed we are sowing is falling on good soil and the harvest is beginning to develop. It was not easy in the beginning, since few youth were interested in anything about God and the Church, but with much effort, we are beginning to gain their interest. We have managed to persuade 25 of them, those who today make up our youth group.

I believe it is the youthful Jesus who has captivated the youth and it is He whom we try to show them during this whole year in catechesis, in biblical formation, in dances, in theater pieces, in spiritual moments, but especially in day to day life, in the midst of their various situations.

In order to develop a bit the plan we are following with them, we managed to have a retreat for two days in the Oblate house in Bogotá, a time during which we shared a beautiful experience. We prayed around the figure of Jesus, a friend who invites us to follow him in mission, but first we must combat our fears and we must let ourselves fall in love with Him.

This time was a moment filled with meaningful experiences which we are sure captivated the youth even more and filled their hearts with joy and a desire to respond with generosity to the

love that God always gives us.

At the end of this semester, I continue giving thanks to God for all that which He has allowed us to live and achieve for the youth, for their families and their community, for the Oblates who gave me this opportunity and for Eugene de Mazenod who inspires us and continues inspiring so many Oblates to go on realizing this wonderful ministry. (*Reineris Herazo Julio, prenovice, in the Boletín Institucional of the Prenovitate of Colombia, November 2009*)

GUATEMALA**Building Dreams**

(Here are the reflections of Bridget Murphy, a Canadian woman who has served as a volunteer in an Oblate parish in Guatemala.)

Since 2006, I have made three trips to visit and volunteer with *Parroquia Cristo Redentor* Mission in Playa Grande, Guatemala. This Mission is run by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and serves 120 villages. Many of these villages are accessible only by walking up mountains which can take up to as long as two hours.

This mission serves one of the poorest regions in Guatemala and in fact, it is one of the poorest regions in Central America. This area of Guatemala is known for the massacres of entire villages which include women and children during the civil war of the 1980s. This region is mainly inhabited by indigenous people, the Maya Q'eqchi, who receives little or no financial support from the government.

During my stay, I was very fortunate to be able to visit many of these villages and to experience firsthand the level of poverty in the area. Many of the people live in poverty with little access to adequate jobs, medical care, good drinking water, electricity, housing and education.

Many of these villages have no high school and the schools that are found in this area of Guatemala

have few or no educational resources. They are also poorly staffed. The schools are substandard to say the least, with no electricity, no running water and no proper bathroom facilities other than an outhouse. The children have no access to a library, a computer room, or to a gym. In addition, education is only guaranteed to grade six. There is no educational funding available for youth after this grade. These youth have no means of fund raising as we do in our country. Many of these youth must try to find work, for very little pay, to help support their parents and siblings. The families have great difficulty in providing the basic needs of daily living.

In January 2008, I made a visit to an area in Guatemala called *Centro Chactelá*. During that visit a group of teachers met with Fr. José Manuel SANTIAGO, OMI, looking for his support to help secure funding to build a high school. Observing the poor conditions of primary schools and the need for a high school, I decided to take action and to help the teachers achieve this need. As a result "Guatemala: Children First Project" was born. The goal of this project would be a fundraising effort to raise the funds that would supply the much needed high school with textbooks, basic school supplies and desks. Some of my efforts to date have included: penny drives, yard sales, cookbook sales and soliciting donations.

You cannot imagine my disappointment when I received word that the youth of this region would not be getting a high school any time soon. Their proposal had been denied. Not to be deterred by this news, I decided to start the second phase of "Guatemala- Children First Project" titled, "Building Dreams." My project would not only provide school supplies but hopefully, will provide, the materials required to build the much needed high school. Together, we can build dreams! (www.omilacombe.ca, December 18, 2009)

GUATEMALA

A winter mission

I want to share with all of you my mission experience with the indigenous Mayans whose native language is "poconchi." First a bit about their culture and religious traditions. This Mayan

ethnic group lives in Northwest Guatemala, bordering the closest country, Mexico. The region is very rainy and there are many huge mountains. It belongs to the Quiche Department, one of the poorest departments of the country and severely wounded by the cruel reality of the war at the time of the military dictatorship 17 years ago. The painful wounds left behind by this war are very much alive in this department and the surrounding regions. One can say that it is a land fertilized by the blood of martyrs who gave their life for their faith: catechists, celebrators of the Word, ministers and priests who were tortured.

The concern for defending the Pocones communities makes the indigenous put much confidence in the Church and in their culture. They welcome the missionaries and the work that can be accomplished for them. My joy was to share with them their culture, their traditions and to learn their language.

The children and the women do not speak the Spanish language; only the men do. Few of the youth can go to school; also a few of them can speak a little Spanish. The important thing is that our mission touched each of these communities. Their devotion to the Virgin shows that they are a very marian and loving people, dedicated to Mary Immaculate and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our meetings with the small communities were by sectors; they included praying the Holy Rosary, readings and many songs. Something which I really marveled at in this culture was how much incense they use in religious services and how they attend the religious services with such loving respect.

The work that a missionary Oblate offers in service of these communities requires 7 to 8 hours to arrive at a village and to share with it; climbing up and down the mountains tires us, but upon arriving at the place and seeing how they are eagerly awaiting the missionary and seeing the needs of these communities, our fatigue becomes the strength to be with them and to be at the service of others and to love as Christ Jesus loved and gave Himself for us. (*John Jairo Teherán Cali, Colombian OMI novice, in the Boletín Institucional of the Prenovitiate of Colombia, November 2009*)

Africa-Madagascar

ZAMBIA**Radio Liseli reaches out to school children**

Oblate Radio Liseli has launched a new program which reaches out to the schools within Mongu district. This is a program in which primary and secondary schools as well as colleges are given an opportunity to share their historical backgrounds, their success stories, the challenges being faced by the schools and future plans. Other programs being presented by schools include drama, inter-schools debates and programs on the local culture.

The educational programs are aired every Tuesday and Saturday. They are fully supported by the management of Oblate Radio Liseli and the District Education Board Secretary under the Ministry of Education.

Meanwhile, the United States Ambassador to Zambia, Mr. Donald Booth, was on a familiarization tour of the Western Province and took time to see a number of projects that are supported by the U.S government. Some of the projects he visited include a clinic in Nanjucha and a rice growing project supported by the Diocese of Mongu Development Centre (DMDC).

Ambassador Booth also visited Oblate Radio Liseli where he spoke to the Station Manager, Mr. Bella Zulu, who explained to him about the growth of the station and the challenges it faces. Mr. Zulu said the station has partnered with the United States Government in making education accessible to all children through one of the programs aired on the radio called "Learning at Taonga Market". This program has enabled children to attend formal school on radio under

the keen eye of a trained mentor (OMI ZAMBIA November-December 2009)

KENYA**A success story**

(Fr. Ken FORSTER served for several years in the OMI Lacombe Province's mission in Kenya. He tells of his pleasure in seeing the success of one of the young men that he knew there.)

I had the privilege of visiting Kenya after an absence of three and a half years this past October. I accompanied a Mission Awareness Tour. Twelve Canadians joined me to experience the hospitality and welcome of the Kenyan people. It was a blessing for me to visit with friends and see the continued dedication of my Oblate Brothers who minister there.

One of my remarkable days there found me having a cup of tea with a "grateful" young man now in his mid-thirties. Douglas Ikunda had been associated with us and contemplated becoming an Oblate. That was not to be. Later he received an inheritance of a couple of acres of land at his uncle's passing. We loaned him money to buy tea seedlings to enable him to get his new land into production a year or two earlier than would have been possible without that assistance. Douglas has paid off the loan and his tea is now almost at full maturity to produce optimum kilos. He has a small house and hopes to buy a milking cow this year. After tending his tea meticulously for the past nine years, he will have a net annual income of \$2500 for his annual salary. He is just so grateful for our assistance and the blessings given by God to himself and his family. (www.omilacombe.ca, December 18, 2009)

Canada-United States

NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP**Fernand Jetté and spirituality**

Fernand Jetté, o.m.i. et la spiritualité (in French only) is a scanned work, edited and

annotated by Eugène LAPOINTE, with the expert collaboration of Léonce PAQUET. The work covers more than 1,000 pages (3 volumes) of the unedited spiritual writings of Fr. Fernand JETTÉ, over a period of twenty

years as professor and religious formator. Other volumes are being prepared.

It is possible to have the three volumes already published. One can write to the Archives Deschâtelets. The three volumes are of nearly 400 pages each, in “letter” format.” One can order them from Father André DUBOIS, Director of the Archives, at his e-mail address: andubomi@yahoo.ca . (INFO OMI, 15 December 2009)

OMI LACOMBE

The first six years of a new province

Six years ago, the OMI Lacombe Province of Canada became a reality with the merger of the former Oblate Provinces of Grandin, Manitoba, St. Mary, St. Peter and St. Paul. Father André BOYER was the first provincial of this new province. Before finishing his mandate, he communicated with the members of the province through the province’s web site. Here is an excerpt of his “farewell address.”

Each one of you will shortly be receiving a publication on the history of OMI Lacombe Canada entitled *The Path is made in the Walking*. We have certainly journeyed well over these last six years.

Journeying People:

Journeying People is a rich image of our response to God’s unconditional love – our God

- who loves us into Life,
- who calls us to the fullness of Life,
- who sends us to companion and to enliven others.

In looking at the journey, Scripture gives us these sign posts to mark our way:

I. Discipleship

A disciple is one:

- who listens and who learns God’s word from someone who knows-

- who hears and who obeys God’s commands from someone who speaks with authority-
- who seeks Life and who follows someone who creates possibilities for it.

We are each called to a lifetime journey of personal discipleship.

Over these last six years we have come to appreciate the necessity of leaning on God’s word and seeking Life through our journey. We know there have been plenty of rough roads but with our foundation secure we have been able to journey onward.

II. Friendship

- Friendship is a call to a way of being in relation to each other mutually.
- Friendship is a way of working in relation to each other in collaboration.
- Friendship assumes that each of us accepts oneself and others as persons with gifts and limits.
- It assumes that all of us accept our shared responsibility for creating relationships that enhance life.
- Friendship with Jesus and each other calls us to become responsible stewards of ourselves and our resources.
- To companion others as friends required ascetic discipline.
- I must let go my preferred “goods”, that we can create a common good.
- I must lay down parts of my life – my old patterns, so that new patterns more creative of life can emerge.
- I must lay open to the scrutiny of others my commitment to use my gifts in collaborative service and the possibility of my exceeding my limits.

As a new Province, we have been richly blessed in many areas from being mere fellow workers to becoming friends. We have seen this transpire as Oblates begin to move across former

provincial boundaries and also as we have seen the expansion of works in our Kenya Mission.

III. Prophecy

To hear the prophetic word in the solitude of intimate prayer and to speak that prophetic word in a public arena on behalf of persons

- who are without power,
- who are without voice or
- who are victims of injustice is to assume a prophetic stance.

As members of OMI Lacombe Canada Province our Mission Statement challenges us to continue to be prophetic in all that we do. (www.omilacombe.ca, 4 December 2009)

NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP

A well-deserved medal

A “star” has been noticed in the little known regions of the Northern Coast! On May 24, 2009, Father Laurent DESAULNIERS received from the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, Mr. Pierre Duschesne, the Lieutenant Governor’s Medal for Elders, “in recognition of your involvement in the community and your generosity.” The recipient responded: “The honor that you bestow upon me reflects upon my human family and my religious family: the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The generosity which you mention...I owe it to the Inuit communities for which I have dedicated all of my energies. I hope that my presence facilitates closer ties

between the natives and the non-natives, and that it will engage us even more in this new era of fellowship among peoples, according to the Declaration of the United Nations on the rights of native peoples.”

Congratulations and thank you, Fr. Laurent, for this message sent out from the wide open spaces, often traveled in moccasins for many years. (Robert CHATEAUNEUF in INFO OMI 1 December 2009)

NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP

A second African missionary for Canada

OMI Information announced, in its No. 494 (December 2009), that Fr. Pascal Pali PITSO had left Lesotho in November to join the Oblate Province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap, Canada, to work there as a missionary.

A few weeks later, Fr. Patrick Maboe MATSAU, from Lesotho, arrived in Montreal on December 2, 2009. He set out for James Bay, leaving Ottawa by bus on Monday, December 14. Bishop Vincent CADIEUX met him at Cochrane and then accompanied him to Moosonee. Fr. Matsau will later meet Fr. Pitso at Attawapiskat. Fr. Jacques LALIBERTÉ, vicar provincial and superior of the provincial house, is traveling with the two missionaries. They will come “South” at the beginning of January, to visit other Amerindian reserves and to begin their acculturation with the Canadians and the Amerindians, learning languages, etc. (INFO OMI, 15 December 2009)

Anniversaries for February 2010

70 Years of religious life

1940.02.17	07581	Bro. Jean-Charles Dutil	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
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65 Years of religious life

1945.02.17	07952	Fr. Remigius Scheuber	Northern S. Africa
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65 Years of priesthood

1945.02.18	07403	Fr. Jean-Marie Mouchet	Lacombe
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60 Years of religious life

□ 1950.02.17	09418	Bro. Augustin Coté	United States
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1950.02.17	09417	Bro. Arthur Van Hecke	Lacombe
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60 Years of priesthood

1950.02.02	07603	Fr. Joseph Gilles Brossard	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
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1950.02.12	08224	Fr. Pietro Bignami	Lacombe
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1950.02.12	07827	Fr. Angelo Bonadio	Italy
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1950.02.12	07981	Fr. Luciano Cupia	Italy
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1950.02.12	08095	Fr. Fiore Paglione	Italy
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1950.02.12	07829	Fr. Domenico Vitantonio	Italy
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1950.02.19	07825	Fr. Joseph Boisseau	France
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1950.02.19	07905	Fr. René Charrier	France
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1950.02.19	08118	Fr. Michel Lynde	Thailand
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1950.02.19	07903	Fr. Loïq Mégret	France
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1950.02.19	07873	Msgr. Daniel Verstraete	Central S. Africa
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1950.02.26	07894	Fr. Daniel Cavagne	France
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1950.02.26	07895	Fr. Marcel Dalverny	France
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1950.02.26	07988	Fr. Noël Leca	France
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50 Years of religious life

1960.02.17	10831	Fr. Anthony Bailey	Northern S. Africa
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1960.02.17	10829	Fr. Joseph Money	Natal
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50 Years of priesthood

1960.02.21	09955	Fr. Juan Rogge	Mexico
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25 Years of religious life

1985.02.17	12931	Fr. Eric Alleaume	General Administration
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1985.02.17	12843	Fr. Harry Dyer	Australia
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1985.02.17	13006	Bro. Jozef Sprengel	Poland
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25 Years of priesthood

1985.02.17	12591	Fr. Edgar Garcia	United States
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Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 104-110

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Clement Novakowski	OMI Lacombe	14/03/1927	Saskatoon	29/11/2009
Fr. Martin Uhegbu	Cameroon	30/01/1969	Bangangte	02/12/2009
Fr. Frank Ryan	United States	04/11/1926	Belleville	11/12/2009
Fr. Francis Ouellette	United States	25/08/1926	Burlington	12/12/2009
Fr. René Dufour	United States	24/12/1926	Belleville	12/12/2009
Fr. Patrick Gnanapragasam	Jaffna	16/10/1945	Jaffna	21/12/2009
Fr. Otto Denner	France	06/03/1909	Strasbourg	29/12/2009

“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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