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## Celebrating 200 years of missionary service in the Church 1816-2016

### Community - Mission - Partnership through the prism of *Laudato Si'*

Fr. Raymond Warren, OMI, Provincial of the Anglo-Irish Province

The encyclical of Pope Francis on the Care of our Common Home speaks a truth that expresses the Spirit's gifts while it also indicates danger, warning, caution and challenge. This year 2016, is a convergence of three very significant happenings: how we take up the challenge of *Laudato Si'*; the Jubilee Year of Mercy for the Church and the world; and our Oblate bicentenary of foundation. Initially we might feel overloaded by these three events and fail to focus on any of them. But they are, in fact, a harmonious convergence of a theology of Mission and a grace of the Spirit.

The issues presented in *Laudato Si'* are not just topical or popular issues; they are the issues of the Gospel and of life itself. They demand a response and our time to act is now. Reading *Laudato Si'* as a kind of prism through which to view my own religious life, I would like to share some of my reflections with you.

#### What is happening to our Common Home?

I don't profess any expertise in the field of science or ecology, or anything else for that matter! I believe that climate change has occurred as part of a natural evolutionary process, but there is also a climate change which is caused by overproduction, over-industrialisation, greed and abuse. In seeing religious life as the expression of my 'common home', I am aware of the natural

effects of the changes which have emerged as religious life has evolved. Sadly too, I can also see some damaging effects: dysfunctionality, a sense of ossifying or mummifying because of resistance to growth in one's life, the occasions of breakdown of relationships or simply not building up and maintaining of relationships. Viewing 'our common home' as my religious community, I must ask myself: is it sustaining me; is it nourishing me; and a very important question, how am I contributing to its wellbeing?

My 'common home' can give me a sense of belonging and healthy security. But perhaps because of some bad experiences one may have had, one may feel insecure and so be unable to engage wholesomely within the community. I may give weak responses to important issues because I am in crisis myself. There are human roots which are common to all these problems.

*When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves.<sup>1</sup>*

**Religious Life: We are committed to the renewal of Community life as the source of Oblate mission<sup>2</sup>.**

<sup>1</sup> *Laudato Si'* 115

<sup>2</sup> Vision, Mandate and Direction of the Provincial Council, Anglo-Irish Province 2015 - 2018

But what does that really mean for me? What am I prepared to let go of, or take up in order to renew my religious life? The ‘Gospel of Creation’ as presented in *Laudato Si’* offers great wisdom as I reflect on my present attitude to the way I am living my religious life.

*Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality....It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions.*<sup>3</sup>

Religious life is a gift to creation and our Oblate religious life has contributed to praising the Lord through mission and ministry, but always as community! In perhaps a simplistic way, as I look at my religious life through the prism of *Laudato Si’*, I substitute the word ‘community’ for ‘earth’ which I find very helpful:

*Each community can take from the bounty of the **community** whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the **community** and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. “The **community** is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the **community** with all that is within it.” (Dt 10:14. Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership.*<sup>4</sup>

As we begin the Jubilee Year of Mercy, I believe this year holds out to us a very strong invitation to address the ways we give to, and take from, our Oblate community. There is also an invitation here “to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations”. Surely this is an invitation to concentrate our prayer and work for the gift of Vocations.

During this great Jubilee Year of Mercy, we are invited to account for our own attitude to the ways we live mercy among ourselves in community.

*Laudato Si’* is not a document which invites pious platitudes and vague generalisations. It calls us to show mercy to our suffering creation – a fully active and wholly engaged mercy. It applies to the attitude we have towards our planet and it also applies to the way we live our lives as Oblates and religious.

### **Mission to the Periphery**

The ‘Mission to the Periphery’ is, of course, our Congregation’s foundational call to go out to the poor with the Gospel. It is ever present in every generation and is non-negotiable.

I am deeply challenged by this call. I may feel inadequate or even fearful about the human challenges and struggles which affect my world and my social environment but I must not allow myself to become paralysed. Unless I overcome my fears and join together with others for support and strength, I can never build on the good that is happening, or challenge the needless destruction I witness all around me. Once I begin to truly engage, the mandate to go out to the periphery becomes real for me and no longer just empty meaningless words and promises.

*Authentic development includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life, and this entails considering the setting in which people live their lives. These settings influence the way we think, feel and act. In our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and neighbourhoods, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity. We make every effort to adapt to our environment, but when it is disorderly, chaotic or saturated with noise and ugliness, such overstimulation makes it difficult to find ourselves integrated and happy.*<sup>5</sup>

Each of us can only do what we can, given our energies and capabilities. Some of us, because of age and infirmity, might feel unable to participate but I believe there is a part for all of us to play, however small our contribution may be or how minimal the effort we can make. Religious life

<sup>3</sup> *Laudato Si’* 63/64

<sup>4</sup> *Laudato Si’* 67

<sup>5</sup> *Laudato Si’* 147

does not set us apart from society but firmly within it, at its very centre.

### Partnerhisip

We say that “Lay leadership and active participation is essential to Christ’s Mission in the world”. We say that “we are committed to adult faith formation and leadership training over these coming years”<sup>6</sup>.

*Laudato Si’*, in addressing the lines of approach and action to the care of our common home, speaks of dialogue and transparency in decision making. I am presented in strong terms with the absolute need to be in dialogue. Our models of Church leadership and authority are in flux and crisis to varying degrees and at all levels.

Here I substitute the word “Church” for “Environment” so as to emphasise the importance of dialogue:

*Church impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or programme. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure. ...A consensus should always be reached between the different stakeholders, who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions and alternatives. The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest. We need to stop thinking in terms of “interventions” to save the **Church** in favour of policies developed and debated by all interested parties. The participation of the latter also entails being fully informed about such projects and their different risks and possibilities.*<sup>7</sup>

Religious life communities, as my common home, are like so many groups or institutions

across the world, places of immense change. To live well this change, I am called to change myself first, a conversion. *Laudatio Si’* concludes with the call to a new lifestyle, an ecological conversion and a call to educate ourselves for the covenant between the environment and humanity.

*Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.*<sup>8</sup>

Finally, I am brought back to the source of Creation, the community of the Trinity. Through God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - I am drawn into the web and source of all life, the interconnectedness of all things:

*The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.*<sup>9</sup>

Now, where is your common home?

<sup>6</sup> Vision, Mandate and Direction of the Provincial Council, Anglo-Irish Province 2015 - 2018

<sup>7</sup> *Laudato Si’* 183

<sup>8</sup> *Laudato Si’* 202

<sup>9</sup> *Laudato Si’* 240

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## Holy See

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### VATICAN

#### Oblate named Auxiliary Bishop in Peru

On January 30, 2016, the Vatican announced that an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Fr. Carlos Alberto SALCEDO OJEDA, has been named Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Huancayo, Peru. He is presently serving as the parish pastor of two parishes in that same archdiocese. There are about 812,000 Catholics in the archdiocese.

Bishop-elect Salcedo was born in 1960. He

professed his first vows as an Oblate in 1989 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1996.

Since his ordination to the priesthood, he has served in various parishes in Peru. He has also been engaged in Oblate formation ministry within the Latin American Region, in particular as assistant Novice Master in Asunción, Paraguay (2008-2011). He is currently serving as the Coordinator of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission for the Oblate Delegation of Peru.

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## General Administration

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### EUGENE DE MAZENOD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

#### A portrait of Father Deblieu

The research done on the occasion of the bicentenary of the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence allowed us to discover the portrait of Father Jean-François Sébastien Deblieu, one of the first companions of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. It is really a great gift of the Jubilee, because until now the Oblates had no portrait of Father Deblieu.

Fr. Deblieu's lithographic portrait was offered to the Oblates by Mr. Georges Eyssautier with the following inscription: "Great grandson of Leonie Eyssautier, born Deblieu, I offer this lithographic portrait of his uncle, Messire Jean-François Sébastien Deblieu, Canon Emeritus of the Cathedral of Fréjus, Pastor and Dean of La Seyne in the same diocese, one of the first and valiant companions of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate of Aix, to perpetuate his memory. December 6, 2015."

Fr. Jean-François Sébastien Deblieu, was ordained a priest in Aix in February 1813; he was one of the first five companions of the Founder. He participated in at least 17 of 40 missions preached by the Missionaries of Provence. In 1823 he left the Congregation, but he remained a very good priest and occupied many important posts in the diocese of Fréjus, his diocese of origin. (Krzysztof ZIELEND, <http://www.centremazenod.org/>)

### EUGENE DE MAZENOD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

#### USA Associates make a bicentenary pilgrimage to Aix

David Berry and Ana Novoa are members of San Antonio, Texas, chapter of Oblate Associates; they recently participated, with 37 other members, in a pilgrimage to Aix "in the footsteps of St. Eugene". They were accompanied by Frs. Frank SANTUCCI, David KALERT and Art FLORES. In this article they share with us their amazing experience of the pilgrimage.

"My wife and I were privileged this month to be pilgrims following the footsteps of St. Eugene de Mazenod on this bicentenary of the founding of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We visited places, important to the Oblates, in Paris, Aix-en-Provence and Marseille, places significant in the life of St. Eugene".

Ana has always been interested in serving the poor in both her professional and private life. She is a full-time professor of Law at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. For many years she managed the clinical education program for law students, a program that provides free legal services. Additionally, she is chairperson of the board for Mexican American Catholic College in San Antonio which provides undergraduate education particularly to seminarians and others who seek to minister to Spanish speaking population. On the other



hand, David worked many years for the State of Texas. Since retirement he has been attending the Oblate School of Theology, first, in the Master of Theology program (he received his MA in May 2013) and now he attends OST taking one class each semester for fun.

According to David, “the highpoint of the pilgrimage was our visit to the OMI foundation house in Aix. We were warmly received by the Oblates residing in the house and truly made to feel welcome and at home. We were blessed to be able to spend a few days residing in the house where St. Eugene founded the Congregation. The rooms are lovely, kept warm this winter, and the communal dining with the Oblates and comradery we developed with them was truly a blessing. We were honored and privileged to share in the life of the community, eating with the Oblates and participating in their prayer life at Vespers and Oraison in the evening”.

Ana shares in David’s sentiments, “I join in everything that David said about the pilgrimage, about our Oblate hosts, and the warmth we shared with our group. I add that in those few days St. Eugene has become a dear friend. My introduction to him began on arrival in Aix: our lives were very different and yet similar enough for me to seek him out and to feel comfortable with him”.

Ana finds herself in St. Eugene who grew up in an aristocratic family, being a spoiled young man and later as priest chose to be the priest for the poor, she tells us, “my youth was not as privileged, but close enough, and clearly spoiled. As a priest St. Eugene dedicated his life to serving the poor, I have been committed to social

justice and practiced the option for the poor my whole life; of course my work is not as intense, personal, or committed as his”.

Ana was particularly struck by the stories about the Founder’s life, how strong and determined St. Eugene was: “he was formidable, as well as large. And yet, when the Holy Spirit led him to a path he had not intended or planned (mission, founder, bishop . . .) he followed with characteristic strength and love for the poor and marginalized. I heard these stories a little bit, but felt them a lot. I was not surprised, and I had expected to make friends”.

On the other hand, for David the apex of the experience, “was a directed meditation in the room where St. Eugene lived with the priests who were to establish the order with him. We felt his spirit and the zeal he felt for evangelizing the poor and those at the margins of society. The Charism of the OMI which is so carefully carried out by the many brothers who call themselves Oblates was palpable in the room. We were privileged to pray and feel that spirit while touching the relic of the saint’s heart. Many in our group left the room weeping.

“On this pilgrimage we learned a lot about St. Eugene, and the history of the Oblates. We will always be connected to St. Eugene, to the upper rooms of the Foundation House, to Aix, from which the work and spirit of the Oblates flow. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate shared their home with us, and now it is in a way our home as well. We pray that this bicentenary year will yield great fruit for the Oblates and all they minister to”. (<http://www.centremazenod.org/>)

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## Europe

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### FRANCE

#### **Homily of the Archbishop of Aix, 24 January 2016**

*During the Mass for the Oblate Jubilee celebrated on 24 January 2016, in the Saint-Sauveur Cathedral in Aix, Archbishop Christophe Dufour preached the following homily.*

“The Holy Spirit has sent me to bring the Good News to the Poor.” This Sunday’s gospel gives us the road map of Christ’s mission: to bring to the poor the Good News of the love of God, His Father. But this road map inspired a young priest of our diocese of Aix, born on Cours Mirabeau, to choose these words as the motto for the community of Missionaries of Provence which he founded: “The poor have been evangelized.”

The liturgical calendar by chance has done well in offering us this motto borrowed from Luke's gospel which we have proclaimed today with the entire Church. On this day when we are celebrating the 200 years since the founding of the community of the Missionaries of Provence, which would later become the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, I will speak to you about evangelization.

Together with Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, we speak today about a new evangelization. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Christ gave us the program: proclaim the Gospel to the poor, a Gospel of liberation of captives and the oppressed, a Gospel of light for the blind. Proclaim a year of favor offered by God Himself.

Evangelization, new evangelization: Saint Eugene de Mazenod is here as one of our teachers. I will ask him to comment on this double proclamation of the Good News to the poor and a year of favor granted by the Lord.

**Proclaim the Gospel to the poor.** How did Eugene, this son of the rich, who loved money and luxury – he had promised to marry a woman who had money! – how was he able to choose this fundamental orientation for his life: to go and bring the Gospel to the poor? He would tell us: “Because Christ himself called me.” Christ called him, a bit like the apostle Paul, as he gazed upon the Cross one Good Friday in the church of the Madeleine, in 1808. It was because Saint Eugene, beneath his superior airs, his desire to be pleasing in the eyes of the world, has a sort of poverty, a wound. Because he himself was poor, he was able to accept the Gospel and live a real encounter with Christ. Because he was poor, Christ went to him. For Saint Eugene de Mazenod, this was a new evangelization. He was baptized, a traditional Catholic; he went to Mass, but he had not lived a real encounter with Christ. The Christian message had stayed on the surface; it had not penetrated his soul so as to convert him and change his life. And so, before the Cross, he recognized his own poverty and Christ took hold of him.

And Eugene de Mazenod allowed himself be led to the poor.

First of all the prisoners, with the ministry of prisons founded two centuries before him, a ministry still alive today in Aix-en-Provence.

Then the jobless youth in front of the Palace of Justice, with whom he would found the Association of Christian Youth in April 1813.

He would also start a group for the chimney sweeps and a group for young soldiers... He had the charism of a founder – it's surely for that, that Christ called him! He was completely motivated by this passion for the Gospel, a passion that led him to deeply revitalize evangelization by going to the poorest of the poor. I quote him: “You who are poor, come! I want to make my voice heard to the farthest corners of the world so as to summon all of you. I am going to begin by teaching you who you are, your origin, your dignity, your rights. Poor ones of Jesus Christ, distressed, unhappy, suffering, infirm, sick, all of you whom misery overwhelms, you whom the world rejects, you my brothers, my dear brothers, my respectable brothers, listen to me. You are the children of God. You are the brothers of Jesus Christ. You are the heirs to his kingdom; you are the ones he has chosen and whom he prefers.” (Sermon in the Church of the Madeleine in Aix, Ash Wednesday, March 1813)

There it is: the road map for the new evangelization. Pope Francis would sign on to it for he wants “a Church that is poor and for the poor.”

**Proclaim a year of favor offered by the Lord.** A year of favors, of benefits, of mercy, of pardon, of reconciliation.

In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis has invited all the Catholics of the world to a missionary conversion so that they might become missionary-disciples. Not just disciples of Jesus, but missionary-disciples. For there cannot be disciples who are not at the same time missionaries. A disciple who is not a missionary is not a true disciple. In a text of Eugene de Mazenod, one thing caught my attention. It's the letter he wrote to the Chapter of vicars general to ask for permission to found a community with some priests of the diocese; he wrote that

in bringing the Gospel to the poor, Christ gave a proof that he was the Son of God. Pope Francis adds: in the same way that Jesus proved that he was sent by the Father by bringing the Gospel and the love of God to the poor, so too the disciple, as a missionary, will prove to Christ that he is an authentic disciple.

After “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis announced a Holy Year of Mercy. A year of favor. He shares his conviction that the reception of divine mercy is a necessity, a prerequisite to any missionary renewal. Here too the missionary experience of Saint Eugene de Mazenod should be recalled.

First, the rule of his community makes a requirement for the missionaries: between each mission, they were to get together for a time of fraternal life, of prayer and sharing, of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness.

Then there’s confession. The missionaries would bring with them four portable confessionals. Eugene relates in his journal of the mission at Grans: “No one was making the Easter duty... soon one would have to close the church, so little was it used... Everything changed that first week: from 3 in the morning, the penitents crowded around the confessionals... We stayed there for as long as 28 hours without stopping.”

Finally there was the role of reconciliation. The Revolution had produced hatred in the villages. The mission was a sort of jubilee of mercy. Eugene preached reconciliation: “It is not possible to live together in the parish if we are not reconciled.” It was proposed to those who hated one another to come forward under the cross, before the altar, and to talk, with the missionary as the sole witness.

There can be no successful mission without reconciliation. Pope Francis tells us that again. After calling us to be missionary-disciples, he calls upon us to reconcile with one another by accepting the gift that is above every gift, pardon, whose source is the divine mercy.

“It’s time,” says Pope Francis, after the manner of the prophets. It’s time for two reasons. 1.) As

if he could foresee a catastrophe as he looked upon the violence that plagues the world, he states his Christian belief that only God’s mercy can cure mankind of this illness. 2.) It’s time “for the testimony given by believers to be stronger and more effective.”

Through the intercession of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, let us ask for the grace to see ourselves as poor, to accept the divine mercy and to be its witnesses, so that the Good News might be proclaimed to the poor. Amen.

## UKRAINE

### Serving the poor for our anniversary

The evening of January 25 was a day of great rejoicing in the Ukrainian Delegation. The day before, January 24, all the Oblate parishes across the country participated in liturgies to pray for the good of the Congregation. On the evening of January 25, all of the Oblates working in Ukraine and Russia travelled to the main house of the Delegation – Obukhiv, near Kyiv – where they participated in the Holy Liturgy, along with his Excellency Bishop Radoslaw ZMITROWICZ.

January 26 was lived in accordance with the wishes of the Superior General, Fr. Louis LOUGEN. During the morning, there was a conference as well as adoration before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the good of the Congregation. After this, Fr. Pavlo VYSHKOVSKYI was installed for his second mandate as superior of the Delegation and the new administration of the Ukrainian delegation as well.

After lunch the Oblates divided themselves into four groups and went to serve more than 300 poor in various areas and ministries around Kyiv. One group of Oblates went to help the Missionaries of Charity; the other three groups went to distribute food and the Word of God to the destitute in various locations around the city.

As a sign of conversion, the administration of the Delegation is planning to dedicate the center at the parish in the town of Hnivan as a spiritual center where persons suffering as a result of

the war in Ukraine or other such problems could come and find a home where they might rediscover their human dignity and where God's love will be apparent. This would include, for

example, people who have no homes or jobs, could come and find a home in which they could rediscover their human dignity and God's love would be apparent.

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## Africa-Madagascar

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### WESTERN SAHARA Specialists in a most difficult mission

*Fr. Alberto GNEMMI, the Provincial of the Mediterranean Province, together with the Vicar Provincial, Fr. Ismael GARCIA, celebrated Christmas by visiting the two Oblates who are the Catholic presence in the Sahara, the Apostolic Prefect, Fr. Mario LEÓN DORADO, and Fr. Valère EKO. Fr. Mario is originally from Spain; Fr. Valère, from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The following are excerpts of a conversation Fr. Alberto had with the two missionaries.*

*(There are) positive aspects, but for a mission that in some way should be ready for evangelization, the challenges seem difficult, impossible in the political-religious context of the Sahara. Father Mario gives me his explanation in the light of the faith:*

“Certainly, proselytism such as the conversion of a Muslim is forbidden (the crimes of apostasy and leading a Muslim to apostasy are punished with imprisonment). Having said that, I believe I am fully a missionary and an Oblate. We do evangelize, showing Christ and his gospel in this land, as Pope Francis tells us: ‘Always proclaim Jesus Christ, and if necessary, even with words.’ The image of Blessed Charles de Foucault inspires me: we are in the time of sowing; the time of harvesting belongs to the Lord. He knows what He is doing! We are only laborers. He will decide when it will be the right time for the harvest. For now, our work is to show the face of Christ, to make Him present, to sow the seed. In reality, the anti-proselytism climate is not much different from some clearly anti-church obstacles in the West. But it is also true that there are some laws that forbid Christian proselytism.”

*I ask Fr. Valère a more specific question: “What are the greatest difficulties or dangers for a missionary who is working in a context*

*without Christians and without the possibility of freely evangelizing?”*

“For missionaries working in this context where you cannot evangelize outside of the church, the dangers and risks are many: the relativization of everything; the loss of that sensitivity of the soul that makes you feel like a Christian, a priest, an Oblate. Other risks: being expelled by the police if you speak about politics, about human rights, if you try to do proselytism. With the growth of fundamentalism and religious extremism, you never know when or where they are going to strike. For us, it's a question of knowing how to live the missionary dream without losing the passion for Jesus Christ and the zeal for the salvation of souls. Sometimes we find ourselves in a dilemma: there is nothing to do and / or there are many things that can be done.”

*Father Mario, as Prefect, has the possibility of meeting the bishops of North Africa and so to know the reality of the Church in this part of the world. “Father Mario, how do you see the future of Christianity in the Islamic world? What is the place of interreligious dialogue? Isn't there the risk that it be a dialogue among the deaf?”*

“It seems that here, Christianity will always be in the minority. Islamic fundamentalism is growing almost everywhere. Islam and the Muslims are living in crisis. It appears that this crisis is global, so everyone is experiencing the consequences. But not only here in an Islamic country, but also in Europe. Just look at what happened in France last November where they are living in a state of shock. I believe that here, we are privileged witnesses. In Morocco, the Christians are all foreigners and it will continue to be that way into the near future. Furthermore, society makes you feel like a stranger. However, everything could change in the future. In Tunisia and Algeria, local Christian communities are beginning to grow slowly. In other countries, that is unthinkable,



for example, Libya and Mauritania. In Morocco, there is an in-between situation. Part of Moroccan society would accept religious freedom with all its consequences, even though the majority of the population, traditionalist and conservative or fundamentalist, would not understand this and would rebel.

“Concerning interreligious dialogue, being here, we cannot avoid it. One dialogues not only with works but also with one’s life! Unfortunately, it is often a dialogue among the deaf. Most of the time, it’s like being in front of a wall: here, as in Madrid and in Rome..., wherever there are Muslims. This is true not only for the Muslims but also for the other side. In my experience, I have met few persons who have completely respected me for what I am, a Christian. That happens when some has the human and religious maturity that makes them able to accept the other as an equal, even if the faith is different, or because they love you, accepting you as you are, but only after a long process. In any case, the important thing is to be present while the Muslim world follows its path. We cannot fail to accompany them in their process, in their life, in such a crucial time.”

## SENEGAL

### Pilgrimage with Founder’s relic

Vatican Radio reported that for the celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Oblates, a relic of the heart of St. Eugene de Mazenod has been offered to the faithful of Senegal and Guinea Bissau for veneration. The relic began its journey on January 16 from the Cathedral of Dakar. On January 23-24, it was at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Liberation at Popenguine where the Missionary Oblates had their jubilee celebration. Cardinal Theodore Adrien Sarr presided at a solemn Mass on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Of special interest is that Cardinal Sarr can find the Oblate Founder in his own episcopal lineage: the Cardinal is ninth in a line of succession from St. Eugene. The Oblates have been present in Senegal for 40 years.

The veneration of the relic of the heart of St. Eugene de Mazenod is meaningful because the

Founder often spoke of his own heart. He put it at the center of his life with his love of God, the people and his confreres. For that reason, he wanted it to be, even after his death, a symbol of his affection for all who knew him.

The *Oblate Historical Dictionary, Volume I*, states under the rubric *Heart of the Founder*:

“In conformity with a custom which was formerly commonly accepted, the Founder wanted to leave as an inheritance to his Oblates his heart, the symbol of his affection. In his will drawn up August 1, 1854, he declared: ‘I would have been really happy if after my death my heart were placed in the sanctuary of Notre-Dame de la Garde at the feet of our good Mother whose temple I have had the happiness of rebuilding...’ (Oblate Writings I, vol. 15, no. 191, p. 251) On January 20, 1861, in a codicil attached to his will, he specified: “It is my wish that my heart, divided in two, should be deposited, one half in the sanctuary of Notre-Dame at the feet of my Good Mother, and the other be deposited in the midst of my sons at Montolivet.””

Over the course of the years, the holy relic of the Founder has had various homes and has been further divided several times.

## SOUTH AFRICA, NORTHERN PROVINCE

### Oblates honoured by school they founded

Learners in South Africa today are reaping the fruits of the decision of a French priest to help revive the Church after the devastation caused by the French Revolution. Fr Eugene de Mazenod, a priest from Aix-en-Provence, established the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1816. Although the original and primary focus of the Oblates has always been on missionary work among the poor, they have also been instrumental in the establishment of many schools.

One of these is St. Benedict’s in Bedfordview, Johannesburg, which shares a common history with other great Oblate schools in Canada, North America, the Philippines and Australia. The presence of the Oblates is still strongly felt at St. Benedict’s, said headmaster Andre Oosthuysen.

“We congratulate the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on the celebration of their bicentennial and thank God for the many gifts and blessings that have been bestowed upon the world through their tireless work and selfless sacrifices,” said Mr Oosthuysen. “We thank them for our school. May Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate continue to fan the flame of their life and mission.”

Oblate priests who have played a special role at St Benedict’s include Fr Philip ERASME, who was instrumental in establishing St Benedict’s in 1957,

and Frs. Hugh DALTON, Jimmy TOWELL, Robert DA SYLVA and Patrick HARTIN.

The first headmaster of St Benedict’s Preparatory School, the late Fr Jack O’BRIEN, was also an Oblate. “So many Oblate priests and Brothers have played instrumental roles in the history of our school,” Mr Oosthuysen said. “Without the vision and charism of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, our school would not exist. They are an integral part of who we are.” (*The Southern Cross*, [www.scross.co.za](http://www.scross.co.za))

## Asia-Oceania

### INDONESIA

#### Celebrating the bicentenary in Central Java

The District of Purwokerto, Central Java, celebrated 200 years of the foundation of the Congregation with a Mass and a community gathering afterwards.

Firstly, all the Oblates of the District gathered in Cilacap Parish: Frs. Antonius RAJABANA, Yohanes DAMIANUS, Reynold SOMBOLAYUK, Fr. Niko Ola PAUKUMA), Frs. Charlie BURROWS, Vincent WATUN and Peter STOLL, as well as scholastic Petrus SIDABALOK. The Eucharist which was celebrated in a chapel about 5 km from the parish of Cilacap.

The Mass was packed with nearly 700 people. There was extra seats and canopies/tents to accommodate the extra crowd. The Vicar General and also the Dean of the diocese were present with several other diocesan and Missionaries of the Sacred Heart priests. The provincial, Fr. Rajabana, was the principal concelebrant.

In his homily, the provincial spoke of the Founder’s experience that is now the basis of Oblate spirituality as well as St Paul’s experience, namely conversion and sacrifice. After the Eucharist, the Celebration Committee had prepared a few little ceremonies to mark the occasion: the traditional cutting of the cake as well as the cutting of the “tumpeng” - the cone shaped rice surrounded by assorted Indonesian dishes. Photos were taken and seven balloons were released into the night sky, representing

the seven Oblates working in the District. Each balloon had a prayer attached to it. Afterwards, we all had a simple meal together. One of the endearing factors to this celebration was that there was a good number of young people involved. (Fr. Peter Subagyo Stoll)

### JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

#### Helping the widows

HAVONOS is an organization in Holland that is designed to help those affected by the war in Northern Sri Lanka; they work in partnership with the Oblates of the Jaffna Province. The Oblates organize mini-programs, on behalf of HAVANOS, to grant support for war-affected widows.

On December 11, 2015, thirty-one widows from around Mankulam were granted first installments to start poultry or dairy farms. Additional help will be made available in order to establish a regular livelihood for these widows who are the only breadwinners in their families. Similar mini-programs are scheduled for the widows around Mullikulam, Kilinochchi, and Yakkachi.

It is to be noted that there are an estimated 90,000 war-widows and 160,000 amputees as a result of the 30 year civil war in Sri Lanka. These widows fall under either or both of these categories: some have lost their husbands while others’ husbands have lost their limbs. Compounding these problems, some of these widows themselves are amputees and are displaced persons, living on temporary land. (<http://www.omijaffna.com/>)

**COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**  
***Samvaada* Oblate journal going electronic**

*Samvaada* is a Sri Lankan Catholic journal on interreligious dialogue started in 2012 in honour of late prophet-martyr Fr. Michael RODRIGO of treasured memory. So far it has had three issues. It is an Oblate venture whose editor-in-chief is Fr. Claude PERERA. Other Oblates on the editorial board are Fr. Chrysantha THILAKARATNE and Eric WASALATHANTHRI.

Beginning with the latest issue of 2014-2015, the journal is published only electronically. It can be accessed only as an e-journal in the Colombo Province website: <http://www.omicolombo.com>.

In the future, back issues will also be made available. The access is free. The editors say that their biggest challenge is to find articles for publication, and thus, appeal to Oblate and non-Oblate writers from all over the world to contribute by way of articles related to theology of religions and its praxis in various parts of the world. The main articles of the current issue are: *A Difficult Vocation: Fr. Michael Rodrigo at the Foot of the Cross; Political Participation of Women in Early India; Relationship between Early India and the Old Testament; Thou Shalt not Worship Globalization*. For any related correspondence

please contact Fr. Claude Perera via email: [ereraclaude@gmail.com](mailto:ereraclaude@gmail.com).

**COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**  
**Interreligious dialogue through “*Elle*”**

*Elle* is a popular team sport in Sri Lanka. To an outsider’s eye, it might look somewhat similar to American baseball. Our Lady of Holy Rosary Church, Kuchchaveli, organized a friendly *Elle* tournament on January 15, which is the Thaipongal Day – the Tamil festival of thanksgiving.

The invitees were Catholic, Hindu and Buddhist girls’ teams from nine different towns. Among the guests who witnessed the occasion were Fr. Balasingam JEYABALAN, the parish priest of Nilaweli, and Fr. Jesu RAMESH, the parish priest of Kuchchaveli.

This event publicly demonstrated the harmonious co-existence and the dialogue among the multi-religious and multi-ethnic people in and around the parish. Meanwhile Fr. Ramesh has also taken a lot initiative to raise the educational level of the children of the area with his linguistic talents. He also travels long distances daily, which he does happily, in order to gather children and people together for religious and educational activities in his parish. (Fr. S. RANDIL Fernando)

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**Canada-United States**

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**NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP, CANADA**  
**A statement of the Archbishop of Ottawa**

*Here are some excerpts from the message which the Archbishop of Ottawa, Msgr. Terrence Prendergast, SJ, addressed to the Oblates last January 25 on the occasion of the Bicentenary.*

“Your missionary heart, rooted in service ‘to preach Christ crucified’, not in grandeur of word, but in the sharing of the Spirit, has been an immense blessing to many around the world and in particular, here in Canada.

“In Ottawa, we have a special relationship with the Oblates since Bishop Joseph-Bruno GUIGUES, founding bishop of the diocese

of Bytown, was an Oblate. The roots of our archdiocese are closely linked to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the founding of Bytown College, later the University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University, celebrating 160 years this year including the 125 years of the faculty of theology.

“In addition, there are six parishes with various languages and heritages -- English, French, German, Italian and Polish – now being served by the Oblates of the Polish Assumption province and the provinces of Lacombe and Notre-Dame-du-Cap (... ).

“May Our Lady continue to intercede for her sons and may God bless your ministry and your community...” (INFO OMI, 1 February 2016)

**NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP  
President of Bishops' Conference on Oblate  
Bicentennial**

*On the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Oblates, Bishop Douglas CROSBY, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and also an Oblate, wrote a letter of congratulations to Fr. Luc TARDIF, provincial of the Province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap:*

Dear Father Tardif,

On the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops joins the universal Church in offering joyful thanksgiving to God. When Father Eugene de Mazenod and Father Henri Paul Tempier shared their vows as Oblates of Provence on Holy Thursday, April 11, 1816, they had no idea where the Spirit of God was leading them and their young community. Two hundred years later, about 4000 Oblates serve in 69 countries worldwide! Despite a reduction over the past several years from even higher numbers, the community is still a strong missionary presence in the Catholic Church.

Arriving in Canada in 1841, at the request of Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, the Oblates began an important era of evangelization for the country, most especially during the "opening" of the West. The Oblates worked closely with Indigenous Peoples, learning their many languages, and preparing dictionaries and grammars, assuring that some of these languages

would survive the arrival of European settlers and continue into our time. As missionaries, Oblates priests and brothers were not afraid to travel to the more remote communities in the northern parts of the country, often giving their lives for the people entrusted to their care. Names of Oblate missionaries are given to cities, towns, parks and streets across the country.

Many religious institutions established by Oblate missionaries over the years endure, among them the University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University; the Shrine of Our Lady of the Cape in Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec; Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ontario; and many parish churches in Canada, including several cathedrals! Even the skidoo was conceived by an Oblate!

Similar to the situation of other religious communities, the Oblates face many challenges in this new millennium. Undaunted, they look to the future, undertaking new initiatives, always desiring to serve the Church with creative energy, pastoral enthusiasm, and missionary daring!

Praise God for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this great missionary community in the Church! As we conclude this special Year for Consecrated Life, may the Oblates know of the admiration and gratitude of the entire Church in Canada, and accept her prayers for continued rich blessings into the future.

*Ad multos et faustissimos annos!*

+Douglas Crosby, OMI

## Latin America

**BRAZIL  
Still among the poorest of the poor...**

*Father Roberto VALICOURT, a missionary in Brazil's Northeast for more than 50 years, tells us about the life of the indigenous peoples, known as "Indians"...*

I need to remind you that when the Portuguese invaded (not discovered) the land of the Holy

Cross, which they called "Brazil," this land was inhabited by about five million human beings whom they called "Indians" because they thought they had landed in the Indies!!! Turned into slaves, massacred, died of diseases brought from Europe that they did not know how to cure. In the 50's, there were only about 150,000 of them left. Today, it is estimated that there are about a million of them in a population of 200 million Brazilians: a very small minority and treated as such.



The Indians live in tribes or communities in the forest or on the banks of streams and rivers, living by hunting, fishing and farming. But other than about a hundred groups who live isolated, refusing all contact with other Indians and the non-Indians whom they call “the Whites,” they are greatly influenced by city civilization through TV and cell phones. It is the city which is invading the “*aldeias*” (Indian villages)!

Many Indian families have abandoned their *aldeia* to come live in the city, in Manaus, in its suburbs or in the nearby rural zone. Why?

A member of the family becomes gravely ill. The presence of a doctor is difficult. There is no medicine and the healers don’t know how to treat the illness of the “Whites” (tuberculosis, cancer, hepatitis B, C, D). They have to go to the nearest town. But in these little towns, the hospitals are ill equipped. They have to come to Manaus. But an Indian will not be separated from family. They await a lasting solution, sometimes death. So they stay.

A young person wants to study. In the *aldeia*, the school offers barely a primary education. They go to the nearby little town. But for the university? Manaus! And the family comes along too and settles there.

The “Whites” invade the forest: looking for oil, for minerals of every kind, for wood; the forest is cut down for raising cattle, soybeans, corn for ethanol. The government has huge projects for opening highways and building hydroelectric dams. The river water is polluted and the fish are disappearing; game birds flee the noise of the machines. Climate change is producing floods and droughts never before seen. They have to leave.

(...) In Manaus, there is no city policy for the poorest of the poor. They are rejected, the “discarded”! Those who arrived twenty or thirty years ago have built their shacks on the banks of a little stream that has become a sewer with the growth of the city. Some young people have managed to study and have become lawyers, nurses, managers, professors.

But they are a very small minority. The great majority who have not had this opportunity remain without work, or with little jobs that give no social advantage. The women make necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, using fibers of the *tucumã* (a species of palm tree), and seeds which they look for in the nearby forest or which they have to buy. But where can they sell their products?

Many are victims of discrimination: “Father, aren’t you afraid when you go among the Indians?”

That’s why many of them deny their roots: “My father is Kokama, my mother is Apurinã, but me...I am not Indian.”

When I arrived in Manaus in 2010, the auxiliary bishop encouraged me to work in indigenous ministry. But doing what? I had to plunge into this reality, totally unknown to me: a completely different culture from my own. One does what one can; love does the rest. The point of departure is visiting, getting to know, living with. We work in a team, with three lay Indians. We help them to organize and to form small associations. We need to save and enrich the culture. We have succeeded in getting elected a member of the Municipal Council for Culture. An indigenous woman is on the Municipal Council for Health. Another is a member of the National Council for Women. We are trying to get their knowledge of medicinal plants recognized, with the help of a professor of medicine at the Federal University of the Amazon. A missionary from Canada, specialist in indigenous languages, comes each year to bolster the knowledge of the indigenous professors.

The way the land is being occupied is favorable to the sects or Pentecostal churches and 80% or more are evangelical. We work with them with no problem, but Catholic communities are practically non-existent. Some families request baptism for their children and I celebrate Mass in some communities. But for now, that does not go very far. The different ethnic groups find it difficult to live together. We try to get them to meet and work together. It’s a real challenge. It would be important to have a cooperative of

Indian artisans. For now, that has not worked. The youth are abandoning their culture and many either use or sell drugs. The men especially are given over to alcohol. One needs much patience and a well-rooted faith...

In spite of the difficulties and the many challenges, I am happy among the Indians of the city. We telephone each other. We work together. The missionary needs to penetrate the culture of the people he is serving. At Bobigny (a suburb of Paris), I had adopted the worker culture. In the

Transamazon, I have learned to live with the “*posseiros*” (squatters). In Manaus, I am trying to graft onto myself the indigenous culture, so different from the others. In talking to a representative of the mayor’s office in Manaus, I was surprised to hear myself say: “We want a place where we can sell our craft products,” as if I too were Indian!

“The glory of God is man alive,” said Saint Irenaeus of Lyon. The glory of God is the living Indian! (<http://www.oblatfrance.com/>)

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### Anniversaries - April 2016

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#### 65 Years of religious life

25.04.1951	08992	Fr. Othmar Grüber	Paraguay
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#### 65 Years of priesthood

29.04.1951	10819	Fr. John Chai	China
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#### 60 Years of priesthood

15.04.1956	08748	Fr. Joseph Kane	Lacombe
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#### 50 Years of priesthood

02.04.1966	11270	Fr. Luc Athimon	France
02.04.1966	10996	Fr. Alain Playoust	France
02.04.1966	10968	Fr. Giovanni Santopietro	Mediterranean
02.04.1966	10967	Fr. Giancarlo Todesco	Senegal
14.04.1966	11219	Fr. Ruben Gomez	Philippines
14.04.1966	10644	Fr. Romeo Villanueva	Philippines
26.04.1966	10716	Fr. William Maher	Japan

#### 25 Years of priesthood

20.04.1991	12924	Fr. Jacob Ramosa Salooe	Lesotho
27.04.1991	12923	Bishop Joseph Mopeli Sephamola	Lesotho

### Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 10-19

Name	Prov./Del.	Born	Died at	Date
Fr. Carmelino Razon	Philippines	25/11/1948	Cotabato City	20/12/2015
Fr. Bernard Crouvezier	France	26/09/1926	Lyon	05/02/2016
Fr. Etienne van Dooselaere	Belgium/Holland	03/10/1937	Oostduinkerke	17/02/2016
Fr. Agustin Petru	Mexico	24/05/1928	Mexico City	21/02/2016
Scho. Jean Claude Mossoula Modounga	Cameroon	20/12/1990	Yaoundé	22/02/2016
Fr. Matthews Mokiti	Lesotho	07/04/1959	Maseru	23/02/2016
Fr. Léon Iwele Enak	Congo	02/05/1957	Kinshasa	23/02/2016
Fr. Iginò Ingriselli	Mediterranean	07/01/1933	Piedimonte Matese	25/02/2016
Fr. André Rebuffet	France	09/10/1923	Lyon	26/02/2016
Fr. Heinrich Josef Rink	Central European	11/06/1929	Hünfeld	29/02/2016

*“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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via Aurelia 290, I 00165 Roma, Italy  
Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail: [information@omigen.org](mailto:information@omigen.org)  
<http://www.omiworld.org>  
Editor: James Allen; Webmaster: Shanil Jayawardena  
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