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**An invitation from the Vicar General  
“Of one heart and one mind...”**

We are living in a time of grace. Last January 25, we celebrated 195 years of existence, and that makes us think that we are getting close to the end of the second century of our history. We are now preparing to celebrate the feast of St. Eugene and this year will be a big event, marking 150 years since his death. When we celebrate the anniversary of the death of our Founder, what comes up immediately and spontaneously are his last words to his Oblates, to those whom he loved with a father's heart: “Among yourselves, charity, charity, charity, and outside, zeal for the salvation of souls”. The time of grace we are living as Oblates is also due to our recent Chapter, which ended by calling us to a deeper conversion, both personal and communal.

Individual Oblates and communities at different levels have already started responding to this call of the Chapter. At the same time, the General Council, gathered in plenary session between January and February, started working on a program for animation for the whole Oblate family. Reflecting and finding ways of going in depth into our commitment as Oblates is the best way to respond to the Chapter call and to prepare for all the anniversaries that we will be celebrating in the coming years.

I'd like to concentrate here on the first call to conversion from the Chapter document. It is about community. The first thing that we are reminded of is that our life and mission have their center in the person of Jesus Christ. St. Eugene considered the community of the apostles around Jesus as the model of the Oblate community; he also took the first Christian community of Jerusalem as another model for the Oblate community, especially

because in that community they were all of one heart and one mind.

Following the example of those two communities, we are called to give our common life a new quality. The heart of the Oblate community is the call of Jesus, who has gathered us together through the needs of salvation that we hear in our world today. And we still hear many of those! One way of giving new quality to our community life is to deepen our relationship with Jesus through personal and community prayer and by reflecting and evaluating our own way of living. The recent Chapter calls us to do this under the guidance of the Spirit.

The nine points that articulate this call to conversion in community life are ways for centering our conversion on the person of Jesus. The witness of our life is a way of sharing the values of our religious consecration and an invitation for others to join the Oblate family. The quality of our lifestyle is to be periodically reviewed in specific areas and in a transparent and accountable way by each Oblate and by all together as a body. This is ground for real conversion.

Community life, when lived intensively, is also a place where we know the difficulties of our relationships and get wounded in our humanity. That's why community is also a place for forgiveness and reconciliation. This is sometimes the most difficult aspect of community life, and because of this, it is, at the same time, the most real way of witnessing our faith and love as followers of Jesus.

In recent years our communities have become largely international and intercultural. This is a

new challenge for our common life, a new call to witness the Gospel as disciples of Jesus. On one hand, we see the world becoming a small village; on the other hand, we experience every day the consequences of violence that creates new barriers, new frontiers, more ideological than geographical. This is why community life

has become for us a privileged way of being prophetic by showing the world around us that living together is possible, even for people coming from places and cultures that are more distant than simply North and South, East and West. (Fr. Paolo ARCHIATI, Vicar General)

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## General Administration

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### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

#### General Councillor named bishop in Zambia

On February 15, the Holy See announced the appointment of Fr. Evans CHINYEMBA as Bishop of Mongu in Zambia. On September 30, 2010, the 35<sup>th</sup> General Chapter had elected him General Councillor for the Region of Africa-Madagascar. He succeeds Bishop Paul DUFFY who served as the first bishop of Mongu since 1997. Bishop Duffy had submitted his resignation when he turned 75 in 2007, but the Holy See asked him to continue his ministry for a few more years.

The new bishop was born in 1967 in Lukulu, Western Province, Zambia. His first profession of vows was in 1994. After attending the International Scholasticate in Rome, he was ordained in 2000. Prior to being named superior of the Delegation of Zambia in 2009, he worked in parish ministry for a few years. Most of his ministry has been in formation, serving as Formation Director of the delegation and as director of the pre-novitiate program in Lusaka. Besides speaking several Zambian languages, he speaks English and Italian.

The Diocese of Mongu, established in 1997, covers some 87,000 square kilometres in western Zambia, with a population of over 620,000; of these, approximately 10% are Catholics.

The Oblate presence in Zambia continues to grow. In this delegation of the United States Province, at the beginning of 2011, there were 73 members, including 49 scholastics.

In conformity with the Oblate Constitutions and Rules, the Superior General in Council, acting

collegially, will choose a new General Councillor for the Africa-Madagascar Region.

### OBLATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

#### Marcello Zago and the Assisi event of 1986

March 1, 2011, was the tenth anniversary of the death of Archbishop Marcello ZAGO. In Italy, the celebrations of this event took place at Villorba, in the province of Treviso, his birthplace. The celebration was organized by his family, with the involvement of the parish, the diocese and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

On Saturday, February 26, the memorial took place in the parish. After projection of a video on the Day of Prayer for Peace held in Assisi on October 27, 1986, Fr. Fabio CIARDI, Director of Oblate Studies and Research, gave a conference on the role of Fr. Zago in the preparation and realization of that day. This year, in fact, is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of an event that was a milestone in Interreligious dialogue, one that marked the path of the Church and religions around the world, "an image," as Fr. Zago wrote, "and a portent of what religious persons should be for society: intercessors with God for peace, builders of peace among men," icons of the unity among the children of God, of the real possibility of dialogue, of friendship and of communion among all.

On Sunday, February 27, the Eucharist was presided by Archbishop Gianfranco Agostino Gardin, of Treviso. Participating were the Superior General of the Oblates, Fr. Louis LOUGEN, together with many confreres and friends of Fr. Zago.

With the Assisi event, Fr. Marcello Zago took leave of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious

Dialogue, having been recently elected Superior General of the Oblates. The results of Assisi would not end there. As he prophesied at that time, “For those who want to understand the nature and the path of interfaith dialogue in the Church and the world, the prayer meeting in Assisi on October 27, 1986, will remain a crucial step, and an even more important symbol.”

In that day, he saw above all a confirmation of

ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. What the Council had stated in its documents, at Assisi was “expressed in a solemn way and understood by all, broadcast by the media. In Assisi, the welcoming of religious leaders and their presence at the prayer of different religions were in some way a recognition of religion and in particular of prayer, a recognition that religion and prayer have not only a social role, but also effectiveness with God. (Fabio Ciardi, OMI)

## Latin America

### GUATEMALA

#### January 25 at Los Pajales

It’s January: the mango trees, already in bloom, will bear their first fruits during Holy week. This is the time to sow beans and corn. We are in Los Pajales, where they speak Maya-Achi, a village 10 km from Belejú (the Oblate parish of Chicamán-Quiché), where the novices from the Latin-American novitiate in Guatemala are spending three months this year in order to live a missionary experience.

In Belejú, at an altitude of 2000 meters, it’s cold and there is no water. In recompense, there is electricity. Los Pajales, on the other hand, is at 1000 meters. Here, it is warm; there is water in all the houses, but there is no electricity and telecommunications are almost impossible because the village is surrounded by high mountains. A tributary of the Chixoy (the river that feeds the hydroelectric dam, two hours from here by foot) makes possible the irrigation of family gardens.

In addition to mangoes, there is an abundance of tropical fruit trees: bananas, coconuts, pineapples, papayas and custard apples. There are 200 families, with 400 pupils in primary and middle schools. They live on both banks of the river, linked by a hanging bridge. The light is generated by solar panels and petrol generators.

We’ll stay five days, camping out in the church and sleeping on the benches. We will visit the families and organize activities for children and young people; we will celebrate Mass and

administer the three sacraments (Confession, Communion, Anointing of the Sick). At the end of each day, there will be a film, looked forward to by young and old. You know: wherever there are novices, there is also the cinema.

On January 25, we are immersed in full missionary activity. We get up at 6:30 for a swim in the river and Mass at 7:00 in the shade of the coral tree next to the church. We pray for the whole Congregation, for the new General Council and for vocations, surrounded by the children who at 8:00 have to go to the nearby school.

In the evening, there is the long-awaited film. The spectators are so many, so we decide to show the film outside. At 18:30, it’s already dark. There are not enough seats. People sit on the ground and we can begin.

If you take your eyes off the screen, your gaze inevitably falls on the spectacle of the stars. The star of St. Eugene, tonight, January 25, the anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation, shines in a special way ... and smiles! (Fr. Pippo MAMMANA and the Guatemala Novitiate 2010-2011).



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## Asia-Oceania

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### SRI LANKA

#### Tamil war widows seek justice

The government must recognize all the war widows as a group in need of special attention, because civil society cannot escape responsibility towards them. Otherwise, “their stories remain buried in the sands of history, blown away by the winds of time.” These are the demands of Fr. Oswald B. FIRTH, president of the *Association for Peace and Development* (PAPD), in a meeting with the *Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission* (LLRC) held on 20 January in Colombo. The PAPD is a nongovernmental organization founded during the war in 2001 to promote inter-ethnic harmony and a spirit of understanding among all major communities in the east, directly affected by war.

Addressing the LLRC members, Fr. Firth said that “many of them have studied and passed the *General Certificate of Education* with good grades, but because of the war, they could not continue their studies. Some speak Tamil and Sinhalese.”

The PAPD President, speaking of his experience working with war widows, said that these women live daily humiliation and social rejection. Another major problem concerns their economic survival, made difficult because of low-paid and temporary jobs. The priest said: “The types of work available to them hardly ever matched their skills. They were never made permanent in their employment, and were therefore deprived of employee benefits. On quitting these temporary sources of income, they were often empty-handed, carrying with them the same feeling of financial insecurity that has been the lot of nearly all war widows.”

The marginalization of Tamil widows is a real social stigma. “They cannot marry,” continues Fr Firth, “because social mores find it deplorable. These women are often alone and insecure, and are treated as a symbol of bad luck in their own circles. Widows of war are certainly among the most vulnerable groups of society.”

The meeting was also attended by three widows of the eastern district of Batticaloa: Suresh Kumar Maheswari, 52; Shiwanthi Manoharan, 43; Jayaseelan Loretta, 40. In presenting their testimony to the LLRC, the three women stated categorically that they can no longer tolerate any form of violence and war, since they have been among the hardest hit victims. “The violence,” they said, “leaves invisible and incalculable damage in the lives of those innocents who have no voice.”

Fr. Firth ended his speech by saying that their condition must be compensated by the State, as a matter of justice. (by Melani Manel Perera in AsiaNews.it)

### LAOS

#### After 40 years, the first priestly ordination in the North

*On January 25, AsiaNews.it and the Vatican radio made this announcement.*

The first priestly ordination in forty years in northern Laos will be celebrated on January 29. It should have taken place on December 12 last year, but it was delayed by almost two months. The new priest, Pierre Buntha Silaphet, is thirty years old and was born in Phnom Van (Sayaboury in northern Laos). He belongs to the K'Hmù ethnic group.

Something which the Catholic community in Laos considers providential is that the name of Pierre in Laotian is “Buntha,” the same as that of the last ethnic K'Hmù priest, ordained in Luang Prabang on February 22, 1970, 41 years ago, by the Oblate, Bishop Alessandro STACCIOLI, Vicar Apostolic from February 1968 to 1975. In that year, the government decided to expel all foreign missionaries, without the possibility of re-entering the country. Since then, Father Tito Banchong has been alone in the Vicariate, and it is with understandable joy that that he announced this new ordination.

The post-ordination festivities, the first in 40 years in the Vicariate of Luang Prabang, will



be held in the village of Phnom Van. The small Catholic community will rejoice with Pierre Buntha when he returns to his native village of Phnom Van, after his ordination which will take place in Takhek, 800 kilometers to the south. The ordaining bishop is Msgr. Marie-Louis Ling, Vicar Apostolic of Paksé, an ethnic K'hmù like Buntha. The new diocesan priest belongs to one of the families evangelized between 1960 and 1975 by the Oblate, Father Piero Maria BONOMETTI, at Ban Houei Thong in the province of Luang Prabang.

The apostolic administrator, Msgr. Tito Banchong, had all the necessary permits from the authorities to celebrate this event. In a non-official way, it has been made clear to those involved that the ceremony of ordination should not be stressed too much, and assume the character of a village celebration. Since 1975, the Vicariate of Luang Prabang has no cathedral, but only small chapels throughout the countryside. The government closely monitors the life and activity of the Church and the Christian minorities. The Catholic Church is present across the four Apostolic Vicariates: Luang Prabang, Paksé, Savannakhet and Vientiane. There are 39,725 Catholics, representing 0.65% of the population.

## **PAKISTAN**

### **40 years of missionary service**

The whole world celebrates St. Valentine's Day on February 14, but for the Oblate delegation of Pakistan, this day has a significance of its own. It was on February 14, 1971, that the Oblates arrived in Pakistan.

At the request of Bishop Benedict Cialeo, O.P, of Layllpur (present Faisalabad), three Oblates arrived in Pakistan. These Oblates started their mission in Gojra, Chak Jhumra and Okara in the Faisalabad diocese. The Oblates also served in the Pir Mahal parish of this diocese from 1996 until 2001. When the parish priest, Fr. Alfred RAYAPPU, died, the parish was handed back to the diocese.

In 1978, the Oblates moved to the diocese of Multan at the request of Bishop Ernest Boland, O.P., and took over the parish of Khanewal. In 1985, they took over the parish of Rungpur in the same diocese but later moved to Derekabad parish where they continue to serve. One must not forget to mention here the name of Fr. Temsey CROOS who was greatly instrumental in the development of this parish. He also built a beautiful grotto of Our Lady. This grotto is one of the most beautiful grottos in Pakistan.

In 1981 the Oblates were called to the parish in Quetta in the Hyderabad diocese which included almost the entire Province of Baluchistan. In 2001, Pope John Paul II established the Apostolic Prefecture of Quetta and entrusted it to the Oblates. Fr. Victor GNANAPRAGASAM was installed as its first Prefect. In July 2010, this Prefecture was raised to the status of Apostolic Vicariate with Fr. Victor being ordained bishop of the Quetta Vicariate.

Currently, the Oblates are serving in two parishes in the Archdiocese of Lahore, one parish in the Archdiocese of Karachi and one parish in the diocese of Multan. The whole of the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta is also in the hands of the Oblates with eleven of them serving there. The Oblates have formation houses in Multan, Lahore and Karachi. During the last four years there has been a remarkable increase in the number of local Oblates. Thirteen local Oblates have been ordained to the priesthood in the last four years.

The past 40 years have certainly been grace-filled years for the Oblates in Pakistan. We have experienced the love of our gracious Lord through our ministries and through serving the poor. Today, the Oblates are very much part of the Pakistani local Church and can proudly say that we too have contributed our part in the building of the local church. As we enter the fifth decade of our presence in Pakistan, we bow our heads in thankfulness and gratitude to our Lord and ask for His perpetual graces and blessings to carry on His mission in this blessed land. (Scholastic Brother Anthony ADNAN)

## AUSTRALIA

### The young Irish of Sydney

*At the request of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants, in 2002, Fr. Thomas MURPHY, then provincial of the Anglo-Irish Province, asked Father Thomas DEVEREUX to become the Irish Chaplain to young Irish immigrants in Sydney. Here is a glimpse at what he does for these young individuals and families who are far away from their homeland.*

I have been very involved in the lives of many people, mainly in the sacramental situations such as births, marriages and funerals. Now that is not unusual in any way. It is in fact the normal life of any Oblate priest, but with this difference: I find myself performing such ministry in sometimes unusual situations. Perhaps the grandparents of a child are here only for a few weeks, and they ask me to perform the baptism at short notice. Recently I conducted a baptism using Skype, with the grandmother watching in Ireland whilst her grandchild was baptized in St Mary's Cathedral. Another time, a young man's mother could not attend her son's wedding due to injury; we made a mobile call at the very moment the couple exchanged their vows. The wonder of modern technology!

The chaplaincy has been a point of contact for people when things have gone tragically wrong for them, such as at a time of deaths or accidents. We have been the ones to whom they can turn when such things happen, providing either accommodation or just the support that they need during such situations. I make the necessary contacts with families or the local clergy in Ireland to assure them that we are handling things, and that it is an Irish person who is dealing with the situation.

I believe that it is important to let people know that there is a place here where they can come in such cases. In the words of many people over the eight years that I am here: "my home has become their home."

When we are dealing with so many young Irish people, the chaplaincy can meet them at very vulnerable times, such as the recent death of friends back home, or members of the their families, especially when it is the grandparents or loved ones at home. They come to have Mass said or they just come to light a candle in the church. Several times I have opened the church so that they could pray, because I realized how much the "tyranny of distance" touches them at this time, even with Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and Skype at their disposal. Sometimes it is just a word spoken outside the church on the weekend that makes it is easier for them to deal with their loss in far-off Australia.

It is important to walk with these people in the many and various situations which life puts before us, and to do as Jesus did with the disciples and people on the roads of the Holy Land: to be the Christ-presence for them in a big and lovely country such as Australia. We come from a small country, the size of many the farms here in Australia. We come from a land which has a great history and culture. We are respected throughout the world for our music, humour and sense of fun and the ability to adapt to situations which have come our way. Thus I feel that the young Irish people who come as the new ambassadors at this hard time for Ireland will be fine examples of what Ireland has to offer the "Lucky Country," as they call Australia. (*Oblate Connections*, 17 February 2011)

## Africa-Madagascar

### CONGO

#### Facing future challenges

*During their reflection days after their annual retreat in January, the Oblates from the Province of Congo looked at the challenges that the new provincial administration will need to face after it is named by the Superior General in Council in*

*2011. The provincial secretary, Fr. Jean-Claude KIANGA sent this report.*

There were 54 of us present on January 14. Fathers Alfons KEUTER, Constant KIENGE-KIENGE and Edy MABILA had joined us the previous evening. Together, we began our "reflection days" after the retreat.

During his homily at the morning Mass, Fr. Jean-Baptiste MALENGE put the liturgical texts of the day into our context: if the paralytic mentioned in the Gospel was the Oblate Province of Congo, for whom should he ask the Lord's healing? And what if we were the four persons carrying the paralytic? Doesn't the number four represent the four corners or the four national languages of the Democratic Republic of Congo, so that the Lord is inviting us to His service, no matter what our origins?

On this opening day of our "reflection days," the Provincial Superior, Macaire MANIMBA, had the task of putting things into context. He evaluated his second term at the helm of the province since 2008.

He noted that the times have been hard, referring in particular to the global financial crisis. The challenge has been to know how to rely first of all on oneself, on the work of each one and the sharing of goods, in accordance with our religious identity.

Considering the specific goals and strategies adopted by the Council, the evaluation focused on the primacy of spirituality and concern about the quality of life in our local communities. The provincial also examined our commitments in the mission of the Church and the evangelization of the poor.

Receiving the greatest amount of attention was the area of economics and finances. The province is still too dependent on outside sources. The situation requires a change, through good management and improved productivity. Unfortunately, difficulties have occurred, with the collapse of our supply centers in Kinshasa and Kikwit. Fortunately, with the help of the General Administration, a new financial system has been implemented.

The provincial also indicated the ways planned or completed by his administration to free ourselves from economic and financial dependence. The decision taken in 2004 and implemented in 2006 has borne much fruit.

Some projects have also been started for the future. But until 2016, the province will have

debts to pay, before being able to realize a real, relative financial autonomy.

Filled with hope and audacity, we will need to effect a real change of mentalities and behavior. The provincial pointed out many unfinished tasks which are challenges for one and all. At the root, there is our relationship to money and the common good. The difficulties vis-à-vis our sharing and the common good also require us to reflect upon the relationship between our vow of poverty and our way of responding to the numerous requests from the poor and from our families. Finally, it is a question of our vow of obedience which calls upon each of us to be accountable in the way we manage material goods.

## CAMEROON

### The barefoot missionary

"One particular example that can encourage you to strive for holiness of life is that of Father Simon Mpeke, known as Baba Simon." These are the words of Pope Benedict XVI during his first pilgrimage to Africa in 2009; he spoke of the "barefoot missionary" in the Basilica of Mary, Queen of Apostles, in Yaoundé, in March of that year.

Servant of God, Baba Simon (1906-1975) was among the first eight Cameroonians to be ordained priests; he was ordained on December 8, 1935 for the Vicariate of Douala. He passed the first years of his priesthood ministering in the parishes of Ngovayang and New Bell - Douala. At age 55, Baba Simon went to Northern Cameroon, as a *Fidei Donum* priest from the Diocese of Douala. He was received by the Oblate Bishop, Yves PLUMEY.

"I came here to the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate to work with them for the conversion of my brothers from Northern Cameroon..." Baba Simon wrote about his mission. The northern part of Cameroon was considered a region firmly closed to the Good News, due to the domination of Islam. Evangelization in the region is one of the most beautiful pages of Oblate history. The Oblates arrived there in 1946.

In addition to his holy life, Baba Simon practiced an evangelization that was Cameroonian. He approached the people and learned that they were “most holy.” His biggest discovery was their belief in the One God. “I thought I was dreaming. Everything is done with the same actions, the same words that are recorded in the Bible in the Law of Moses. They worship the God of the Patriarchs,” he wrote, referring to the religious practices of the montagnards. He worked among the “Kirdi” people. The term “Kirdi” is used by the Muslim invaders of Northern Cameroon to describe the local people who refuse to accept Islam. Its sense is pejorative, meaning literally “infidel dog.” It was originally assumed that the “Kirdi” practiced a primitive polytheism. It was momentous for Baba Simon to discover their belief in the One God. “They just need the message of Christ,” said the Servant of God.

Baba Simon founded the mission of Tokombere at “Kudumbar,” a word that means “battleground.” Today, there is a mission (houses for the priests and religious women, a hospital, a Catholic school, a library and a Catholic youth center) where there was once fighting between warring inhabitants of the surrounding mountains.

This Servant of God’s life is an example of love for God, expressed in ceaseless and fervent prayer and love for the people. The life of this missionary in Cameroon is an example of radical poverty.

The process of beatification of Servant of God, Baba Simon, began at the diocesan level in 2000 and closed with the submission to Rome of the dossier of about 800 pages in 2003. At the request of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in August 2010, an additional investigation began. The Episcopal Delegate for this phase of the proceedings is an Oblate, Fr. Christophe ZIELEND. (From [www.oblaci.pl](http://www.oblaci.pl))

## LESOTHO

### Preparing another missionary project

The Oblates of Lesotho already have a mission in Botswana, which, so far, is operating in the Diocese of Gaborone. Now, from the same country of Botswana, we have received a request

to send more Oblate missionaries, this time from the Catholic Vicariate of Francistown.

When describing the acute shortage of priests in his diocese, Bishop Frank Nubuasah, SVD, states, “At present, I have two parishes without priests and am forced to act as the parish priest of the two parishes which are three hundred (300) kilometers apart. I would be grateful if you could come to my assistance”.

The Provincial Council is positive about the request of Bishop Nubuasah and we are planning to send some Oblates to his diocese in a few months time. The event marks the expansion of the Oblate Mission in Botswana; and our Generalate welcomes the good news! (*Maoblata*, January 2011)

## CAMEROON

### Evangelizing the Pygmies

Forty-one years ago, four Oblates from Poland arrived in Cameroon to open one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of the evangelization of that country. Initially, their activities focused on the northern section of Cameroon, but over time, it reached the southeastern border of the country. Today, in the diocese of Yokadouma (East Cameroon), the shepherd is Bishop Eugene JURETZKO, also known as the “Bishop of the Pygmies.” His diocese is the size of Belgium and there are twelve parishes, four of them in the hands of the Oblates.

In villages of this area, some of the houses scattered along the road resemble a pile of hanging leaves; the better houses are made of clay. This road crosses the second “green lung” of our planet – the tropical forest of Equatorial Africa. But as the forest is beginning to disappear, so too is its real ruler, the Pygmy. They call themselves “Baka” (sitting on a branch) because they are like birds sitting on a branch, ready for flight at any moment. They lead a nomadic lifestyle, living on what they can find and hunting in the woods. They have few possessions.

Salapoumbe is a typical Pygmy village where the pastor is Fr. Grzegorz JAGOWDZIK. Many



of the parishioners have settled permanently in the village because of the opportunity to earn some money. The forest is no longer theirs. These virgin forests are being destroyed by logging activities, by the arrival of palm oil plantations and national parks for safaris. The Baka cannot hunt there as they did for centuries. Therefore, they are forced to find a new way of life wherein they are deprived of their tradition. They are regarded by neighboring tribes as subhuman and they become victims of a new type of racism. They find work in factories and fields for little remuneration, sometimes just a bottle of alcohol. Practices such as prostitution and polygamy, alien to their culture, are beginning to spread. Increasing numbers of Pygmies are infected by the diseases of alcoholism, HIV and AIDS.

Fortunately, the Baka are not left to fend for themselves. "For decades, the Catholic Church has helped them," states Fr. Janusz MILANOWSKI, a missionary from Yokadouma. "The work is difficult because of the instability of the Pygmies ... They often disappear for a time as they go into the wilderness for a few weeks to collect wild mango. For these people, the forest is still their greatest treasure."

It is not surprising that few people want to work among the Pygmies. Sometimes one sees well-equipped charitable centers and hospitals that are empty because it is impossible to find people willing to work there. Life is difficult in the middle of a tropical forest which is difficult to reach, where there is no water, no electricity, no mobile phone network, no Internet.

In Salpoumbe, there is a hospital run by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Virgin. Pygmies come there from the forests, not only in Cameroon but also the Central African Republic and Gabon.

The Baka Pygmies believe in one God. What they need is the liberating message of Christ the Savior who can free them from their sense of inferiority and the threats of aggressive civilization. The Oblates, together with their evangelical colleagues, care not only about the salvation of those who have not known Christ, but also about their social equality, as our Constitution 8

reminds us: *Awareness of our own shortcomings humbles us, yet God's power makes us confident as we strive to bring all people – especially the poor – to full consciousness of their dignity as human beings and as sons and daughters of God.* (Jacek ZIOMEK in [www.oblaci.pl](http://www.oblaci.pl))

## SENEGAL

**"Today, we are making history...."**

December 12, 2010, is a day to write with golden letters in the history of the diocese of Ziguinchor. The founding of a shrine, the beginning of a diocesan pilgrimage, and the welcoming of a precious and beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary gave this day a truly historic character.

It all began with the burning and persuasive desire of the late Msgr. Maixent Coly, bishop of the diocese, when, in 2000, the first diocesan shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Peace at Temento became the shrine of the recently erected diocese of Kolda. Ten years later, while carefully retaining the beautiful experience of the interdiocesan pilgrimage to Temento on the third Sunday of Lent, the diocese of Ziguinchor wanted to find a site to build its own shrine and to begin its own diocesan pilgrimage.

Meanwhile, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, having been invited in 1999 by Bishop Coly to take care of the shrine and the mission of Temento, arrived also at Elinkine in the diocese of Ziguinchor. They did not come alone; a large statue of the Virgin Mary, the gift of a Presentation of Mary community in France, came with them. From then on, all the ingredients were there for the realization of the dream of Bishop Coly who unexpectedly died on August 24, 2010, carried off by illness.

This long introduction was necessary in order to understand what happened at Elinkine this past December 12. With the support of Bishop François Jacolin, the bishop of Mende, who was visiting the diocese, a large group of pilgrims came together to welcome the Virgin Mary, in numbers far beyond the timid expectations of the organizers. Local and regional administrative officials, Muslim and Christian friends from

other churches, priests and religious, the faithful and the curious: they all came together for this gathering at the feet of Mary.

When the bishop unveiled the statue, there was a spontaneous ovation that greeted the Mother of God and sincere emotion poured forth from all those present. The shrine which had just been founded was called Our Lady of the Mission. Why Our Lady of the Mission?

The authenticity of the Church's mission never ceases to be highlighted by Pope Benedict XVI, and through our pastoral programs in which witness and mission are keywords for discovering and living. The mission is not finished; rather, it seems to be just beginning. The new evangelization is a specific need for today, both in the countries with an ancient Christian tradition but where the faith seems to be disappearing, as well as in our countries where one needs to establish the Gospel better and to discover even more our own way of incarnating it. With Mary, we want to breathe new life into our way of evangelizing. She is the one who knows how to be both mother and model for those who follow the Lord. A missionary Church which knows how to give witness to its faith; which knows how to be open to dialogue without surrendering the essence of the faith; a diocese which knows how to assume its mission of being, in the midst of the people and of society, the artisan of a new world through the strength of the Gospel. Mission, evangelization, with the courage and the simplicity of Mary.

In his homily, the bishop explained why and how Mary is a missionary, by going over the various phases of her life and her faith. Mary never ceases to show herself as authentically missionary by participating in an extraordinary way in the realization of the Father's plan and the mission of her Son, Jesus. Father Paul Abel Mamba, the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Ziguinchor, exclaimed, during his comments that "today, we are making history in our diocese."

A dream realized; a presence, that of Mary, which materializes and becomes a place of grace and blessing: that's December 12, 2010, a day that

will mark the future of an entire people. (Bruno FAVERO)

## CAMEROON

### A visit by bandits

*Fr. Charles EKO tells of a visit by bandits at the new Oblate mission in Douala.*

We are gradually regaining our confidence and especially our former energy after the robbery of which we were the victims on the night of Friday, February 11, 2011. Indeed, that day, after celebrating the Eucharist, I went to join Fr. Peter OSEKWUTE in the living room to share a meal and take a moment to chat. It was 19:30 and the catechumens were in the Church for their lessons. At around 20:30, when I left Fr. Peter to do some work in my office, the robbers took advantage of the departure of the catechumens to attack us in the rectory. Armed with guns, they held us down and after tying us up, they went to ransack our rooms, my office and the storeroom. They got away with our laptop computers, the digital camera that allowed us to share with our confreres and friends photos of the new Oblate mission, the sound equipment from the church, a television, our watches, small suitcases and some money.

As brave Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we kept our smiles and especially our calm, something which surprised many of the people who came to commiserate with us. It is good to point out that attacks on rectories are commonplace in the archdiocese of Douala and any kind of security measure does not help much in the face of these rascals who always come heavily armed and ready to confront any resistance.

In fact, we are in a new mission where everything is yet to be done. The rectory is a delayed construction site and open on all sides. But slowly the faithful strive to complete the work; we live there and we give witness to a lifestyle that attracts the admiration of all those who pass by.

After this "welcoming experience," we continued our activities, but we must admit that all of our efforts for progress have been wiped out; Fr. Peter and the youth had organized a prayer chain in

the families. This activity had brought in a rather significant sum that allowed us to equip the parish with the sound system which has been carried off by the robbers. Now we are celebrating in a church with more than 300 people and without

a sound system; that's not easy. Slowly, we are encouraging our faithful to continue the work that has begun; they are more discouraged than we are. So goes the life of pioneers! (Charles Eko)

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## Canada-United States

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### OMI LACOMBE

#### Close to the people

When you sit down with 84 year old Fr. Robert BERNARDIN, you are in the presence of a very thoughtful man. Each word is measured.

Since his ordination in 1953, his many years of ministry have always been with First Nations and Metis peoples. His first assignment was to Camperville, Manitoba, where he learnt the Sauteaux language. Throughout his ministry, he was fluent in the Sauteaux/Ojibway tongue. Bishop Paul DUMOUCHEL, who had composed a grammar, was his instructor at the beginning. Fr. BROCHET, helped Robert through the years with the language. Together they made many translations into the Sauteaux language. They also worked together producing radio programs in the Sauteaux language for the local radio stations.

What were the strong values of his ministry? The answer did not flow quickly. All the while his hands were trying to express his deep feelings to answer the question. "It would be closeness to the people, closeness especially in the expression of their language." There was a pause in the words. "I love the people and they loved me." He never made big splashes in his own estimation but it was clear that his ministry was a ministry of accompaniment. In the beginning much of the travel had to be done by airplane since there were no roads into these communities.

In 1997 he moved into the city of Winnipeg to become pastor of the Kateri Tekewitha Parish for two years. He continued to help with the ministry of this parish. Since his coming to the city, there have been many funerals, close to five hundred of them. Many of the funerals were difficult situations where there had been death by violence or suicide. The look on Robert's face

indicated the difficulties with these situations. "I find it difficult. I accept because someone has to be close to them in those days."

Visiting the sick in the hospitals is a very important part of his ministry. Since he knows the First Nations and Métis people from the Southern half of Manitoba, there are many requests for a spiritual visit to a sick relative.

From his residence at Despins, Robert walks over every day to the Taché Center to read to Fr. Ephrem PELLETIER who can no longer see and together they have a cup of hot chocolate every afternoon. Along with other topics, he reads the news from the Oblate world. His polite nod indicates the benefit of this visit: "It's good for me, too!"

Looking over his entire Oblate life, he says: "I am happy and I never did look back. I really appreciate that I belong to a community." There was a pause in the conversation as he rubbed his chin. "I deeply appreciate that I belong to the Oblates. The ones that are here... we are still here and we are together." He shook his hand to underline what he was about to say: "I like that!" (By Nestor GREGOIRE in [www.omilacombe.ca](http://www.omilacombe.ca))

### OMI LACOMBE

#### A new icon of St. Eugene

*Fr. Jack LAU writes about a beautiful new Icon of the Oblate Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod.*

The genesis of this project came from discussions I had with local iconographer, Suzanne Massie Manchevsky, who lives near the Oblate retreat house, Galilee Centre in Arnprior, Ontario. After we worked together to launch the Spiritual Retreat and Icon Workshop program here at

Galilee, our discussions turned to the life and charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod as the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his “*dies natalis*” (birth into heaven) approached.

Suzanne asked if she could write an Icon of St. Eugene, so we conducted research at the archives of St. Paul’s University in Ottawa and came away with many books, photos and DVD’s about his passionate faith and love of God, our Blessed Mother, his beloved Oblates and compassion for all, especially the lowliest.

Following our initial research and a number of study and prayer sessions, we focused on listening to the Spirit and what St. Eugene was saying to each of us and we each heard the voice of the older, wiser, matured and burnished St. Eugene calling. And so the sketching and drawing process began and Suzanne would send me photos of the Icon throughout the painting that now can be seen as a YouTube video through this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1Kc0WfmCOM>.

There will be a week-long Spiritual Retreat and Icon Workshop at Arnprior in 2011, beginning of the birthday of St. Eugene, August 1.

## UNITED STATES

### Preparing for World Youth Day

About 175 youth and adults will travel from Oblate parishes in the United States to participate in WYD 2011 in Madrid, Spain. Before the Madrid celebrations, they will join over 1,000 Oblate Youth in the Diocese of Málaga for the International Oblate Youth Encounter. To prepare

the future pilgrims for these celebrations, there have been three gatherings in different parts of the United States Province.

The first two encounters aimed at preparing Oblate Youth from around the province took place in Miramar, Florida, in December and in San Antonio, Texas, in February. The third encounter was in the San Fernando Valley, California, on March 12.

The goal of these gatherings is to prepare the young people from Oblate parishes for their pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Spain this summer of 2011. Rather than send them to Spain representing only their respective parishes, we found it important to instill in them an Oblate identity surpassing the parish level, helping them to know that their presence at WYD represents the Missionary Oblates of the U. S. Province and the world.

To accomplish this, the encounters focus on basic themes, including: St. Eugene De Mazenod and the Oblate charism; What is World Youth Day and what does it mean to be sent on Pilgrimage?; Who are the Oblate Spanish Martyrs and what do they mean for a young person today?

The days are filled with creative activities and opportunities to unify the various Oblate entities. More importantly, a spiritual focus has been created incorporating Oblate values into the theme of World Youth Day (*Planted and built in Jesus Christ, Firm in the Faith*). Each gathering concludes with the area Provincial Councilor celebrating the commissioning Mass and giving the youth their pilgrim cross. (Jonathan CLOSNER in *OMI USA*, March 2011)

## Europe

### SPAIN

#### WYD OMI: in less than six months

Indeed, less than six months remain until the beginning of the OMI Encounter for World Youth Day. Many groups from all over the world are already registering. Up till now, we have on file 1,185 young pilgrims coming from as far as northern Canada to Australia, as well

as from Bolivia, Brazil, Senegal, Congo, South Africa, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Hong Kong... Specifically, we can count 30 different countries, a fact that shows how work with youth is developing in almost all of our missions.

Our website is almost completely ready. There, you will find all the necessary information: [www.omimadrid2011.com](http://www.omimadrid2011.com). Also, do not hesitate to



contact us by e-mail for all other information:  
[omimadrid2011@gmail.com](mailto:omimadrid2011@gmail.com).

Italian Province is preparing on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Founder's birth into eternal life. The musical traces the life of St. Eugene through his own writings.

As for the latest news, we announce with joy the performance of the musical "Mistral" which the

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## Anniversaries for April 2011

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### 60 Years of religious life

1951.04.25	08992	Fr. Othmar Grüber	Paraguay
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### 60 Years of priesthood

1951.04.01	08454	Fr. Athanase Pronost	France
1951.04.08	08081	Fr. Jean-Marie Ribaucourt	Belgium/Holland
1951.04.29	10819	Fr. John Chai	Australia

### 50 Years of priesthood

1961.04.02	10064	Fr. Francis McGreal	Northern S. A.
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### 25 Years of priesthood

1986.04.24	12661	Fr. Maria Sebastian Santhiapillai	Jaffna
1986.04.29	12662	Fr. Linus Adrian Soysa	Jaffna

## Suffrages for our deceased

No. 15-22

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Bro. Antonio Neric	Philippines	09/05/1933	Davao City	11/02/2011
Fr. Jerzy Wizner	France/Benelux	23/09/1953	Beuvry	13/02/2011
Fr. William Smith	United States	07/08/1918	Lowell	15/02/2011
Bro. Martin Laufer	Central European	03/07/1936	Hünfeld	17/02/2011
Fr. Eugene A.Tremblay	United States	26/07/1913	Manitowoc	20/02/2011
Fr. Jacques Delpierre	Belgium/Netherlands	27/07/1925	Schaerbeek	21/02/2011
Fr. Kazimierz Szymurski	France/Benelux	20/11/1915	Liège	22/02/2011
Fr. Leo Casey	OMI Lacombe	22/03/1923	Vancouver	28/02/2011

*“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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Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail: [information@omigen.org](mailto:information@omigen.org)  
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