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Discerning new Directions in Ministry

Address of Father General to the OMI Lacombe Province Convocation

(We published the first part of Father General's November 16, 2011, address in the March edition of OMI Information. In speaking of the conversion called for by the last General Chapter, he began by speaking of the inner freedom needed for this conversion. This is a continuation of that speech.)

Part II:

B – LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY: Over and over, Eugene de Mazenod states that Oblates must be "zealous for the glory of God" and it is good to think about this in relation to God's mission in which we participate. Our document from the last General Chapter, referring to "crossing borders" asks us to discern our motivation (Acts of the 35th General Chapter, 2010, "Conversion" p.26, # 7, English edition). Looking at motivation is essential as we assume any ministry. The important question is whether I'm doing a particular ministry primarily for God and for the poor or for myself. A few years ago, the major superiors of the conference of religious men in the U.S. were questioned whether we did ministry as a response to the call of the Lord or as a way to gratify our own needs. This is a very radical call to conversion, to repent of seeking ourselves through our ministry to the poor so that we live for God alone as Saint Eugene de Mazenod called us to live.

Our current vocabulary today goes something like this: "this ministry really energizes me" or "this is a life-giving work I am doing". The question is for whom is it life-giving? For me! To whom does the ministry give energy? To me! Is this what ministry is all about? I'm not saying this is all bad. Of course it is good to find life and energy in what we do. Yet, that isn't what ministry is primarily about. That is a by-product of our ministry, for which we give thanks when it is present. When our motivation is to serve God's mission and to make God's glory the center of our

lives, then we have the freedom and availability to say, "Here I am. Send me." Then we can tell the personnel director, "I am available to be sent me where I am most needed in the Province."

Repenting is asking God for the grace to be able to recognize that mission is about God, living fully for God and seeking God's will and admitting we are sometimes wrapped up in our own self-interest. Without a doubt, we have done good things, but we could have done so much more!

C – COMMUNION: Repentance also calls us in the area of apostolic communion. Our lives are meant to reflect the love, unity, sharing and communion of the Triune God by our communion. Are we free to live in community and to work together with others?

Trends in society (e.g., individualism, workaholicism, consumerism, secularism, materialism, narcissism, etc.) influence us and have pulled us away from each other and given emphasis to the individual and his or her achievements. The Gospel, our CC&RR and the General Chapters, on the other hand, have continually called us to renew our life in apostolic community as a sign of God's very life. We must take the initiative to reinvigorate our lives of apostolic community, the fraternal communion of life sharing deeply our faith, our lives, our care for one another and creating space and time for prayer, meals, meetings and recreation. Sharing is also in the area of finances, putting everything in common. We need the

Spirit's breath to transform our hearts so that we are enabled to make the great Passover to mission as the fruit of our communion. With all our personal limitations acknowledged and owned by us, and cognizant of the challenges we have before us in this area of our lives, we are called continually to work on creating actual apostolic communities characterized by significant relationships. While we have deep bonds of relationship with friends, family and coworkers in ministry, our Oblate life should provide significant relationships of faith, of missionary and religious life that nourish us and help us to grow in holiness. The Founder's mandate to live charity is a call to give ourselves generously to the process of creating Oblate communion as we live together. The vow of perseverance commits each one of us to give ourselves over and over (oblation) to the process of nurturing life-long communion with one another.

II – We look to the Savior: When we confront our lives (under God's gracious gaze) we experience the need for a friend to save us. We rediscover Jesus again and again as that compassionate love of the Father welcoming us home and saving us. This is the root of our Oblate identity and spirituality. This involves, as our Founder wrote, real tears of an intimate discovery of God's love for us. This experience has to be deepened, not forgotten; and lived again over and over. We grow in our love for Jesus in prayer, in our study and contemplation of the Word, in our relationships with others, especially with the poor.

How can we preach the Good News of the Savior and his Reign if we do not live and stay in his company? We follow Jesus not as an idea, but as a friend, a brother and the Savior. We are missionaries who preach the Gospel to the poor and it is a person about whom we are passionate, Jesus, whom we proclaim. An old cartoon from "Family Circus" shows the family in church and the pastor is preaching. Little Dolly, pointing to the pastor, leans over to her father and asks: "Daddy, is he really God's friend, or is this just his business?" A good question to ask is "Are we the friends of Jesus?" in the deepest sense of the word "friend."

The Call to Conversion is always connected to Jesus: being freed by him, loved by him, challenged by him and empowered by him with the Spirit. At the heart of the charism of Saint

Eugene is Jesus: we are drawn to Jesus, to identify with him, and to allow him to live in us, reproducing within ourselves the pattern of his life (OMI CC&RR #2).

III - Third, we have then to make a choice. We have been able to see ourselves with love and courage, we have grown in freedom and our motivations are more consistent. Now we have to make a decision. Grace is with us, and we are invited to make an option, stepping out in freedom. This is the risk, the challenge, the daring to leave all behind to follow Jesus, to drop our nets in the boat and leave father, to walk away from the money box at the tax collectors' booth, to break away and make a rupture. The radical choice is right here and right now.

We have left home so many years ago, but there are so many other "homes" we have built for ourselves over the years. We have to choose to leave the comfort of familiarity, of security, of personal success, etc. We must decide to leave and cross borders. Our plans, our agendas, our ways of seeing things, our points of view, our favorite ministry, living the way we like to live, are elements of a personal kingdom that needs to be taken apart for new life in Christ to happen. We see that this happened often in St. Eugene's life: when he decided that he would enter the seminary and live alone for God; when he founded the Missionaries of Provence; when he decided to go to Rome to receive approbation of the CC&RR: when he left Aix to go to Marseille to help his uncle; when he was called to become a bishop; when he had to readjust his political views with the changing reality in France; when he was called upon to send his missionaries to new countries outside of France. Everything was a consequence of this decision to be a priest and servant of the poor and involved many other decisions and crossing of borders after that.

IV - Fourth, this brings us into another culture of living and we could say, a 'strange place' in which to live. We have truly crossed borders, not just to get away and live our own way. We have journeyed to a land of freedom where Gospel logic reigns: the first are last and the last are first; those who try to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel will save it; the clever and learned people don't understand the mysteries of the Kingdom and the little ones and simple

people do; those who are great become the least and the least become the greatest; the mighty are cast down from their thrones and the humble are lifted up; it is the Master who serves and washes feet; the smallness of the mustard seed and the little amount of yeast reveal the power of faith; where emptying out oneself, one is filled; where those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted; where others have a tiny speck in their eye and I have a huge beam in my own.

We enter this strange land if we dare make the passage. Instead of emphasizing self-fulfillment and self-realization, we embrace the Gospel call us to self-transcendence. This form of going beyond ourselves for the kingdom, for Jesus, for the poor brings us immense fulfillment and joy, love and meaning without measure. Although it is a hard passage, there is nothing like it in the whole world!

Now we are in the process of conversion, now we are striving to become saints as Eugene exhorted us. Now we can deepen our communion of life with others in apostolic community, not because the community is fulfilling my needs, but in freedom I choose to love those who are my brothers and sisters. Now we are free people who can collaborate with others and who can execute together a plan with priorities. Now we make

ourselves available. We discern together and ask God, "What is the mission you want us to do?"

Conversion has brought us to a strange land of freedom and joy where everything seems upside down at first. We are empowered in freedom by the Spirit of Jesus as prophets to announce his Good News. We are able to make ourselves available for the Province discernment which has made decisions about our way to participate in God's mission.

My brothers and sisters, gathered for this Convocation to fan the flame of the Spirit and discern new directions in ministry, it is the Holy Trinity who calls us to participate, grow, convert, be holy and share more intimately their communion so that we can be truly preachers of the Gospel and missionaries to the most abandoned. The Trinity calls us; empowers us and sends us. Sustaining our life and loving us, the Trinity invites us to holiness and to participate in God's mission in the world. We are asking as a province community: "What would you have us do, Lord?" With Saint Eugene's example, in radical freedom, in holiness of life and in apostolic community, let us prayerfully discern directions as the Province of OMI Lacombe Canada to bring the Gospel to the poor and abandoned of our society today. We ask Mary Immaculate to help us listen and respond with all our heart to God's call.

General Administration

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

A work in progress

They've begun to talk about it in Aix-en-Provence and in the diocese of Aix & Arles: things are changing with the Oblates in Aix!

All those who rub shoulders with the Missionary Oblates know that the house is where they were founded. Just to remind you, Eugene de Mazenod bought part of a former Carmelite monastery to bring together there the youngsters from the Congregation of the Youth of Aix and to establish there the community of missionaries who would become, in 1826, the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

This place is now the birthplace of the Congregation and has a special place in the heart of the Oblates and the whole Mazenodian family. Given its importance,

on December 7, 2011, we experienced the transition of the Aix community from the Province of France to the General Administration. As Fr. Paolo ARCHIATI, the Vicar General, said: It's the passing of the baton as in a relay race." He added, "This movement is in the service of life..."

The remodeling is only a foretaste of the project. When the work is finished, a new intercultural community will animate a new place, at the service of individuals and groups, youth and adult, from France and from abroad, for periods of formation, the discovery of St. Eugene de Mazenod and the Mazenodian charism.

The realization of the project has been entrusted to an architect of Aix, Mr. Eric Ferment. The various sub-contractors have been chosen and all of these companies meet each Wednesday in the foundation room for a site meeting.

The work that has just begun is impressive, but take heart! When the work is finished, at the end of 2012, the building will be more functional and the patrimony will have been preserved and enhanced.

As was stated in the bulletin, *OMI Information* 518, January 2012, one consequence is the closing of the International de Mazenod Center throughout the construction period. Only a small community of three Oblates is living in the house of our foundation, so as to ensure a presence and promote a smooth operation of the building site.

The community invites the whole Mazenodian family to support this project with their prayers, first of all so that the members of the future community prepare themselves to give a "soul" to the "International Eugene de Mazenod Center" and that they therefore realize the desired goal of this renovation. And that the place radiate the Mazenodian charism for generations to come! (*Benoît DOSQUET*)

GENERAL FORMATION COMMITTEE 2012 Meeting

The members of the General Formation Committee met in Rome on February 24-March 2. The first day was spent listening to reports on formation in the different regions, in light of the call to conversion given to us at the last Chapter, as well as the new General Norms of Oblate Formation. Then there were four major themes for this year's meeting: the preparation for and the celebration of perpetual oblation; a formation program for Oblate Brothers; a formation program for the novitiate; and ongoing formation.

Concerning preparation for perpetual oblation, first of all we reviewed some programs being used in the various Units and Regions. After that, with the help of Frank SANTUCCI, we put together a program to be proposed to the Units and Regions, something that will allow the candidates for perpetual oblation to live in depth this very important step.

The proposal of a formation program for Oblate Brothers is in response to a resolution of the last Chapter which called for the development of common standards in the first formation of

Oblate Brothers. The proposals we have made will be taken into consideration by the Committee of Oblate Brothers in November before making any recommendations to the Superior General. Fr. Paolo ARCHIATI and Brother Benoît DOSQUET joined us to work on this program.

The committee reiterated the importance of ongoing formation in the Units and local communities. The document from the last General Chapter and the new Norms give some precise suggestions on this subject. Apart from what is already presented in the Norms, the committee intends to consult about existing programs in the various Units before making a concrete proposal during its next meeting in 2013.

In addition to the major themes of the meeting which we mentioned above, other highlights marked our work week: the meeting with Father General, Louis LOUGEN, and visits to the International Scholasticate and the Interprovincial Scholasticate of Vermicino, Rome.

The General Formation Committee is composed of six members, an Oblate from each Region and the Assistant General in charge of formation. It meets each year to study problems linked to formation and to make recommendations to Fr. General and his Council.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT Acta Administrationis Generalis

With help from the General Secretariat, Fr. James ALLEN has prepared the 2010 and 2011 editions of the *Acta Administrationis Generalis*. For more than 30 years, the *Acta* has been an official publication of the General Administration containing: Documents of the Holy See regarding our Congregation, Acts of the General Chapters, Letters of Superiors General to the Congregation, Communiqués from Plenary Sessions, Lists of Obediences given by Fr. General, Lists of important appointments, Lists of Oblates who made perpetual profession, and of those who died.

Because of the diminishing need for paper-printed documents, Fr. Louis LOUGEN and members of the General Council suggested that we print and mail fewer copies of the *Acta Administrationis Generalis*

than in the past. Thanks to the humble and faithful work of Fr. Théophile LE PAGE, every Province will receive two copies of the new editions of the Acta. One copy will be sent to every Delegation and to the six Oblate Institutes of higher learning.

If someone else, an Oblate or an Institution, is interested in receiving an additional copy, please contact the General Secretariat. It will be possible to order a hard copy or/and an electronic version in PDF. (e-mail gensec@omigen.org)

Africa-Madagascar

CONGO

Provincial Assembly

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the Democratic Republic of Congo have met in a provincial assembly.

For the first time, the assembly was held at two sites. The Oblates from the district of Kinshasa met at the St. Eugene de Mazenod Scholasticate at Kintambo on December 26-29, 2011; those of the district of Idiofa-Kikwit, at Ifwanzondo, on January 2-8, 2012. Called together by the new provincial superior, Fr. Habell NSOLO, the assembly had as its theme: "Renewing ourselves in the spirit of our oblation."

For the Oblates, it was an opportunity to re-evaluate their religious life, their missionary activity and their expansion in various missions, notably in the dioceses of Idiofa, Kikwit, Isangi and Lolo, in the archdiocese of Kinshasa, and in Angola. Together, they considered the ways and means to adapt the formation of their young members to the needs of Congo, Africa and the contemporary world. They also tried to plan their missionary expansion, both within Congo, as well as in Angola and toward new external and far-off horizons. Among the topics mentioned, economic recovery and consolidation of the Unit appear to be some of the priorities the Oblates of Congo included in the agenda of Fr. Habell's new administration.

If the exchanges and discussions were marked by the specter of the economic crisis that has been hounding us since 2008, the climate of cordiality, as well as the active and constructive participation of everyone, expressed the unity of the Oblates around their new provincial superior, in a willingness to work together to rebuild their province. From this point of view, the assembly itself and its message resonate as an act of growing awareness. By insisting on the spiritual foundation of their consecration, the

Oblates have recalled what is essential: "to renew oneself in the spirit and truth of their oblation" is both the condition and the way to overcome the economic challenges of the present times and to ensure a better future. (Didier MUPAYA)

MADAGASCAR

La Réunion: a new mission

August 27, 2011, has become an historic date for the Oblate Delegation of Madagascar. On that date, our Congregation advanced a step by an expansion in the Indian Ocean. We now have a parish on the Island of La Réunion, some 800 km from Madagascar and an overseas department of France.

The Ordinary of La Réunion, Bishop Gilbert Aubry, officially inaugurated the first Oblate community in the Parish of St. John the Baptist.

The relationship and the cooperation between the Oblate Delegation of Madagascar and the diocese of La Réunion had begun some years before. This collaboration began especially with month-long substitutions by Oblate Fathers in several parishes of La Réunion during the summertime. Thanks to the good work of the Oblates and their sincere missionary witness during these periods of substitution, Bishop Gilbert decided to invite the Delegation to take a permanent place in his diocese.

In 2009, Fr. Marek OCHLAK, the Delegation Superior, and Fr. Adam SZUL, the Treasurer, made the first official visit to La Réunion in order to contact Bishop Gilbert. After this visit, the Delegation administration worked hard to get the permission to open this mission. Permission was finally granted, along with a change in the Delegation Statutes and the enlargement of the territory into Madagascar and La Réunion.

St. John the Baptist Parish is located in the eastern part of La Réunion. Canonically established on December 13, 1852, it has a long history and an

important place in the hearts of the Christians of La Réunion. Its clock, originally built in 1885, is a symbolic spot for the parish and the people. The building itself has been reconstructed many times.

For now, the parish also includes two affiliated

chapels which are visited regularly by the pastor, Fr. Andrzej SERWACZAK and his associate, Fr. Elysée RAHARINIRINA. There are presently some 12,000 members in the parish. (Deacon Marcin SERWIN dans *Echo OMI Madagascar*, février 2012)

Latin America

PERU

RECREATE YOURSELF 2012: in the Peruvian rainforest

The Peruvian rainforest remains more than ever a very impressive target for foreign investors. Statistics tell us that in 2011, Peru grew economically by 7%. They say that was a good year. They speak of a country that is growing and is in good condition to face the economic crisis. In the executive branch, they speak of a policy of social inclusion. The development of a powerful oil industry is starting in the Napo-Loreto basin.

On the other hand, the indigenous communities are concerned about such topics as the pollution of the rivers because of oil spills; the spread of drug trafficking; the increase in illegal logging; the unlawful mining of gold; the taking of large quantities of fish from the lake in freezers; the increasing lack of teachers on all levels. And there is only talk about social inclusion, but they don't have much on the policy level.

In the midst of this reality, the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption in Santa Clotilde-Rio Napo-Loreto, for the fourth consecutive year, is focusing on the education of indigenous boys and girls and teenagers of the Kichwa peoples. The RECREATE YOURSELF project is a program created by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate for providing a place for the integral formation of the children and youth of the Napo. This January 2012, a total of 24 indigenous Kichwa communities in the basin were present at Santa Clotilde by sending their representatives: 51 boys and girls, accompanied by a team of young leaders and professionals. The central theme for their work was "Children and care for creation." Each day, there was academic enrichment, group work, a workshop for painting and drawing, a puppetry workshop, a singing workshop, catechesis for the first encounter with

Christ, and a workshop on indigenous Kichwa values. Nor did we leave out recreation, sharing, the common life, and interchange with the neighbors in the barrio. Each participant was examined by the doctors of the Health Center of Santa Clotilde.

At the same time, 25 indigenous youth from the Upper and Middle Napo received pre-university training at the St. Eugene de Mazonod Academy. For the third consecutive summer, their academic background was reinforced and they have been prepared for entering the National University of the Peruvian Amazon. The young students, many of them high school graduates, found in the SEM Academy an opportunity to learn and to prepare themselves. This year, the focus of discussion was "The presence of oil in the Napo river." They shared information about oil spills in the Loreto region in the past five years, the increase in deforestation and illegal logging, as well as the increase in drug trafficking in the area. Their concern was evident in their faces and in the prolonged dialogue. Our thanks to the professionals who guided this academic formation. We are happy that this year, two Kichwa indigenous youth from the High Napo, Edgar Jota and Ítalo Noteno, have succeeded in getting into the university, Edgar for a career in nursing and Ítalo for pharmacy and biochemistry. They are the first indigenous Kichwa youth to take this step. Now it's up to us to accompany them in their training.

The mission of Santa Clotilde is grateful to those who were involved in this task: the benefactors, the youth leaders of the parish, the professionals from the Health Center of Santa Clotilde, the lay professionals who came from the Parish of Nuestra Señora de la Paz-Comas-Lima. May God, the Father of the Earth, whom we call in Kichwa "Pachayaya," bless the work and the efforts of each one. We believe that this work is a contribution to the Amazon and to the indigenous communities. We believe that RECREATE YOURSELF is an

important experience that should be continued. We believe that by listening to the indigenous children and youth, we learn a lot. (Edgar NOLAZCO ALMEYDA and Roberto CARRASCO ROJAS)

PARAGUAY

I will never forget their eyes....

Recently, Father Miguel FRITZ, General Councillor for Latin America, published a book entitled: *Nunca me voy a olvidar de los ojos. Derechos humanos en el Paraguay - Como yo los viví. (I will never forget their eyes. Human Rights in Paraguay -- as I lived them.)* The following is an excerpt from an interview published in the weekly newspaper, UltimaHora.

What motivated your writing this book?

When I arrived in Paraguay, working in the Independencia Colonia, I was moved by so many injustices, sufferings, atrocities, and I began to take notes. When Stroessner fell, that was not the end of the injustices. And I had the impression that many things are never known while others fall into oblivion. Then I decided to write about what I have seen, heard and lived.

How do you see the reality of the indigenous Chaco people?

Today's reality is totally different from the 80's. We have succeeded--and this was one of the goals of the first Indigenous Pastoral Plan--so that they are no longer the strangers in the country and that they are the managers of their own interests and needs. In the Chaco, for example, they are an important political factor, something which we ourselves had to learn too. Today, they have access to modern means of communication, but not all and not all in the same way. Of course, this fact is causing dramatic changes within their cultures. The future of a culture does not depend on which elements remain, whether they change or not, but on "ethnic esteem:" a healthy pride in being who they are.

And specifically, what about the partnership of the Church with the NGO's in the Paraguayan Chaco?

I distinguish between governmental organizations, non-governmental and ecclesial. They are three different ways of operating. The Church is not

an NGO and it is certainly not governmental, but one must distinguish well between an NGO where there are people who benefit and who take their livelihood from it, which is not bad, but it is a fact that they create NGO's to feed the people, while the Church does not. We do not create jobs in order to have a better life and to eat; we look for ways to transform lives. It is obvious that we must continue to cover functions that should be done by the government. For example, we started all the schools and health centers. We started them in the Chaco; there were no others.

What is the relationship between the indigenous and the Mennonites in the Chaco?

When they arrived, the Mennonites had no idea that there were indigenous peoples. When they found them, the thought: "The Lord has sent us to evangelize them." So with very good intentions and good assistance, they began to help them. It's been a long road for them to discover that the indigenous are active participants. And there is still some welfare mentality. So there have been some good experiences with organizations that work with the indigenous; there are things happening. I think that very early on, we discovered that we have to lay aside all paternalism and promote work and self-rule...

PERU

A blanket and a house

It was a cold winter's morning with a sky so dark and angry-looking clouds ready to drench the earth. A fine drizzle was falling and in spite of the bleakness of the day, the leaves had a beautiful shine of clearness that helped to make the morning a little brighter.

I noticed a very old man walking up the dirty street wearing an old, filthy blanket that had more holes in it than cloth. He walked slowly and looked as if he was carrying the world's problems. I went to my room for a fairly new, heavy bed blanket. Folding it, I proceeded to the other side of the street to meet this elderly person. I asked if he wanted to trade blankets, but to my surprise he said no. He looked at me with sad, watery eyes and hesitated to speak in answer to my offer. I did not insist, but returned to my room with my blanket pondering his negative response.

After some reflection I came to the conclusion that “no” was not out of disrespect for my interest in helping him but rather to say: “If I accept your new blanket, this very night it will be taken from me by thieves and drug addicts as I sleep in the street ... so my old, dirty and holey blanket helps me to keep warm.”

One day I came across a fallen-down shack and knocked on the plywood door hanging from one hinge. A man, about 45 and the father of eight children, appeared at the door. I chatted with him for a few minutes and he invited me into his ‘home.’

I mentioned that we could help him build a little home but, being very poor, he did

not have two cents to rub together. When I mentioned to him that he had to participate in the actual work in the construction of his new house, he said he couldn’t give the time “because I have no job and I am working out in the streets for food for the family.”

Upon hearing his good logic I offered him something that the poor man did not expect. I said: “During the construction of your new house, you will work with my builders. While the work progresses and at the completion of the construction, you will receive a decent wage to provide for your family.” The man, with great surprise, began to cry. “No one does things like this ...” (Blaise MACQUARRIE in *Oblate Spirit*, February 2012)

Canada-United States

UNITED STATES

“Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice”

It is the privilege of bishops to present to the Holy Father the names of persons they deem worthy of receiving special recognition for their service to the Church. The Oblate Bishop of San Angelo, Texas, Michael D. PFEIFER, has announced the conferral of the *Golden Cross “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice”* on several persons. Two Oblates are among the recipients of the award: Fr. Louis LOUGEN, Superior General and Fr. Edward DE LEON, pastor of the Oblate parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Midland, Texas, as well as director of liturgy for the Diocese of San Angelo.

Also receiving the medal are Honorary Oblate, Mr. Thomas Benson, and his wife, Gayle. Bishop Pfeifer pointed out that he recommended the Bensons for this award because of their long, constant and outstanding generosity and service to the Oblates for almost 50 years.

“Tom and Gayle are longtime friends and benefactors of the Oblates who bring out the best in us,” stated Bishop Pfeifer. “They are true friends who not only make many of our good works possible, but they help make us be our best: courageous and daring, generous and forgiving, determined and faithful—good Oblate missionaries. I find this true of them on a personal level and a corporate level. Their friendship has been life-giving personally to countless Oblates.” Bishop Pfeifer points out that

Mr. and Mrs. Benson, who presently reside in New Orleans, have also been very great supporters of the Catholic Church in both the New Orleans and San Antonio regions, as well as other areas throughout the states of Louisiana and Texas. Mr. Benson is the owner of the New Orleans Saints football team.

OMI LACOMBE

With youth in their own context

As the oldest of three children, Brother Daniel DIONNE was raised a Catholic but drifted away in his early years. “I became interested in the Oblates through the Oblate outreach to youth in TEC (Teens Encounter Christ). I found the God element in me that I had left behind in my young years. It was through the Oblates that I was brought back to religion as fun and an adventure. I was grounded in it [TEC]!”

This first experience with TEC sparked a faith beginning to grow within his soul. “I wanted to know how they did that when the very Church resources in the past had failed to do that [spark my faith]. So I started being friendly with the Oblates.”

He did not arrive at the Oblate doorstep immediately. It was only after five years of volunteer youth ministry in Northern Manitoba and the Northwest Territories that he entered the Oblate novitiate in Winnipeg.

Twelve years ago he joined forces with Mike

DECHANT and came to work in youth ministry in St. Charles Parish and then in the Edmonton Catholic School System. The past seven years have been with the St. Albert Catholic School System.

When asked what it means to be a part of youth ministry, he states: “It is understanding what is sacred through the eyes of youth. It means being an advocate for youth. It means enabling youth to work with youth, and youth to trust youth. It means helping them to discover what it means to communicate with others. It means growing in an awareness of the world in which we live.

“Family is very important to the lives of youth. It is through family that we understand the origins of our faith. It is in family that we find ourselves and are nourished by the family.” He continued: “It always amazes me how much I gain in knowledge of young people by getting to know their parents and siblings.

“Family is more and more crucial to youth ministry. The more my ministry develops toward youth, the more it becomes a family ministry. I do not think we can understand people without understanding the context in which they live. It was true of all Aboriginal peoples, all peoples

from various ethnic groups and it is of the very nature of youth.” We must read and understand youth precisely in their own context.

In St. Albert, the Oblate Youth Ministry team has been hired by the Catholic School District to provide leadership and be a presence of religious education, liturgical support, counseling, evangelization and providing spiritual experiences that will lead to conversion. In summary Dan frames the work of youth ministry: “Most importantly it is to have a good venue of Church.”

Dan has a very strong sense and passion to make youth welcome into Church. He has difficulties when there is a resistance on the part of pastoral leadership to be welcoming to youth. He asked: “Are they afraid of youth? Do they not know how to talk to youth?”

“I have an easy way to speak with youth whether it is at the hardware store or down at the coffee shop. They are the easiest people in the whole world to talk to. A young girl said to me. ‘We’re not complicated. We do not have huge expectations. If you feed us and pay attention to us, we’re there!’” He shook his head. “I knew that!” (www.omilacombe.ca)

Europe

ITALY

Signs of the times

In a letter to the members of the Italian Province in late 2011, Fr. Nicola PARRETTA, the provincial, made an announcement that is being repeated with some frequency in various parts of the Oblate world, especially in Europe and North America. He stated that in September of 2012, the Oblates will hand over the ministry of a parish to the diocese of Treviso and leave the city of Oné di Fonte in the foothills of the Alps. The Oblates have been there since 1920. From 1943 until 1983, they conducted a juniorate there. Many Oblates studied there and many relatives of Oblate missionaries reside in the vicinity.

Fr. Parretta gave the reasons for this sad departure from a beloved ministry site:

- The impossibility of maintaining all of the communities of the province, because of the

marked decrease in the number of vocations;

- The directions that came forth from the province assembly in 2010;
- The province’s ministerial project that followed from that assembly.

ITALY

Some Roman streets dedicated to Missionary Oblates

Last December, Lucia Borzaga, the sister of Father Mario, whose process for beatification is in motion, received notice from the Acilia district of Rome about some streets dedicated to Oblates. Father Angelo PELIS asked for confirmation of this from the appropriate office in the city of Rome. The person responsible for the committee that chooses names, Doctor De Pascalis, responded immediately. It should be noted that in Rome, street names in various parts of the city are reserved for particular groups. For example, many of the streets near the

General House are named after popes and cardinals. In other areas, they are named for literary figures or politicians.

Dr. De Pascalis indicated that in an area not far from the sea, where place names are dedicated to “Religious and Missionaries,” she had chosen some Italian missionaries for this honor. The street signs have already been put in place in a relatively new neighborhood. They read:

Piazza Monsignor Lionello Berti: Missionario (1925-1968) - OMI Laos

Via Padre Natalino Sartor: Missionario (1931-1966) – OMI Laos

Via Padre Mario Borzaga : Missionario (1932-1960) – OMI Laos

Via Padre Giuseppe Di Marco: Missionario (1906-1949) – OMI Sudafrica

Via Padre Paolo Meroni: Missionario (1873-1939) - comboniano

Father Angelo was able to give Dr. De Pascalis further information about the three Oblates who had worked in Laos since he had been their companion in studies and in the mission. He pointed out that Fr. Giuseppe Di Marco died at the age of 43 in South Africa, as a result of a traffic accident.

UKRAINE

A Golden Cross for an Oblate

On February 21, at the Apostolic Nunciature in Ukraine, Fr. Pavlo VYSHKOVSKYY received the *Golden Cross “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice,”* the highest honor which the Holy Father awards to a religious. Bestowing the award was Archbishop Thomas E. Gullickson, the Apostolic Nuncio. Fr. Pavlo received the award after six years of work in the Secretariat of the Apostolic Nunciature.

With sincere emotion, he thanked the Holy Father in the person of the Apostolic Nuncio. He stated that he is very young for such an honor and knows many other religious and religious who would merit it as well. Many of them survived years of persecution, keeping their faith alive and still professing it among the new generations by serving God with dedication and courage. He went on to say that he wanted to share the honor with the Ukrainian martyrs.

Born in Ukraine in 1975, Fr. Pavlo joined the Oblates in 1992. His formation took place in Poland; he was ordained a priest in 1999. Since completing his doctoral studies in Rome, besides his work at the Nunciature, he has been the director of the Catholic Media Center since 2005. He is also the spokesperson for the Ukrainian Bishops’ Conference.

FRANCE

Confessor and confidant

A Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in Chad for 45 years, Fr. Joseph SERGENT has become a “listener” at Fourvière (Diocese of Lyon).

After so many years, he realized it was time for the Africans to take over. At the seminary, Fr. Joseph had learned theology; in Africa, he learned the Gospel! “When we speak the local language, we need to get down to the essentials, and one finds that in the Gospels.”

Upon his return to France, he settled down at the Oblate house of Sainte-Foy. It’s not always easy to find one’s niche when returning from Africa.

One of his confreres suggested Fourvière to him and he discovered a new world there. He was surprised by so many people coming there, many of them tourists, but also those who come to pray and to meet with a priest!

And at Fourvière, they will surely find someone who will listen to them! As someone told him once, “For the first time, the priest is obliged to listen before beginning to speak!”

Each case is very different: people in the midst of a divorce and who find themselves alone; others looking for God in their lives; others who cannot forgive...

He also meets those who begin by saying: “I have never gone to confession; I don’t know what to say!” Fr. Joseph replies: “Tell me whom you love and whom you do not love.” He adds: “Beginning with that, you can help people reflect on their lives.”

The listeners have to adapt to each person. To the one who admits to being irritable, one can

say: "Tomorrow, smile at everyone you meet." To another, he recommends: "Tell your wife that you love her." And to another who is walled up in loneliness, he advises: "Look at the people around you."

He sometimes deals with people who want to tell him their whole life story. At a certain point, one has to cut them short. "But I have not finished!" He replies: "Anyway, God knows the rest; the essential is to recognize yourself as a sinner before God and ask for His help."

Many do not yet know the God of Jesus Christ, this God who is full of compassion and mercy.

"The parable of the prodigal son lets one discover another face of God, this God who is first of all a Father. When the son wants to ask for pardon, the father stops him and says: 'Come on, we are going to have a party.' Many times, I have had the response: 'I've never thought of that!'" That's what Fr. Joseph Sergent has discovered at Fourvière, and it's still only the beginning! (The editors of *Église à Lyon*, February 2012).

FRANCE

Fr. Victor Robert: 100 years old

Last February 17, the very day of the 186th anniversary of the approval of the Congregation by the Church, Fr. Victor ROBERT, of the St. Francis of Assisi community in Lyon, celebrated his 100th birthday. Still very lucid, he presided at the Eucharist and agreed to be interviewed by Fr. Jean-Pierre BONNAFOUX.

Over a hundred years, there have been many experiences and events. Would you tell us about something that stands out for you?

Yes, about Europe, the Church and the Oblates.

So let's begin with Europe...

We are at peace! Europe lives in peace! I have lived 25 years of war. I was six years old at the end of the war of 1914-18, when there was nothing to eat! Then, during the war of 1939-45, after the armistice, Alsace-Lorraine had been annexed by Germany. I was a prisoner; I

was released from the army and I went back to Augny and continued the missions. Then I was sent to Corsica, to Vico, and there, in February 1944, I left for the army in North Africa, landing on the Island of Elba. One can say therefore that I was on two of Napoleon's islands. I was released in November, 1945, and I received the commemorative medal of the 1939-45 war with the bars of *France* and *Liberation*. You may not realize what Europe at peace means! That just seems normal to you today.

And the Church...

I want to clarify one point: they blamed Pope Pius XII for remaining silent, but it was he who morally supported the Bishops of Germany and Italy. Today, there is freedom to come and to go, to go or not go to Church. At the time of Hitler, one had to hide in order to go to Mass. Christian associations were forbidden. There was only one party. One should not forget that one of the fathers of Europe, Robert Schuman, found asylum in monasteries that hid him.

And the Oblates?

I entered the Oblates because of a juniorate student who did not stay with the Oblates. After the novitiate, I made my scholasticate at Burthécourt. Fr. RESLEY was the superior.

I preached many missions in Alsace-Lorraine because I spoke fluent French and German. My community was in Metz with Fr. HAUBERT. I liked him a lot, even though he took jokes too seriously! I have good memories of Fathers DELORS and ROHR: they've been dead a long time.

Today, we have only one province in France. I knew the Eastern Province which was only Alsace-Lorraine. Evidently, it was very small, but just the same, it was a family.



Asia-Oceania

KOREA**A dormitory for the homeless**

In Korea, the customary salutation when we leave someone is *Agnon-Hi'-Caseo*, which means: *Go in peace*. It's a beautiful and friendly greeting when used in normal situations, but it becomes strange and out of place when every night I say it to our 500 friends, the homeless persons, who, after having received a warm supper at our Center, go wandering the dark and cold streets of the city to sleep somewhere under some stairs, covered with cardboard, or in subway stations, covered only by old newspapers. Knowing that the thermometer will drop to between five and thirteen degrees below zero, my heart is filled with pain and human compassion.

In the face of this reality, we had the idea, with the help of many Korean friends, of building a third floor on our Center. We were involved in this project throughout all of 2011. The result is a small dormitory, with 20 beds, to allow our unfortunate friends to pass a warm night, to have a nice shower and to have a good breakfast before being sent off to their lot in life. After a year of hard work and commitment, this dream became a reality when we launched it on January 15, to the great joy of our friends who live on the streets.

A great contribution came also from our Italian donors: if the gifts of the Koreans were used for the construction, those from Italy serve in the daily operation of the dormitory. Now, in the morning when I greet our homeless friends after they've spent a warm night in a comfortable bed, I can joyfully say: *Agnon-Hi'-Caseo -- Go in peace!* (Vincenzo BORDO)

PHILIPPINES**Evangelized by a simple faith**

Almost seven years ago, on July 28, 2005, I first arrived in Sitangkai, Tawi Tawi. Nobody knew that I would arrive on that day, so nobody received and welcomed me. Besides, the former priest in-charge of the Sitangkai Mission had gone to his new assignment. But, it was no big deal...!

Oblates have become used to this kind of transition. We assume our responsibilities in any mission and assignment without any protocol or formalities, e.g., installation rites, special programs and the like. We give the Bishop a courtesy call and off we go to our new assignment.

The Christian population in the Municipality of Sitangkai is less than one percent. In the whole Vicariate of Jolo, Christians are about 2% of the population.

I knew beforehand that life in Sitangkai as a missionary is really difficult. There is no convent boy, no cook or laundry woman. There is no TV, refrigerator or microwave oven or any of the regular conveniences or luxuries that a lonely missionary enjoys, because there is no electricity in the island. The hardest part is that we rely on rain water for drinking.

Notwithstanding the threat and the possibility of being kidnapped or killed, the priest does all the household chores like cooking and more. I say to myself, "Well, this is life in an Oblate mission, so I may as well enjoy it." This is Sitangkai, the last populated island in Southern Philippines!

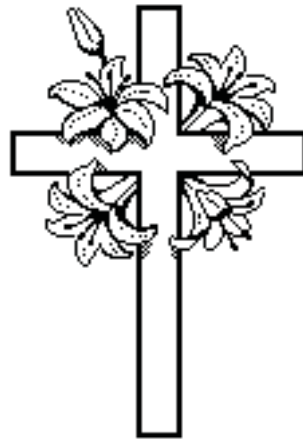
One morning, as I was having my coffee, an old man arrived and introduced himself as the Lay Minister of Santo Niño Chapel in Tongehat Mission Station. The man was Tinoy Segiunte. They came to Tawi-Tawi through a relative, looking for "greener pastures". He was from Alicia, Zamboanga del Sur. He is a seaweeds farmer and, occasionally, a fisherman. His wife, Dolores, is a catechist in the same chapel. They have two wonderful children and they have lived in Tongehat for the last twenty years. As I came to know him little by little and up to this day, I have become fascinated by Tinoy's dedication to work as a Lay Minister in Santo Niño Chapel.

I am challenged by the kind of faith that this simple man lives. He has not completed his elementary schooling and he could hardly write even his name. Yet, he is very well versed with

the language of love through his work as a Lay Minister and through the zeal and care he shows for his family. He knows the doctrines of our faith by heart and yet he has deep respect for the faith of his Muslim neighbor.

I may have studied twelve years of philosophy and theology, but I say that Tinoy lives that faith that I continue to study and understand. Tinoy lives a simple lifestyle with no complexities; all he has is his faith in God. There is the longing of every human being to be happy. Tinoy longs for it, too. But I am also certain that his fulfillment and happiness lie in serving God, His people and in showing true love to his family.

I once asked Tinoy where he learned all these things. His only answer was, "Father, when you love God, you will learn easily." He never misses any training, seminar, recollection or any activity sponsored by the Mission. He never has any complaints when asked to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word. He knows what true sacrifice is, because of his love for God. Tinoy, indeed, is a silent witness to the Gospel values he lives and his life is a reflection of his deep love of God. He is a reminder of my priesthood and of my ministry. I am evangelized by this simple and faithful man. Truly, he is God's gift and grace to my vocation. (Fr. Celoi ANDAMON in *OMI Philippines*, March 2012)



Anniversaries for May 2012

70 Years of priesthood

1942.05.28	06344	Fr. Giuseppe Affinita	Italy
1942.05.31	06198	Fr. Alfons Rzezniczek	Poland

65 Years of religious life

1947.05.31	08298	Fr. John McGrath	United States
1947.05.31	08299	Fr. Agustin Petru	Mexico

65 Years of priesthood

1947.05.31	07318	Fr. Jacques Croteau	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1947.05.31	07315	Fr. Roger Gauthier	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1947.05.31	07316	Fr. Lionel Goulet	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1947.05.31	07505	Fr. Ephrem Pelletier	Lacombe

60 Years of religious life

1952.05.21	09898	Bro. Erich Wieland	Central European Province
1952.05.31	09245	Fr. Richard Houlahan	United States
1952.05.31	09239	Fr. Edward Vrazel	United States

50 Years of religious life

1962.05.01	11206	Fr. Otto Dichtler	Central European
1962.05.01	11204	Fr. Karl Ege	Central S. Africa
1962.05.01	11208	Fr. Heinz Steegmann	Central European
1962.05.31	11219	Fr. Ruben Gomez	Philippines
1962.05.31	11223	Fr. Anthony F. Jayamanne	Colombo
1962.05.31	11225	Fr. Emilianus Moraes	Colombo
1962.05.31	11222	Fr. Joseph Bosco Perera	Colombo
1962.05.31	11220	Fr. Basil Job Silva	Colombo

50 Years of priesthood

1962.05.31	10536	Fr. Joao Drexel	Brazil
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25 Years of religious life

1987.05.21	13052	Fr. Lauro de Guia	Philippines
1987.05.21	13091	Fr. Simeon Sebastian	India
1987.05.21	13053	Fr. Luc R. Young Chen Yin	Australia

25 Years of priesthood

1987.05.02	12636	Fr. Clemente Basilicata	Italy
1987.05.28	12712	Fr. Tizi Edouard Hamman	Cameroon

Prayers for our deceased

No. 13-21

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Bro. Andrea Palladino	Italy	26/10/1935	Frascati	19/02/2012
Bro. Emile Louis	France	25/06/1930	Strasbourg	28/02/2012
Bro. Louis Détilleux	OMI Lacombe	28/12/1925	St. Albert	09/03/2012
Fr. Loïq Mégret	France	29/02/1924	Lyon	11/03/2102
Bro. Léon Dumont	France	30/04/1921	Strasbourg	15/03/2012
Fr. Alexandre Kayser	France	27/02/1904	Strasbourg	16/03/2012
Fr. Giuseppe Affinita	Italy	10/01/1917	Santa Maria a Vico	16/03/2012
Fr. Frank Bullivant	General Administration	03/07/1930	Bury St. Edmunds	16/03/2012
Fr. José María Garmón	Argentina/Chile	05/06/1928	Santa Fe	18/03/2012

“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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