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Community: a brotherhood of faith

By Fr. Paolo Archiati, OMI, Vicar General

We have recently begun a journey especially important for the life and mission of our family. During these three years, we will be preparing to celebrate, and we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of our founding. Through our newsletter, I would like to share, throughout this year, some thoughts and considerations on Oblate community, the theme chosen for this first part of this journey.

I would like to start this series of reflections by recalling an event that our family celebrated in 1976: the famous "Congress on the charism of the Founder today." The special issue of *Vie Oblate Life* which contains the proceedings of that conference contains an interesting contribution that highlights some of the characteristics of community in the light of the apostolic life, especially in reference to the Founder and the beginning of our Congregation. Father Marcello ZAGO, attempting to summarize the conference in an article on the fundamental points of our spirituality, sees in the community a place of apostolate and holiness, an ambiance that evangelizes and through which we become a sign for the poorest and most abandoned.

In our Oblate spirituality, there is a close link between Christ, evangelization and community: three fundamental elements of Oblate life which are the source of all our renewal. The community is not only a means of evangelization; it is also a place for our own evangelization: we evangelize to the extent that we identify with Christ, and the community is an indispensable means for this to happen. Among the features of Oblate community, modeled on that of the apostles

gathered around Jesus, the article stresses charity as its fundamental law; unity; communion around the one broken bread, around the word of God and in the sharing of goods.

The community is first and foremost a fraternity of faith: the Founder wanted the Oblates to return to their community, not so much to protect themselves from the dangers of the world, but mainly so as to have the possibility of seeing themselves as brothers in Christ, and thus be able, in touch with Him, to revitalize themselves in spirit. In this community, each one is a minister of faith for the others and he lets the others be that for him; this leads them beyond simple friendship and human affection, both so important for the common life.

Among the obstacles that the common life encounters, to be stressed are the scattering of members; the diversity of activities and ministries that engage us in multiple work groups; the diversity in formation and background. In some situations, one experiences frustrations and disappointments, sometimes even a cynical tendency to nip in the bud any sort of enthusiasm for life in common and for any community activity; and in some situations, paradoxically, the greatest obstacle to communion of faith in the community is represented by the apostolate itself, when an apostolic work is assumed by a person and not by the community and when the ministry creates a work community that is different and far removed from the religious community to which we belong. Many of our Oblate houses, Father Zago writes in the article cited above, more often resemble a boarding

house than a community; this is why we need a new conversion to Christ and to the Church, a conversion which requires Oblates to gather in community for a self-evangelization, to evaluate their life, the quality of their witness and their goals. In this, community animation has a role of paramount importance.

The final statement of the conference emphasizes how the ongoing renewal of the sense of community is seen by all as an opportunity to enrich the life of the Congregation and its mission of evangelization. The community, we read, is not simply seeing ourselves as a group of evangelical laborers who work together; like the Church, the community evangelizes itself and evangelizes others. The person of Christ, who through love is made present in the community, evangelizes those who accept and live a real sharing of life, so that it is the whole community that evangelizes.

Some of the final recommendations of the conference are significant in this regard. It

recommends, for example, choosing, at all levels, superiors who believe in and live the Oblate ideal, having as a priority continual renewal. It asks that attention be paid lest whoever may not want to move forward becomes a roadblock to others in their journey. It invites us to have the courage to abandon works that do not comply with the goals of the Institute in order to promote those that do (and in doing this discernment, the community factor should weigh decisively, more than it does in so many circumstances).

“For this,” we read in the final declaration, “we live in community with each other ... in it, we are mutually strengthened in faith through charity and we enrich each other with our discovery of God and of Christ, who lives and works in us and in the world.” If we consider that this important conference took place almost 40 years ago, we realize that some challenges still remain today and we understand why conversion is a journey that is unending.

Holy See

VATICAN

Vatican announces retirement of Bishop Pfeifer

On 12 December 2013, the Vatican announced that the Holy Father had accepted the resignation from the pastoral care of the diocese of San Angelo, Texas (USA) of Bishop Michael D. PFEIFER, in conformity with canon 401 par. 1 of the Code of Canon Law.

Bishop Pfeifer was born in Alamo, Texas, in the Diocese of Brownsville on 18 May 1937. Ordained a priest for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1964, he served in various assignments, including 16 years as a missionary in Mexico. He was named Provincial of the former Southern Province of the Oblates, and while in that position was named Fifth Bishop of San Angelo by Pope John Paul II on in 1985.

General Administration

GENERAL HOUSE

The triennium has begun at 290 via Aurelia

The Oblate triennium, the three years prior to the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation by St. Eugene de Mazenod, got off to a rousing start with the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception at the General House in Rome.

Close to 60 Oblates from around the world, as well as a number of guests, joined together for the Mass and dinner celebration which followed. Bishop Douglas CROSBY, of Hamilton,

Ontario, Canada, was the principal celebrant of the Mass; Superior General Fr. Louis LOUGEN, gave the homily, and the music and liturgical preparations were provided by the students of the International Roman Scholasticate. As always, Honorary Oblate Gina TARQUINI, who worked for many decades at the General House, was a welcome guest, as was Bishop Lionel Gendron, Sulpician from Canada, who accompanied Bishop Crosby.

The Mass began with the blessing of holy water and the signing of each person present with that

water, reminding us of our baptism. A small heart with a cross engraved on it was given to each one as a token of the commitment to the renewal the triennium calls forth.

Fr. Lougen, in his homily, highlighted the plan for the next three years, and pointed out the ways in which Mary was and continues to be an example for us in faithfulness. The prayer of the faithful featured a petition from each area of the Oblate world, presented in

the native language of one of the scholastics.

During the meal, under the direction of Fr. Edouard DAGAVOUNANSOU of the scholastic staff, various national or language groups presented hymns to Mary from their tradition.

As the group dispersed, the challenge of living the renewal called for by the triennium was on the mind of each one, and set the tone for the rest of Advent. (William O'DONNELL)

Europe

FRANCE

A look toward the future

The Oblates from the Province of France came together for three days of discussion on the occasion of the end of the mandate of the present provincial. It was an opportunity to look at current missionary activities and to vision prospects for the future: a real challenge in a changing society!

Seventy-five Oblates were present. The European dimension of Oblate life was obvious during the meeting, with the presence of Chicho ROIS, General Councillor for Europe; Alberto GNEMMI, the present provincial of the recently established Mediterranean Province; and Zbigniew OPYD from the France-Benelux Delegation.

The first morning was an opportunity for the provincial, Yves CHALVET, to take stock of his mandate in the form of a personal testimony, and Marc CHATELLIER to speak of the financial situation. The end of the morning was devoted to an interesting dialogue with Chicho Rois and Alberto Gnemmi. Indeed, it is clear that the future of Oblate life in France will not happen without a link to all of Europe. (Bertrand EVELIN in <http://www.oblatfrance.com>)

ITALY

St. Eugene and the holy queen

On 25 January 2014, in the Basilica of Santa Chiara in Naples (Italy), Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for Saints,

will proclaim blessed the Venerable Maria Cristina of Savoy. The future Blessed was born in Cagliari to Vittorio Emanuele I and Maria Theresa of Austria Este, in exile, 14 November 1812. It was the Napoleonic period in which States and rulers were shuffled like leaves in the wind. After the defeat of Napoleon, Victor Emmanuel I was able to leave Cagliari and return to Turin. The following year, 1815, he called his wife and four daughters to come from Sardinia: Mary Beatrice, Maria Theresa, Marianna and Maria Cristina. In Turin, the child was brought up by her very pious mother, and the court chaplain, Fr. G. Baptist Terzi. The young princess spent much time in prayer and in her religious education, within the culture proper to her status.

In 1825, Maria Cristina was in Rome for the jubilee: she visited churches and holy places and several times, she saw Pope Leo XII. There were several episodes of religious devotion and humility that created an almost legendary aura around her. Maria Cristina (then thirteen years old) described in a letter the ceremony of the opening of the Holy Year, just as St. Eugene would describe the closure in his diary. After six months she returned to Genoa; then it was back to Rome at the end of the year, and until mid-1826. It was in that year that Eugene de Mazenod, in Rome for the approval of the Rules, saw her. *The queen of Sardinia and her daughters came to listen to the instruction in the gallery of our church. These instructions must be given everywhere on the sacrament of penance, to prepare the faithful to celebrate Easter worthily.* (Journal, 5 March 1826)

In the evening, I attended catechism in the church of the house where I live. The Queen of Sardinia and her two daughters, who are staying at the Quirinal Palace, come and attend regularly. This exercise, repeated in thirty churches in Rome for eight consecutive days, must be very helpful to the faithful who flock there, always in large crowds. Our missionary today focused his catechism on the sins of scandal. They Vincentians do the same exercise every day in their missions. (Journal, 7 March 1926)

At the time of the abdication of Victor Emmanuel I, in the absence of a male descendant, the kingdom had gone to his cousin, Carlo Alberto. The day after her mother's death, which took place in Genoa, Maria Cristina received peremptory orders to move immediately to Turin. Carlo Alberto feared, in fact, that she might escape the commitment of marriage, needed to consolidate relations with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Given in marriage to Ferdinand I, King of the Two Sicilies, she became pregnant in 1835. The heir to the throne, the future Francis II, was born 16 January 1836. At the age of little more than twenty-three, Maria Cristina died in Naples on 31 January 1836 from complications.

ITALY

Photo exhibit about a missionary project

On the occasion of a meeting of the Council of the Mountain Community of the Castelli Romani and Prenestini (Municipalities in the Province of Rome), on Tuesday, 26 November, a photo exhibit of a project of cooperation with Alinlì - Farim - Guinea Bissau was officially inaugurated. There was much emotion during the ceremony to grant honorary citizenship to Father Carlo ANDOLFI, the Oblate missionary who coordinates the project on site.

Among those present were many mayors and local administrators, who gave testimony based on their experience in Guinea Bissau, and Fr. Adriano TITONE, Procurator of the OMI Missions for the Mediterranean Province.

Immediately after the ceremony, an agreement was signed for managing the pharmacies in

Guinea Bissau. Father Carlo, in his speech, after having thanked those present and the Mountain Community for their efforts and for their solidarity, said that so far in the village of Farim, the work goes on, as begun with the aid of another missionary, a qualified nurse who will continue the work of the clinics, taking care of the health of the inhabitants.

The project was completed this year, after five years of hard work; it has allowed the creation of a network of first-aid health care facilities in one of the smallest and poorest nations of the world. Each village now has its own dispensary, symbolically twinned with each municipality making up the Mountain Community.

UKRAINE

A gift for the Holy Father

Fr. Pavlo VYSHKOVSKYY, Superior of the Oblate Delegation in Ukraine and Russia, is a happy man. He twice met with Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. He worked for six years in the Apostolic Nunciature in Kyiv, and recently he had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis and give him the Italian version of his book about the persecution of Catholics of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine. On November 20, during the General Audience in St. Peter's Square in Rome, Fr. Pavlo was able to shake the Holy Father's hand and give him the book.

The book was published several years ago in Milan, and in Italy, 10 thousand copies have been sold. It is in its second edition. Fr. Pavlo has been studying and writing about the persecution of the Church in Ukraine for a long time. The Polish edition has had four editions with 25 thousand copies. He is now preparing an edition in Hungarian.

"When talking with the Holy Father, I asked for his blessing on the ministry of the Missionary Oblates, on our members and on the ordinary people of Ukraine, as well as all those close to my heart and those who couldn't be there. In response, he said to me in Russian: "Glory to Jesus Christ." I was amazed by his eyes; he really looks like what is written on

his coat of arms: “Miserando atque eligendo” (*Loosely translated: Seeing him through the eyes of mercy and choosing him*), a passage from a homily of Venerable Bede on the

call of Matthew, the tax collector. The Pope really looks with “mercy.” It is impossible to describe his eyes. This will remain in my memory forever,” says Father Pavlo.

Africa-Madagascar

MADAGASCAR

A bold new commission

The OMI Delegation of Madagascar has created a new “Commission for Communication and Marketing” which met for the first time on 13-14 September 2013 at Soavimaboaka.

The members of the commission are Fathers Henri MARCINIAK, Adam SZUL, Marek MODRZEWSKI, Piotr KOMAN and Jocelyn Rasamoelina RIVOTINA. Fr. Henri, as the one responsible for this commission, has tried to respond to the question: What are the goals of the delegation in creating the commission?

- First of all, a consolidation of our audiovisual work;
- Study and planning concerning the use of audiovisual means;
- Research into a new way of doing things, i.e., an expansion of our work;
- And especially a question of money for the economic self-sufficiency of the Delegation of Madagascar.

We developed four proposals for the next meeting of the Madagascar Delegation Council: the establishment of a print shop; a bookstore; a second audiovisual studio; and a pharmacy (the latter is not so much in the audiovisual sphere as it is part of marketing.)

Fathers Henri and Marek can offer training to those who would be interested: audiovisual language; photographic composition; faith and media; the Internet today; creating a web site; and other information on the use of the computer and software.

There will be collaboration between the two centers (Fianarantsoa and Tamatave) and if any Oblate would like professional help (creation of logos, illustrations, electronic books, etc.) we would be ready to help them,

because that is essentially why the commission was created.

At the end of these long discussions, the members of the commission were unanimous, even though the materials are not yet ready, that we would officially announce the print shop, bookstore and the audiovisual studio, if the members of the Delegation Council agree. The name we propose is: OMISTUDIOPRINT.

At the end of our meeting, we looked at how we can help the Committee for the Preparation of the Oblate Triennium. We suggest the following:

- A slideshow that will help in the animation of each community or parish or mission;
- A calendar for each of the three years with the theme and some prayers;
- A poster to publicize our Triennium;
- An Oblate congress to close the Oblate Triennium.
- A congress for Lay Oblates;
- Translation into Malagasy of the book on the life of our delegation by Fr. Jarek;
- A new film that will tell of our work in Madagascar. (*Écho OMI Madagascar*, November 2013)

MADAGASCAR

Reception of the relics of Blessed John Paul II

Great joy filled the hearts of the Christians at the new Blessed John Paul II Parish in Morondava, Madagascar, on Sunday, 20 October 2013. That day saw the blessing of the new chapel and the reception of the relics of Blessed John Paul II. For the opening hymn, they chose a song that matches the charism of John Paul II, to be the missionary pope for the entire world.

On 25 November 2012, the bishop of the diocese Morondava, Bishop Marie Fabien Raharilambonajna, erected the new parish

on the outskirts of the town of Morondava, entrusting it to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Two weeks later, on 10 December, we started the construction of the new chapel. Construction was completed at the end of May. We decided to wait a few months to bless the chapel on the day of the memorial of Blessed John Paul II, 22 October.

While waiting for the feast, the Christians of the parish prepared themselves for this great celebration. During this time, the parishioners organized a dinner-concert to raise some money, by inviting Christians of all the parishes in the city. From September, we spoke in five parishes in the city of Morondava. In each parish, we preached sermons on the spiritual legacy of John Paul II and in the evening, we showed a film on his life. In our parish, the celebration was preceded by a Triduum. On the last day of the Triduum, there were confessions.

Four Oblate priests came to the feast: Frs. Marek OCHLAK, Superior of the OMI delegation in Madagascar; Adam SZUL, delegation treasurer; Henryk MARCINIAK and Stanisław KAZEK.

The chapel is too small for big celebrations; that's why we prepared an outdoor Mass. The chapel's porch served as a platform for the altar and the celebrants.

The liturgy at Mass was enlivened by the youth of the parish. Fr. Riri, the vicar and a composer, composed two songs for the feast. According to Madagascar customs, during the four songs, the youth did liturgical dances.

Thanks to the money raised at the dinner-concert, we were able to invite the priests and representatives from each parish for a meal after Mass. During the meal and afterwards, till sunset, the representatives from each parish presented songs on the platform.

This feast closes the first phase of the formation of the parish. May the good God bless us! May Blessed John Paul II intercede before God for our parish, our diocese and for the whole country! (*Écho OMI Madagascar*, November 2013)

NATAL

Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Denis Hurley, OMI

The passing of Nelson Mandela on 5 December reminds Oblates that it took three great leaders to accomplish the abolition of apartheid in South Africa: Mandela, Hurley, and the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Now is a good time to recall what Paddy Kearney wrote in 2009 in his well-received biography of Hurley: *Guardian of the Light*, about Hurley and Mandela working together.

When Hurley was hauled before a court in February 1985 and threatened with jail for publishing "untrue facts" in relation to action by police (p. 211), Mandela wrote from his prison: "Archbishop Hurley is often in my thoughts, especially now. I would like him to know that" (p. 223).

In 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of South Africa. Hurley was a special guest. Kearney writes "He regarded it as the second great highlight of his life, after Vatican II. In a letter to his friend Petal O'Hara, he described the occasion:

The function of the Inauguration was magnificently performed, every person doing his or her part perfectly . . . The mood of the crowd rose to a joyous fever pitch. The final act was the firing of a twenty-one-gun salute and a flyover in tight formation of several SAAF squadrons, the last one consisting of six planes that left trails in the many colours of the South African flag. The crowd was ecstatic. 'Our air force', shouted the African citizens . . . Lunch followed, very well organized—plenty of food and drink, easy access to supplies and to tables. And by 3:00 p.m. we were climbing onto buses and heading for the airport full of the joy of having participated in perhaps the greatest day in the history of South Africa.

When Brother Jude Pieterse saw Hurley after the inauguration, he noticed 'an excitement I had never really associated with him before . . . He was almost . . . bubbling over, you know. Normally he kept his emotions pretty well under control, but [that day] there was a real joy in his whole approach.'"

In 1999, President Mandela conferred on Hurley the Order of Meritorious Service (Class 1) (p. 309). When Hurley died on Feb. 13, 2005, Dominican Sister Marie-Henry Keane, who as a young nun had benefited from his special attention in explaining Vatican II to women religious, called him “the Nelson Mandela of the Church” (p. 325).

Now they are together, rejoicing at the continued growth of justice, truth and opportunity in South Africa. (Fr. Harry WINTER in www.omiusa.org)

CAMEROON

A double celebration

It was December 8 when we opened, in the Cameroon Province, the triennium for the bicentennial of the existence of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. There was a happy coincidence and a providential circumstance. We were in the parish of Christ the Savior in Bangué. The inauguration took place at the Mass of Thanksgiving Father Thomas BANG, ordained the previous day at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Douala with the imposition of hands by Bishop Samuel Kleda.

The homily by Father François CARPENTIER presented the entire Oblate mission since 1826; it announced the next mission of the new priest; and it motivated or stimulated the vocation of more than one young person, with meaningful catchphrases that were challenging yet joyful.

Then the awaited moment arrived. After communion, Father Provincial, Fr. Raymond NANI, announced the program of the Triennium from the pulpit. With fireworks, symbol of the burning flame of love or zeal for the mission, the three-year celebration began. The church was full of trills of joy by the most beautiful voices, especially for the symbol of the Holy Spirit, when Father Provincial let fly a dove presented by a Christian woman of the parish.

Father Provincial came on strong. One could say that he focused his words for all the Oblates present on this first year which celebrates community in view of the observance of chastity. It was as if to

say that good community life would avoid any misunderstanding about the experience of chastity. Indeed, from 8 December 2013 to 07 December 2014, the entire Congregation, at least the province of Cameroon, will live the grace of apostolic community or will put into practice the last General Chapter which called loudly for the conversion to community life. (Schol. Bro. Pascal KIDARI in <http://www.omicameroun.com>)

MADAGASCAR

Our presence among the Malagasy

To joyfully cross the world for love of the poor. That is the choice that drove a delegation of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate to touch down in Madagascar some thirty-three years ago.

With about 20 million inhabitants, Madagascar, one of the largest islands in the world (fourth, worldwide), separated from Africa by the Mozambique Canal, is counted among the poorest countries of the world.

The reality of Madagascar requires many adjustments, surrenders and conversions. Thirty-three years of presence among the poor. A presence that translates into a missionary commitment in every aspect of life's realities, where the first thing that strikes one is the poverty. It is a material poverty that is not destitution but one which evokes a remarkable human richness in the spirit of hospitality, sharing and availability.

Another pervasive and dominating reality: ancestor worship. This is a very formalistic practice, sociological and deeply rooted in the soul of the Malagasy. The life of the individual finds itself ever dependent on different customary ancestral ceremonies. So, how to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ amidst a people that is sure of a permanent contact with the great beyond, through the performance of a number of rituals and stereotypical behaviors? What future is there for these "primitives", faced with a globalization where technology, productivity and immediate effectiveness reign supreme? Is it already too late to prepare them for a world

civilization that already is crushing them? How can they avoid going under the steamroller of progress conceived of as "having more" rather than "being better"?

The appropriate responses are only drops of water which do not make an ocean, for in Madagascar as in Africa, they evaporate before they hit the ground.

- People: men, women and children struggle unconsciously with the instabilities of life. A life that could be improved if they had the proper help in order to get out of the embrace of a tradition often based on experimental knowledge.
- Babies, who have a right to life, but who lack the minimum adequate social conditions, die before being born and often their mothers die with them. Children of school age, in order to take care of their essential human needs,

can be found in fields and rice paddies or watching cattle, so that already at their age, they bear the yoke of an adult so as to add a little more to the family's daily income.

- Youth, living in the illusion of another developed world and wanting to break free from the traditional constraints, rush into a society that has almost no standards, unless the Church calls them to her maternal care.

These rather shocking and glaring realities of life summarize a set of social injustices in both the countryside and the cities: the needy families, the elderly without resources, young people without standards, patients with no money for treatment, problems of hygiene, lack of drinking water that causes a parasitic illness, especially among children, etc. ... in short, God's people who are bleeding! (From « *Présentation de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée à Madagascar* », December 2013)

Asia-Oceania

COLOMBO

The oldest Catholic monthly is online!

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have inaugurated the first English edition – printed and online – of Bakthi Prabodhanaya, the oldest magazine in Sri Lanka. First published in January 1899, the Catholic monthly has been regularly published for 114 years. The presentation of the new project took place on 16 December at Negombo, in St. Peter's Parish. "It's a great victory, obtained through the blessing of God," Fr. Dilan PERERA, the director of the magazine, told AsiaNews.

The presentation ceremony began with a Mass of thanksgiving, presided by Fr. Lal PUSHPADEVA, director of St. Vincent House in Maggona, together with other priests. At the end of the liturgy, Fr. Dilan offered the first English edition of Bakthi Prabodhanaya to Fr. Rohan SILVA, the provincial superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

"The new edition will not be simply a translation from the Sinhalese," Fr. Dilan explained to AsiaNews, "but it will have original content. For some time, international and government schools

have asked us for an English version of the magazine, to be able to read the spiritual content. Furthermore, from now on, we will also be able to reach readers of the Tamil language who do not speak Sinhalese." In Sri Lanka, Tamil is an official language, equal to Sinhalese, since 1987, but English is used as the bridge-language.

The first edition of Bakthi Prabodhanaya came out in January 1899, printed at St. Vincent House in Maggona. At that time, each edition was of eight pages and the annual subscription cost one rupee. The monthly was published together with the even older Catholic daily in Sinhalese, Ganartha Pradeepaya. Today, the magazine sells about twelve thousand copies per month. The most common themes are the family, the social doctrine of the Church, ethics and children. (19/12/13: Melani Manel Perera in <http://www.asianews.it>)

THAILAND

Preparing for Christmas

During Advent season, in which we often forget the one to whom we are really looking forward, my job, at St. Michael Parish where I am pastor, is to make Jesus known, to point out

where he can be found. It is a difficult task full of unknowns in a church that has not grown, in terms of the faithful, in more than a hundred years. Jesus among us is like a hidden treasure that no one is looking for, but when we come into his presence, something changes inside us. Two weeks ago we had, for the first time in the parish, a day for families. We had prepared long and hard; we did not expect many people, but the level of participation surprised us a little. We came together simply to try to take care of each other, to be kind and welcoming, ready to be of service to others. The day went well, but the most surprising thing was the reaction of some couples: *"Father we were glad to be together today, like this, in simplicity; it was a discovery. You know, we should organize some other gatherings like this."* This couple met Jesus; they experienced the beauty of his plan, and that's not a small thing in a country where the people (sometimes) come to Mass, but even before the final blessing, are already on their scooters, ready to go home (or go to the mall).

In October, we organized a distribution of aid for refugees who know our parish, people from all backgrounds and walks of life, all in need of a few thousand Baht to pay the rent, buy food, take care of their children. There were 200 people. We had not expected such a large number; we did not know how to help everyone.

At the end, a couple in their thirties with two small children stopped to chat with me: they needed milk for the children. They were a Pakistani Catholic couple who had fled their country for religious reasons. I told them that I would try to find some powdered milk for their children. At that point the dad started crying and told me the story of his life in Pakistan. He thanked me for the help I had given him; he showed me that he wore a cross on his breast and told me that it was his God, a God who took care of him and even though his situation was very precarious, he believed that Jesus was with him in these difficult times. "See – he told me with tears in my eyes - I had to run away from my country because I was persecuted as a Christian; I left everything behind me, I have nothing, but I came here and found a Christian community that tries to help. You are our father and God put you here to

help us here so that we can be no longer afraid." I could not but be moved by such strong faith and I felt a little embarrassed that I can do so little for these people, for his family. Bassim is someone who has met the Lord; for him, it is certainly Christmas this year, a real Christmas, perhaps not lived in a cave, but in a rented room rent, almost empty, furnished only with two mattresses placed on the floor, one for him and his wife and the other for the children, without even a sheet.

My work continues in the parish of St. Michael, very unassuming, but with perseverance and commitment. I do not know when my parishioners really have a true experience of Christmas, but I am doing all that I can, seeking the collaboration of all of my parishioners so that they too can become a bit more missionaries of the Gospel of Jesus, the good news that can really give hope to our lives. (Domenico RODIGHIERO)

INDIA

"What does your church do for the non-Christians?"

Many persons these days seek pleasure, comfort and material goods on the one hand and on the other hand, they are filled with grief, pain, agony and untold miseries. One of the agonizing factors in the modern world is AIDS. Unfortunately the percentage of HIV positive persons is increasing at an alarming rate. There are many such people even in Bangarpet, a developing town in Kolar district, Karnataka, India. Bangarpet has a rich, proud history of its own as it once played a crucial role in marketing gold. Bangarpet means town of gold. The town is on the border of two southern states of India, viz., Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The population is a mixture of Telugu, Kannada and Tamil speaking. The majority is Hindu and Christians are still a minority. Owing to the closure of the gold mines, back in the 1990's, a good number of people shifted to Bangarpet, hoping make use of the train to Bangalore to work in computer science and any other field to earn their livelihood. The total population is around two-hundred thousand. There are about five hundred HIV positive persons.

The BMSS (Bangalore Multipurpose Social Service) is striving to meet the needs of these AIDS stricken people. Once a month, AIDS victims are invited to our parish hall. The parish priest, Fr. BENEDICT also attends the meeting to share their sufferings. It is very painful to find our own brethren in miserable living conditions. They pour out their hearts to tell of their grievances: being turned away from their employment; being rejected by family and friends; being deprived of education and being restricted by society. The parish priest talked to the Parish Council which decided to adopt 50 of the HIV patients.

As an initial service, old clothes, stationery, rice and dhal (lentils) are given. The Council decided to distribute bags to all the parishioners so that they could put a handful of rice into the bag for the needy as often as possible. Once a month, the rice is collected and distributed. In the past three months, commendable efforts have been made by the Church to also meet their medical,

educational and other basic needs. The priest and a few of parishioners show their concern to these people by giving ear to their sad stories.

The priest conducts a special prayer service for them for about half-an-hour. Later he soothes them with affectionate words. It seems that this is a dire need in their lives because a few minutes spent with them and a few loving words spoken to them go a long way in making their lives happier and in maintaining their faith in humanity. The meeting ends with a good lunch. They return home assured that God is merciful towards them because He has inspired people to still love them.

The idea of this kind of service was sown by Fr. Louis LOUGEN, Superior General, during his visit to India in 2012. The thought for it sprang up when he asked the parish priest and the parishioners, "What does your church do for the non-Christians?" (Fr. Benedict, OMI in BORN)

Canada-United States

OMI LACOMBE

An Oblate in the Sports Hall of Fame

Fr. Jean-Marie MOUCHET was given a special honor just a few days before he died. On November 22, he became the newest member of the Northwest Territory Sport Hall of Fame in Yellowknife, NWT. He received a much more special honor on 2 December when he was called by the Heavenly Father.

An avid fan of skiing, Mouchet was the innovator of the Territorial Experimental Ski Training (TEST) Program, which was designed to give aboriginal children physical achievement through cross-country skiing.

In 1955, while living in Inuvik, Fr. Mouchet founded the TEST program. The program soon grew and expanded to other northern communities. Many young First Nations athletes participated in the program, with impressive results. Fr. Mouchet not only taught skiing, he taught youth in Northern Canada the value of challenging themselves and the benefits of determination in order to reach their potential.

Over the years, the fruits of his labour were realized as several athletes from Inuvik found their way on to the national and Olympic teams in the 1970's.

Born in France in 1917, he was the last Oblate in the Yukon. Most of his ministry was among the Inuit and the Denes.

ASSUMPTION

Province begins triennium

On 8 December 2013, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, about 4,000 Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate around the world began their Oblate Triennium, a three-year preparation for the 200th Anniversary of the establishment of their Congregation. The Superior General, Fr. Louis LOUGEN, said that, "*this jubilee is a gift from God, a holy time, a kairos for each Oblate and for all those associated for us, lay people, young people, and religious congregations that have connections with the Oblate charism.*"

To commemorate this special occasion, over 140 priests and lay associates gathered at Queen

of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga on 9 December. The event began with the Holy Eucharist, which was presided by Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Toronto, William McGrattan, and concelebrated by the Oblates of the Assumption Province from the Toronto district, together with other religious and diocesan priests from the Toronto area. Guests in attendance included the Consul General of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Grzegorz Morawski, Honourary Oblates, parents and families of Oblates, employees of Assumption Province and people of good will who support and promote the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

At the end of Mass, Fr. Marian GIL, Provincial of Assumption Province, presented two individuals, Mr. Mark Garczynski and Mr. Paul Fletcher, with the Crystal Oblate Madonna Award for their contributions to promoting the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod and dedication to the mission of Assumption Province.

The program for Triennium celebrations in Assumption Province will focus on three areas: 1. Renewal of Oblate Life; 2. Oblate Youth Ministry; 3. Parish Ministry. The Oblates of Assumption Province ask all people of good will to participate in Triennium celebrations in the coming three years and keep Oblates in their prayers, that this time of grace and preparation bear much fruit. More information can be found at www.omiap.org.

UNITED STATES

Athletic Hall of Fame for another Oblate

Currently, Fr. William O'DONNELL is working as assistant to the Secretary General in Rome and as secretary "pro tempore" of the Superior General.

But in his youth at the Jesuit school, LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York, he was a noted runner on the Cross Country and Track team (1961-1965). In September 2013, he was inducted into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Among other comments, the inscription on the award he received says: *In addition to competing*

in Indoor & Outdoor track, O'Donnell ran Cross Country his first season on the Heights and served as manager each of the next three years. Serving across campus in a variety of capacities during his time at Le Moyne, O'Donnell upon leaving Le Moyne, entered the religious order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate where he studied philosophy and theology at the Jesuit-run Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained in Rome in 1970.

UNITED STATES

St. Eugene de Mazenod Church

The first parish in the world named for Eugene de Mazenod as a Saint was dedicated by Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, before a packed congregation on Saturday 7 December 2013. The brand-new, 550 seat church features an historic, eight-foot tall Oblate cross salvaged from a former Oblate parish in Big Spring, Texas and stained-glass windows commemorating Oblate history in the lower Rio Grande Valley.

The current pastor, Fr. Timothy PAULSEN, ministers to 600 registered families in this largely immigrant community. The parish's first pastor, Fr. Harry SCHUCKENBROCK received a standing ovation at a celebration where the former church building, now slated to become a new parish hall, was named in his honor.

South Central Area Councilor, Fr. Jim BROBST, attended and presented Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville a relic of the heart of St. Eugene. Later Fr. Brobst wrote, "It struck me how appropriate it was to be placing a relic of the founder's heart into the parish altar where his great heart continues to beat, in our own province renewal, and in the people of that parish, so representative of Oblate love for the poor and of our great history of ministry in North America."

St. Eugene de Mazenod Parish in Brownsville was so named one day after Pope John Paul II canonization St. Eugene in Rome on 3 December 1995. (www.omiusa.org)

Latin America

BAJA CALIFORNIA MISSION **New families continue to arrive**

Fr. Nicholas HARDING, one of the five Oblates working in the La Morita barrio of Tijuana, Baja California, just south of the Mexico-U.S. border, gives some updates about the mission there.

Recently, I met “Yolanda” who hitchhiked almost 1,000 miles from the state of Michoacán with her baby and two little girls. Her husband had left her for another woman, and she hopes to find employment in Tijuana with the help of her uncle Zamora, a brick maker in our parish, who lives along the train tracks. I was impressed that when I was introduced to her, the first thing she wanted to know was whether her nine-year-old daughter could still enroll in catechism to make her First Communion. Our parish found two discarded garage doors for her to use as walls for a shack for her little family to live in (no electricity or running water). Our parish area continues to grow rapidly due to newcomers from the south of Mexico like Yolanda.

In the past six months, 1,500 families have built themselves shacks on unoccupied land, again without sewage, water or electricity services. We help provide tarps for roofs and some Catholic groups from California build some houses.

In June we had a big “crop” of candidates for confirmation in our parish. The archbishop came three times to confirm a total 515 of our youth. Also, in December he came to confirm 68 adults. We began a special formation school for our 232 catechists. We now have a team which goes once a week to each of our fifteen chapels because it was very difficult for the faithful in the countryside to come to one central location. Some of our more remote chapels are located where there is no public transportation or paved roads.

Over the summer we had summer schools in several locations for the neediest kids...Bible study, arts and crafts, sports, and a paseo (field

trip) to a museum. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s Missionaries of Charity helped a lot.

In our ‘special education’ building we continue to have classes Monday to Thursday for our children who have autism, Down’s syndrome and other conditions which prevent them from going to regular public schools.

On Friday our bus picks up other special needs children and youth for classes. We now offer acupuncture as well as tutorial and remedial classes for youngsters who have been deported from the U.S. and who don’t speak Spanish very well. There are an estimated 5,000 such deported youth in Tijuana.

Once a month we have been blessed with volunteers from the University of San Diego and Loyola University (Los Angeles). These students have helped with painting buildings and paving our driveway with cement to make it useable during the rainy season. The young people also have lugged stones to build a chapel in our Rojo Gomez Alta neighborhood, which is high up on a hill and accessible only by a dirt road.

About a mile from the main parish complex is Casa Memorias which houses 85 HIV positive patients. There we help in whatever ways we can at the hospice and the tuberculosis ward attached to it.

This autumn, we supplied about 100 children and youth with becas. These are small scholarships strictly based on need and adequate performance. They enable both boys and girls to pay school fees and purchase required uniforms, shoes, notebooks etc.

Each year in preparation for the December feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, there is a wonderful tradition here of parishioners visiting homes with her image and praying the rosary at a different house each evening for 46 days. We had about 100 teams for these visits, so 4,600 homes were visited.

Anniversaries - February 2014

70 Years of priesthood

1944.02.27 06915	Fr. Pierre Mercier	France
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65 Years of religious life

1949.02.17 08605	Fr. Roland Tessier	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1949.02.28 08609	Fr. John de Nobrega	Northern S. A.

65 Years of priesthood

1949.02.17 07724	Fr. Jean Guéguen	France
1949.02.20 07887	Fr. Giangiacomo Coati	Mediterranean
1949.02.20 07751	Fr. Joao Hébert	Belgium/Holland
1949.02.24 07678	Fr. Lucien Sawyer	United States
1949.02.27 07771	Fr. André Didon	Colombo
1949.02.27 07727	Fr. Lucien Wisselmann	France

60 Years of religious life

1954.02.17 10243	Bro. René-Jean Roublot	France
1954.02.27 09690	Fr. Kevin Bugler	Northern S. A.
1954.02.27 09644	Fr. James Towell	Northern S. A.

60 Years of priesthood

1954.02.21 08575	Fr. Leo D'Aes	Central S. A.
1954.02.21 08956	Fr. Christian Hoet	Belgium/Holland
1954.02.21 08792	Fr. Patrice Morel	France
1954.02.21 08930	Fr. Emilio Trottemenu	Argentina-Chile

50 Years of priesthood

1964.02.08 10394	Fr. Richard Doll	Lacombe
1964.02.15 10572	Fr. Guglielmo Crespan	Mediterranean
1964.02.15 10569	Fr. Alphonse Gioppato	United States
1964.02.15 10570	Fr. Salvatore Lavorgna	Mediterranean
1964.02.15 10571	Fr. Pietro Reginato	Mediterranean
1964.02.15 10574	Fr. Vincenzo Sgambato	Mediterranean
1964.02.22 10263	Fr. Jose Ante	Philippines
1964.02.22 10370	Fr. Jean-Pierre Caloz	France
1964.02.22 10312	Fr. Jacques L'Heureux	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1964.02.23 10789	Fr. Gerard Barrett	United States
1964.02.23 10387	Fr. Cornelius Campbell	Australia
1964.02.23 10390	Fr. Michael Guckian	Anglo-Irish
1964.02.23 10385	Fr. Vincent Mulligan	Anglo-Irish
1964.02.23 10388	Fr. Thomas Murphy	Anglo-Irish
1964.02.23 10586	Fr. Michael Phelan	Anglo-Irish

25 Years of priesthood

1989.02.24 12783	Fr. Danilo Sergio	Philippines
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Prayers for our deceased

No. 90-95

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Carlos Krzewinski	Mexico	02/06/1928	San Antonio	25/11/2013
Fr. Louis Fournier	OMI Lacombe	18/02/1923	Coral Harbour	25/11/2013
Fr. Joseph Meeùs	OMI Lacombe	03/09/1927	St. Boniface	01/12/2013
Fr. Jean-Marie Mouchet	OMI Lacombe	01/05/1917	Whitehorse	02/12/2013
Fr. James Blaney	United States	30/07/1937	Sitka	04/12/2013
Fr. Gerald McGovern	United States	08/04/1931	Belleville	16/12/2013

“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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