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## “Better alone than in bad company”?

By Fr. Paolo Archiati, Vicar General

As I write reflections on community, I realize the complexity of the issue and of the many angles from which it could be treated. After speaking the last time about the local superior and his particular “vocation” to be the shepherd of his brothers, for this issue and perhaps the next, I had thought about reflecting on the members of the local community, studying and analyzing the different “types”. Although it would be an interesting effort that could provide food for thought, it is too complex. It would lead to “classifying” people, closing them into predetermined clichés, with the risk of being superficial and subjective.

So I would like to touch on two other points that I feel are important to the life of an Oblate community. The first, trivial if you will, is that of the ideal number of people who should compose a local community. It is a number that does not exist. There are Oblate communities of thirty persons where relationships are good, despite some inevitable difficulties and not necessarily related to the number; there are Oblate communities of three or four Oblates where relationships are always quarrelsome, or even non-existent.

According to our Rule of Life, “The local community normally consists of at least three Oblates,” and “the situation of Oblates living alone should always be considered as temporary.” There is, in these two expressions, some wisdom, also linked to psychological considerations. The fact is that we still have many, too many Oblates who live alone, and for many, too many years. What is to be done? How often this question comes up in our meetings at the level of the

General Council! Even though I consider myself a generally optimistic person, I must confess that regarding this question, and the situations to which it refers, my optimism sometimes abandons me...and that's where the question arises: what is to be done?

Someone could quote me the saying “better alone than in bad company”, but who says that the only alternative to being alone is to be in bad company? Couldn't people come together and work at being good company?

The other point, though very complex and in some ways more subtle than merely an external number, is that of interpersonal, interwoven relationships within the Oblate religious community. This theme is linked to one of those previously treated, where we said that the Church is the place where one learns communion. The community is somewhat the same thing. The aspect that I wish to emphasize here is that of “otherness.” Much ink has been spilled on this subject in recent decades, and I wonder if this is the very core on which depends the functioning of community life. Identity and relationship. Self-affirmation and recognition of the “other.” The “other” in his being “other-than-I:” is this a help or a threat to my freedom? Is he a brother with whom I walk after the Master who has called us both or an obstacle on this path? Is he a presence that enriches me or a “spoke in the wheel” of my personal agenda? We could go on. “Hell is other people,” said a famous French philosopher. Are we sure, existentially, that this is not so? Can we prove it? Perhaps it is precisely here that we find the

prophetic dimension of religious community. “Otherness” is a serious matter; it is a challenge, a call to conversion, an exercise in asceticism. Until we manage to experience “otherness” as a positive daily experience, we are probably not yet able to make community happen.

A final consideration. In a report that I came across recently, I read a story about a house that was designed and built with enough doors so that its residents could come and go without being seen and without meeting. I thought about the nature and usefulness of such a house. I was bothered when I found out that this project was actually built with this feature; not only that, but it is a religious house, and for Oblates! It was, I confess, a blow to my so-called bright optimism.

What is to be done? Do some readers wish to venture an answer? Even from this point of view, the 200 years of our history are a “kairos” we must not lose. Otherwise, what would be our prophetic stance? How could we still speak of a “prophetic religious life?”

And what if the “other” is paradise...or a way to achieve it? I am convinced that if he is not, he could become so, and in support of this belief, there is no lack of the example of many saints, not the least of which is our Founder who saw in the community the privileged place and the school of sanctity for his Oblates: “We are on the earth, and in particular, in our house, to become holy, helping one another by example, word and prayer.” (To Fr. Tempier, 22 August 1817)

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## Holy See

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### VATICAN

#### St. John Paul II and the Oblates

*Fr. Pawel LATUSEK, former provincial of the Polish province, published an essay on the province's website ([www.oblaci.pl](http://www.oblaci.pl)) about the relationship of newly canonized St. John Paul II and the Oblates. Here are some excerpts from that essay.*

**A father who was not afraid to express his feelings.** It is a tradition that during General Chapters, the participants in those meetings visit the Holy Father. During these official audiences with delegates representing Oblates from around the world, John Paul II always found a way to show us his kindness and affection. During his pontificate, the Oblates held five General Chapters. I recall his words during the first and the fifth. On 5 December 1980, he said: “When I look at your big family my heart is filled with admiration. Because you are missionaries of Christ, Oblates of the Virgin Mary!” Even more poignant was the greeting addressed to the Oblates on 24 September 2004. At that time, since the pope had difficulty speaking, usually one of the curial prelates read the text of the Holy Father's speech. But before his spokesperson took the microphone, the pope himself spoke words that expressed what was in his heart: “Beloved! I am glad that during the General Chapter of your Institute I can welcome you and assure you of

my spiritual closeness in prayer ... Thank you for all the kindness that you show to the Successor of Peter. I reciprocate affectionately and I do so, both because of the devotion I have for your Father Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, as well as out of due respect for your Marian and missionary Congregation.”

**A father who appreciated our ministry.** Speaking to the participants of the General Chapter of 1986, the Holy Father concluded that for 160 years, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were part of a wonderful chapter in the missionary history of the Church, from the Far North to the Equator. During the same speech, he praised the Chapter's movement towards a new missionary effort on behalf of the poor of this world and the effort taken for the renewal of community life, which fosters religious and apostolic zeal. He reminded us that this zeal is the key to the problem of priestly and religious vocations, because how could young people knock on the door of communities that are mediocre and immersed in the secular?

Appreciating the good results of Oblate ministry, John Paul II taught us to thank God for it and see it in the context of the whole Church. On 24 September 1998, he told the Oblates: “Together with all of you, I offer thanks to God for the work accomplished by the Oblates. Through

your presence on all continents, especially in distant lands, you are in contact with people of different cultures and traditions; it is a sign of the universality of the Church and its concern for all peoples ... The Church appreciates your availability and your willingness to respond to the call of Christ wherever you are sent and to engage in service to the local Churches.”

**A father who was able to trust and delegate important duties.** Oblates working in different institutions of the Holy See are a sign of the confidence of John Paul II in the Congregation. It is impossible to list here all of them, but we cannot fail to mention Father Marcello ZAGO, who in the 80’s, was first of all secretary of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, and after 1998, the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; Fr. Joseph METZLER, who was entrusted with responsibility for the Secret Archives of the Vatican; or Fr. Joseph KUC, who for several years was rector of the Pontifical Missionary College in Rome.

As an unmistakable expression of papal confidence, some Oblates were also named bishop. At this point, I would like to recall an event told me by our former Father General, the late Archbishop Marcello Zago. During one of the many meetings he had with the Holy Father, he was asked about the activities of the Congregation. At some point, the conversation turned to topics related to the growth of the Institute and new vocations. The pope asked whether the downward trend in members and vocations had ceased. Father General said with regret that due to the lack of vocations, the downward trend continued, except for one: the ratio of bishops was going up for some time! The Holy Father nodded and replied: “Well, bishops, I can still add, but giving vocations is beyond my competence.” Indeed, episcopal appointments during his pontificate were many. Among the members of Congregation, John Paul II appointed 36 bishops (one of them was a cardinal), two Apostolic Prefects and 1 mission superior “sui juris.”

**A father who gave gifts.** Unquestionably the most valuable gift that John Paul II gave to the

Congregation was his confidence in the Oblates, entrusting them with important responsibilities in the Church. He gave us the gift of an audience, as a group during General Chapters and sometimes individually, with the exchange of a few sentences, a rosary and a commemorative photo. However, the gift to the Congregation that will last forever, and therefore a most valuable gift for each Oblate, was proclaiming our Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, a saint, and the beatification of Fathers Joseph Gerard and Joseph Cebula. (Pawel Latusek)

## VATICAN

### Cardinal Quevedo assigned to Pontifical Councils

On 22 May, Pope Francis named the Cardinals he had created on 22 February, 2014, to membership in various congregations and councils of the Holy See. Our Oblate Cardinal Orlando B. QUEVEDO received appointments to the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace and to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, both areas where he has gained considerable expertise and experience as Archbishop of Cotobato in the Philippines.

According to the Vatican website, the mandate of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is summarized in these few words: “The Council will promote justice and peace in the world, in the light of the Gospel and of the social teaching of the Church.”

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue “is the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of interreligious dialogue in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, in particular the declaration “Nostra Aetate.” ([www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va))



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## Latin America

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### **SURINAME (Part I)**

#### **Expelled from paradise**

The Oblates in Suriname, the smallest country in South America, belong to a district of the Province of Belgium-Netherlands. They are deeply concerned about a situation there that affects the lives of some of their poorest parishioners.

The gigantic Brokopondo dam has, for half a century, been supplying Suriname with electric energy. But for the Maroon people, descendants of African slaves, the dam has caused untold misery and loss. Fr. Doris WEEWEE, himself a member of the largest Maroon tribe, the Saramaccans, speaks passionately about what has happened, and not happened, to and for his people.

Since people did not want to leave their home voluntarily during the dam construction in the early 1960's, the state had to entice them with supposed guarantees. "They promised us the moon, but nothing happened for a long time and far too little has happened till now," says Fr. Doris.

Officially 6,000, but presumably over 10,000 members of this largest Maroon tribe have lost their traditional ancestral territory because of the dam and with it also their hunting areas, their fields and their religious sites and tombs. When the rain forest in Suriname, on an area three times larger than Lake Constance was being flooded, the authorities promised to the descendants of escaped slaves new houses. "In Brownsveg you can see what has been done to these people," the outraged Father Doris stated. "They built them huts which were conceived as temporary camps. Today the Saramaccan are still living in these chicken coops."

Many transmigrants, as the official language euphemistically called those forcibly displaced, are still waiting in vain for compensation payments. The road has been paved for only four years; this reduces the travel time to the capital by three hours. And only twelve years ago

Brownsveg was connected to the power supply system created by the dam that displaced them. Only thanks to the Church is there a primary school and a health center in the village.

The priest is one of the few Maroons who ever talk about the impact of the dam. It seems that a mixture of shame and anger, displacement and vulnerability has made these expelled people close in on themselves. They feel like the losers to progress. (Source: *Kontinente*, March/April)

### **SURINAME (Part II)**

#### **Life above the dam**

Whereas the people in the transmigration villages mentioned in the earlier article manifest themselves as reserved, unapproachable, almost lethargic, above the dam can be found a completely different kind of people. For the villages along the upper reaches of the Suriname, the one responsible is Fr. Toon TE DORSTHORST, another Oblate. The 71-year-old is the youngest of the six missionaries from the Netherlands still in Suriname. His journey by jeep from the capital to Adjoni, a small dock at the south end of the dam, lasts almost four hours. Here he lowers his small motorboat to start his week-long pastoral trips on the Suriname.

In the past 20 years, Father Toon, together with a nun, has formed more than 100 catechists. Actually, he would rather call them "pastoral heads of the communities" rather than catechists, because they are much more than just prayer leaders. "They are the salvation of the Church in the inland: they bring not only the Word of God, but also development."

It takes five years to form a catechist in Suriname. And only when the village agrees, the candidate receives from the bishop a cross and Bible as outer signs of his office. From that day on, he is the guarantor of a living community. According to Father Toon, every second baptism in the inland is still an adult baptism. "The rising number of Catholics in Suriname is mainly due to the pastoral leaders," he assures. "Yes, the

Church in the country is under construction... unlike the Church in Europe, which diminishes more and more!"

In Jaw Jaw, a few kilometers further up the river, Father Toon can prove this with facts and figures. Where there was only a handful of Catholics among the more than 1,000 Saramaccans 15 years ago, today three-quarters of the residents are baptized. Jaw Jaw is a sprawling place with spacious houses and gardens and with open-hearted and sociable residents who show initiative and business acumen.

These people were lucky. They were not directly affected by the construction of the dam and could maintain their familiar environment, hunting grounds and fields. Together with several hundred forcibly displaced persons who were not drawn into the transmigration villages, the Saramaccans could preserve their traditions. "They didn't succumb to the lure of the state and thus things have gone ultimately better for them," Father Toon states, before getting into his small motor boat to compete the way back to Paramaribo.

Along the way he tells a little story. It is about the treasure which has been resting half a century

in the lake beyond the dam: a sunken forest of precious wood. When the rain forest was being flooded, the trees were just left standing there. At that time, no one recognized the immense value of the exotic woods – there are presumably ten million cubic meters, about 500,000 truckloads. A Dutch company has discovered the treasure and started its recovery.

The Maroons were to be hired as divers. But they dared not go into the lake, allegedly because of the many piranhas. In fact, the reason may be the fear of the dead who still lie buried in the flooded villages. Now Brazilian specialists cut down the trees under the surface of the water. The woodworking industry has settled around the lake and at least there, a few local people have found a job.

It will take around 15 years to harvest the underwater trees. The main customers for the wood are the Netherlands and Germany. For each tree from the dam, a tree on land can be spared. What some praise as a little respite for the wild, remaining Amazon rainforest, the Maroons consider it the desecration of the dead for the trees watch over the dead in the cemeteries of the submerged settlements. (Source: *Kontinente*, March/April)

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## Asia-Oceania

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### INDIA

#### A mission in West Bengal

St. Eugene Province of India is blessed with another child in the form of a mission in West Bengal. On 10 March 2014 the Oblates marched forward in opening the first Oblate mission station there. It is named "St. Eugene Nivas". Archbishop Thomas D'Souza blessed and laid the foundation stone in the presence of Fr. Francis NALLAPPAN, the Provincial. A good number of Oblates and neighbouring parish priests and sisters were present for the occasion. It is a difficult and challenging mission amidst migrants from Bangladesh and fundamental Hindus. The members of the province of India appreciate all the young Oblates, namely Frs. Rajesh Paul KUJUR, Joe Antony, SALAMON, AROKIADOSS and

Deacons Soloman and Rajesh for possessing the true spirit of our Founder and Father, St. Eugene, in daring to do the mission of Christ amidst such challenges. May our Mother Mary be our guide and support.

*Wikipedia* describes West Bengal as: "a state in the eastern region of India and is the nation's fourth-most populous. It is also the seventh-most populous sub-national entity in the world, with over 91 million inhabitants. Spread over 34,267 sq mi (88,750 km<sup>2</sup>), it is bordered by the countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, and the Indian states of Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Sikkim, and Assam. The state capital is Kolkata [*formerly Calcutta*]. Together with the neighboring nation of Bangladesh and the state of Tripura, it makes up the ethno-linguistic region of Bengal." (BORN, March 2014)

## BANGLADESH

### A safe haven

The first two immigrants were Adam and Eve: they had to leave their beautiful homeland, Eden. The other great immigrant was Jesus, who left heaven looking for better prospects on earth. His own did not receive him. Later, his parents, like present day immigrants, had to leave Israel out of fear that the child Jesus would be killed. They went to Egypt without any visa.

In common parlance, anyone who has left home or village can also be considered to be an immigrant. Thousands have settled in different countries and are working temporarily for different reasons as migrant workers. Whoever they are, they are outside of their familiar environment and are at the mercy of unknown forces. They face insecurities known and unknown; they fear a serpent under every bush; fear is the biggest enemy.

Before the advent of the garment industries, the city of Dhaka seldom saw women in this male dominated world. Suddenly, like a huge downpour, women came by the thousands to work in the newly opened garment industries. Being unskilled, innocent and gullible, they were lured by the call of their friends. They endured duress, hid their fears, lived frugally, sent money home to their families with pride. No one was there to help them.

Baridhara became the place of refuge for all of them. Looking at the signs of the times, the Prado Sisters were bold. They left Khulna, rented a hovel, and worked among the garment workers, most of whom were women. For various reasons, the Prado Sisters reluctantly had to terminate their great work, but God did not abandon the migrants of Baridhara. He sent other angels, the Blue Sisters. They continued the same work with the same spirit and expanded, influenced and contributed a spiritual dimension to poverty. Others have joined the Oblates in serving the needy: the Missionaries of Charity, the Our Lady of Sorrow Sisters, the Marist Sisters and the Holy Cross Sisters. While the Church is almost dying in some places, the vibrancy and life of

the Church in Baridhara is a testimony to the loving presence of a God who cares: different Congregations working together, with the same goal, serving the migrants.

In the past the whole area of Baridhara had few inhabitants, but suddenly it was flooded by an influx of different people, and all came from outside Dhaka. All were migrants. In an unbelievable outpouring of the Spirit, caring for the needy of different races, creeds and places of origin took the form of schools, dispensaries, care for the handicapped, and social services by these different Congregations. The number of people who have been touched directly or indirectly by Christ is phenomenal. At least some of the poor with their many faces can come to Baridhara and feel welcomed. (Fr. Angelo MARTYN in *Bangladesh Flashes*, April 2014)

## BANGLADESH

### A ministry of presence

When the Oblates first arrived in Bangladesh in 1973, a country where 85% of the people are Muslims, there were only 300,000 Christians. Priestly formation became one of their first priorities, and before long they opened a seminary and scholasticate in Dhaka. Their efforts have been rewarded: there are currently 50 seminarians, five scholastics and four novices discerning their call to become Oblates. The country is home to 28 ordained Oblates, including a bishop, two missionaries from Sri Lanka and five indigenous priests.

Father Subash GOMES grew up near Dhaka, the country's capital city. "I have five brothers and three sisters," he said. "From childhood I had the desire to be a priest." Before he joined the Oblates, Fr. Subash lived and worked on his family's farm. "I took care of the cows," he said. "We knew what hardship was." The priest, now 40 years old, joined the Oblates after tenth grade and was ordained to the priesthood in 2007.

Today Fr. Subash is bursar for the Bangladesh Delegation. As such it is his responsibility to stay atop the many and varied Oblate ministries – and to make sure each ministry is properly funded. One of

the biggest challenges the Bangladesh Oblates face stems from the fact that they have chosen to serve the indigenous poor. Ministry with them is very difficult due to distance and lack of proper communication. To reach the farthest villages the Oblates must walk five to six hours through mountainous jungle, often finding the smoothest path by walking through ankle-deep water in canals.

Education is a priority for the Oblates – especially in regions where the people are deprived of schools. “Education is one of the key ways to break the cycle of poverty,” said Fr. Subash. “The education ministry is so successful that more than 100 indigenous students are now attending college.” The Oblates have opened two large schools in Sunamgonj (1,000 students) and in Kulaura (700 students), as well as smaller schools in 25 remote villages. Students often travel long distances for the opportunity to study at one of these schools. To accommodate them the Oblates opened three hostels in the city of Sylhet – two for boys and one for girls.

The Oblates have also started a Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) initiative. Through this special ministry the Oblates stand up for the rights of Bangladesh’s indigenous poor people.

The Oblates provide emergency relief when people are victimized by floods, cyclones, hurricanes and other natural disasters. Calamities like these are common in Bangladesh. During one particularly destructive flood in 2003 the Oblates opened their scholasticate to the victims. They

emptied the dining room, television room and church verandas so that as many as 200 families could find shelter for a month. Father Subash said, “Once we gave the room, many generous people came to help – God’s providence. People came with meats, oils, vegetables. After their classes, the seminarians served food to the flood victims – 99% of whom were Muslim.”

Because the villages in Bangladesh are so remote and far apart, accessing proper medical care is nearly impossible. The Oblates have two shelters in Dhaka where people can stay for better treatment. They also provide basic necessities to the people who live in the slums near the scholasticate. In addition, some 200 persons come to the Oblate scholasticate each week to receive free medication.

Despite their long list of ministries, the Oblates in Bangladesh dream of expanding and doing more to help their people. They hope one day to help migrants develop skills like cooking or sewing so they can find jobs. They want to expand their school programs and hire more teachers.

They also hope to build deep-tube wells to help those affected by contaminated or insufficient water supplies. The Oblates in Bangladesh have been working tirelessly for 40 years to share God’s love. Father Subash reflected on the Oblates’ ministry by saying, “Living the values is our way of preaching.” He continued, “Our presence, our ministries...this is how we reach the people.” (*Oblate World* - [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org),

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## Africa-Madagascar

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### CONGO

#### Training youth in hotel services

The provincial treasurer’s office and the Saint Eloi Guest House have organized a training session in hotel services for young men and women. Thirty young people received the training.

The Provincial, Fr. Habell NSOLO, conducted the closure of this training by giving the participants a certificate attesting to their ability

to serve in hotel services. Among them was Brother Romeo NSAMA, Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, who is already serving at the Saint Eloi Guest House.

With this program, the help afforded these unemployed youth will enable them to render service to society and to take care of themselves a bit. Education is of great importance for the people whom the Lord sends us. In the words of our Holy Founder, Eugene De Mazenod, in 1826: “We must lead men to act like human beings, first

of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints.” (Chroniques OMI-Congo , March-April 2014 )

## **CAMEROON**

### **For the world, for the church and for the youth!**

A tale of good tidings in the Oblate World and particularly in the Oblate Province of Cameroon! Today in Cameroon and precisely at the Oblates’ Yves Plumey Scholasticate the love of St. Eugene de Mazenod for youth lives on in the hearts of our young Brothers, priests and formators. Almost spontaneously, they have chosen to return to the source and replicate St. Eugene’s mission to youth, in order to salvage the Cameroonian youth from decadence through a youth apostolate known as “Jeunesse Oblate.”

It is an initiative the same as that of times past! What was it at first that induced Fr. Gaby CRUGNOLA (formator and former Interim Provincial) and Fr. Clement OBOITE (student of Business Administration and Management at the Catholic University in Yaoundé) to think of such an important apostolate which today often occupies the least place in the mission of our Units?

In the course of my chat with Fr. Gaby, who has been involved in formation for a better part of his missionary life, I noticed the passion with which he spoke of the younger generation, the concern he has for them and the desire to get them, in the words of St. Eugene de Mazenod, “to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints human, reasonable and then to help them to become saints.” He told me how he shared his ideas of reviving the youth apostolate with Fr. Clement. Then they called for volunteers amongst the scholastics who have a love and passion for youth. Though this holy enterprise is still in its conceptual stage, however, there have been activities within the group, and meetings are regularly held to see how to touch the greatest number of youths in the nearby parishes. Just like in the days of the Founder, the group began by enumerating the numerous challenges the youth

of that locality are faced with:

- Lack of opportunity to participate in the political activities of their society (leading to complete indifference);
- Intellectual poverty;
- Lack of profound doctrinal knowledge;
- Material poverty, alcoholism and sects;
- The banalizing and relativizing of evil; loss of a sense of the sacred; a lack of mentors; the conflict between science and religion;
- Lack of a listening ear;
- Lack of sufficient and proper education;
- Absence of family life; the exponential rise of one-parent families;
- Corruption and an easy life style;
- Lack of or erroneous sexual education;
- Adrift amidst the artificial and the virtual: telephone, internet, television, etc.

Those challenges, according to the group, are classified according to their order of pastoral priority. Optimism is high, as is the desire to revive this apostolate, now that the Congregation is going back to its roots in order to renew the founding spirit and to refocus on our “first” energy: youth, which gave dynamism and youthfulness to the Congregation at its beginning. St. Eugene’s spirit lives on, even after the 200 years of the Congregation! He reappears today in different forms and inspires audacious acts targeted at those who today are the most vulnerable, the most complex, the most frail and perhaps the most ignored, neglected and marginalized class of society. (Emmanuel YOUNGTEN Temswang, Secretary, AMR)

## **CAMEROON**

### **The first stone for the Marian grotto**

Soon, Christ the King Parish in Meiganga will have a Marian grotto. Fortunately, the rain which soaked Meiganga all day long on Thursday, 11 April, did not impede the laying of the first stone in the construction of the grotto. Presiding at the ceremony was Fr. Anicet Tchoutsema ZEOU, parish pastor and episcopal vicar for the pastoral zone of Mbéré, together with his associate, Fr. Thomas BANG, and several parishioners.



This ceremony, brief but full of hope, was meant to energize the faith of the Catholics during Lent, and especially at a time when the city of Meiganga is experiencing some difficulties, for example: the phenomenon of torturing children to death; juvenile delinquency; the cut off of water for over a month, just to mention a few. The Marian grotto will be a place of prayer, of listening and of dialogue with the mother of the Lord, a place of comfort and hope. (<http://www.omicameroun.com/>)

## **NIGERIA**

### **Oblate voices concern for abducted girls**

*Nigerian Oblate Fr. Cornelius ALINNAEMEKA writes about the plight of the abducted schoolgirls in Nigeria, prays for the girls and urges more actions to free them. Fr. Cornelius is currently doing parish ministry in the Imo State, Nigeria.*

We pray for the abducted Chibok schoolgirls and with hope that one day they will embrace their parents, families and friends at home.

Nigeria, in the eyes of the world, has become a nation where more than two hundred girls could be kidnapped and nothing is done. In fact, it is almost the only news trending on all the social communications media. It has even overshadowed the Ukrainian crises and the World Trade Forum going on now in Nigeria. This case however did not just crop up over the night. It is as a result of abandoned and neglected situations that have mired our national integrity over the years.

There are, therefore, certain reasons that brought us to where we are today. What the world perhaps does not know is that Boko Haram has been causing other very serious havoc in Nigeria over the years. The only problem is that for many reasons, we have been dying in silence. Only this year, for example, these men have sent more than one thousand Nigerians to early graves. And the worst is that, due to lack of national unity, we have always failed to address this matter appropriately.

Politicians, for example, always put their political interest before our national unity and security. An increase in religious fanaticism in Nigeria has also not helped the matter. There is division practically among us all: division between Christians and Muslims; between Catholics and Protestants, etc. There is also a serious failure in national security that has made lawlessness and impunity the order of the day in Nigeria.

The worst is that our religious leaders show no grief over the social situation of our nation. A practical example is their silence in the midst of this current raging situation. Unfortunately, no important religious leader has made a public declaration till now. Neither the Sultan nor the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria has deemed it right to take a stand on the matter.

In brief, the plight of the Chibok girls is the true reflection of the cancerous heart of our nation. (<http://missionary-oblates-jpic.blogspot.com/>)

## **Europe**

### **RUSSIA**

#### **Mission in the Caucasus**

The first two Oblates, Bro. Tomasz STOPKA, superior and treasurer, and Fr. Pawel KUBIAK, parish pastor, arrived in the Caucasus on 18 December 2012. In September 2013, Fr. Wieslaw KUBALSK joined them as associate pastor.

Pyatigorsk, situated on the banks of the river Podkumok in the plains north of the Caucasus mountain range, is one of the most important cities of the Krai (territory) of Stavropol. According to

the census of 2010, there were just under 143,000 inhabitants. The majority is Russian, although there is an increasing number of citizens from other parts of the Caucasus, mostly Muslims. Pyatigorsk is also the seat of government of the North Caucasus. The climate makes the city particularly suitable for sanatoriums. So the most important industry is that of health. There are also present the food industry, textile mills, metal working and factories of various kinds. Currently the city has many building sites. Unfortunately, occasionally there are terrorist attacks, which push the Russians to swarm into the city. As

for the religious aspect, there are 14 Orthodox churches, as well as other places of worship of various Christian denominations and a mosque.

The church for Catholic worship was built in 1844 by the Poles, as is seen in the inscription in Polish on the facade. Until the beginning of 1990, it was used by the philharmonic orchestra, but with the arrival of the first Catholic priest, it was possible to rent it for liturgies. Then, over time, the Catholic community became the only one to use it. It is a small church which, given its structure, is well suited to the needs of the community today. The territory of the parish, however, is very large. Near the church is the rectory with a kindergarten. Both the roof of the church as well as the basement, which is too damp, need to be updated. The Oblates succeeded some priests of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of the Irish province and are helped by nuns (two Mexicans and a Russian) from a new order of the Poor Clares of the Holy Eucharist.

There are about 60-80 Catholics in the parish of the Transfiguration at Pyatigorsk, with 40-45 participating in Sunday Mass. This figure grows with the arrival of those who come for a cure. The faithful of other places (Mineralnye Vody and Essentuki) also attend the liturgies. The parish community is multinational: people have inherited the Catholic faith from their parents. Children and youth are few, but the situation was different before. Now, in fact, many have moved to other cities for work.

The second parish entrusted to the Oblates is St. Therese of the Child Jesus, in Kislovodsk, about a 60 minute drive from Pyatigorsk. Here there are mostly Armenians. The liturgies are held in a private home where there is a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament. Some 20-25 people take part in Sunday Mass. This city too, where the railroad ends, is a cure center.

Another parish, Divine Mercy, is located at Novopavlosk (about a two hour drive). Here there is a chapel, some rooms for pastoral activities and an apartment for the priest. The parishioners come from Syria. There are many children and youth. About 70 attend Sunday Mass.

There are also three small communities of the faithful who are occasionally visited by the Oblates. Two are near Novopavlosk: Staropavlosk and Orlovka. The third is in Georgiyevsk where in the past, the Catholics of Grozny fled. Many have died and there remain only some old women. The parish here has a house.

The economic situation is very difficult. The clergy and the sisters manage with the help of the bishop. On the part of the Oblates, the mission needs humility and continual prayer. Much prudence will be needed in order to be able to carry on our ministry and not create conflicts and problems, given the situation of Russia and the Caucasus.

Typical of this diocese, as well as of Russia, the priests and sisters come from different countries and different religious congregations. At Nalchick, there are the Missionaries of Charity and priests from the community of John the Evangelist from France.

The greatest difficulty for the missionaries is loneliness and alienation as they confront the mentality of this world which is so different. Many priests "have worn out." The only remedy to these difficulties is community life.

The mission of the Church and of other Christians in this region is also expressed in the mission to the little ones with whom Christ identifies himself: "Whatever you did to the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me." The inhabitants of the Caucasus may never become Catholics, Christians, but they will receive the gift of salvation through their works of kindness toward the little ones of Christ.

Ordinary pastoral work, such as visits to homes, to hospitals or prisons seems possible. The bishop has stressed the need for catechesis and daily preaching, stressing that the faithful have no roots, and when the priests whom they know leave the parish, the people leave the Church. It is necessary to lead them more deeply into the mystery of faith.

To conclude, relations with the Orthodox vary and in some places, are getting better. The Orthodox bishop

of Pyatigorsk, for example, is very open and kind: they are beginning to realize that the Catholics are

not a threat. (Fr. Pavlo VYSHKOVSKY, Delegation Superior of Ukraine)

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## Canada-United States

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### OMI LACOMBE

#### The trail ends for last Yukon Oblate

The long trail for Jean-Marie Mouchet, the last member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Yukon, ended on Monday, December 2, 2013. He died at 96 years surrounded by friends at the Copper Ridge Place long term care facility in Whitehorse, Yukon. His passing marks another milestone on the collective journey of Yukoners, the end of 115 years of continuous Oblate presence in the territory.

The first Catholic missionary to arrive in the Yukon was an Oblate, Father Gascon, in 1861. But the Oblates would only establish a permanent Yukon presence following the Klondike gold strike. Log and tent churches quickly sprang up in settlements across the territory. Oblates munched and packed into First Nations seasonal encampments as well. They had their own trail markers to assist them in finding their way. One of the Oblate rules reads, "Whoever wishes to become one of us must have an ardent desire for his own perfection, and be enflamed with the love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church and a burning zeal for the salvation of souls."

Sharing this charism, many Europeans and North Americans would come to serve in the Yukon, Jean-Marie Mouchet among them. He would join them after his February, 1945, ordination in France. His trail, though, began on May 1, 1917 in Malbuisson, a small community on the edge of the Jura Mountains bordering Switzerland. Early into his teen years he felt a vocation to the priesthood. He pursued this calling with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate whom he learned about from the adventurous stories told by clergy visiting his family. The Oblates particular call to be "in solidarity with those who are poor and most abandoned in our world" must have attracted him also.

Young, newly arriving Oblates like Jean-Marie Mouchet were met by Jean-Louis COUDERT,

Yukon's Oblate bishop. He gave them a toolbox and the charge "to go build the church." With no experience of First Nations cultures or reality of the country and climate, Fr. Mouchet set out first for Telegraph Creek, British Columbia.

How did he feel charting a new trail for himself? He wrote down the reflections of a 30 year old travelling to his first post in the opening chapter of his 2002 book "Men and Women of the Tundra." "Why do I come here? The question is not easy to answer. Am I an intruder? A man with a mission? What is opening before my eyes would certainly reject any attempt at superiority on my part. The land is too strong and too powerful to accept anyone who would come with a will. Humility should shape my attitude. Listening is the only stance."

Father Mouchet arrived at a time in the north when the world was rapidly changing around First Nations peoples. He came to respect and learn from the strength of the people's traditions often obscured by visible signs of their material poverty to the outsider. These experiences and the rigors of mountain trails challenged his European categories and claims.

In 1954 Bishop Coudert transferred him to Old Crow. The fact of the Anglican Church being already well established there left him to evolve another way to witness to his faith. In his memoir he tells of his contemplation of and engagement with the people and the land. The exertion of his mind and muscles continued to shape his unique vision of a way he could be present to the people of Old Crow and the North. His well-known Territorial Experimental Ski Training Programme (T.E.S.T.) emerged which would leave a legacy of Olympians, community leaders and many healthy, grounded adults.

In our increasingly "polluted and overcrowded" world he saw "the idea of a simple life" with a "balance between nature and man" revealing its value to him in this isolated northern community.

However he saw the intrusion of negative aspects of the modern world and its technologies threatened it and ultimately all of us. With his Oblate zeal, whether in Old Crow, Teslin, Whitehorse or Carcross, he refused to give up, despite the forces working against his dream.

Even in his last months, Pere Mouchet continued to seek ways to energize initiatives to engage youth. New proposals, reworking of old ideas preoccupied him. Physically he always challenged himself as he did the generations of youth with whom he worked. At 93 years of age he set a goal for himself of skiing 2000 kilometers over the winter season. He achieved this and much more with his faith-filled determination.

Father Mouchet, zealous, faithful, visionary and activist, remained in his adopted land until the end of his trail. He, as the many other Yukon Oblates before and after him, came following the lived example of the Oblate founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod. He chose to offer his life in service, faith and prayer among us. He truly lived the pledge as the Mission Statement of the Anglo-Irish Oblate province in part reads, "We commit ourselves to building a new society in the light of Gospel values - a way of being where justice, peace, love, forgiveness and hope are commonplace." Mahsi'choo, merci and thanks Father Mouchet! (Michael Dougherty)

## UNITED STATES

### **Victorious Missionaries celebrate 50 Years!**

The Victorious Missionaries gathered on May 2-4 to celebrate 50 years of ministry with and by

persons with disabilities. The celebration took place at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois, the birthplace of this organization. Tributes were made to the VM founder, the late Fr. John MARONIC (†1985), and the many VM members. Originally, the VM's called themselves the "Victim Missionaries," but shortly before Fr. John died, they decided that "Victorious" was a better way of naming their reality. The current director is Bro. Thomas RUHMANN.

Participants travelled from California, Texas, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and New York to enjoy the festivities. The celebratory event began with a visit by an actor dressed as Eugene de Mazenod, extolling the virtues of the VM Ministry and Fr. Maronic. There were many activities, both religious and entertaining: games, story-telling, a talent show, times for prayer and Eucharist.

A Power Point presentation captured photo memories of five decades of VM history. By the end of the weekend, people were "dancing in the aisles" to the music accompanying those photos. After all, the VM spirit is one of happiness and reaching out to others, in spite of life's obstacles.

Fr. George KURYVIAL, a long-time member of the Office for Persons with Disabilities in Michigan, and Bishop Stanley Schlarman, whose brother was a founding member of the VM's, presided at the weekend Masses. The festive weekend celebration summarized the two hallmarks of the VM ministry: faith in God and the joy found in life and service. (<http://www.omiusa.org>)

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**Anniversaries for July 2014**


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**70 Years of religious life**

1944.07.25	07812	Fr. Fortunato Alonso	Mediterranean
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**65 Years of religious life**

1949.07.02	09441	Bro. Jacques de Laage	France
1949.07.02	09249	Bro. Hermann Elsbernd	Central European
1949.07.16	08679	Fr. Joao Bernardo Duhamel	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1949.07.18	08643	Fr. Roberto Peña	United States
1949.07.25	08647	Fr. Santiago Díez-Fontecha	Mediterranean
1949.07.25	08646	Fr. José-Maria González	Mediterranean
1949.07.25	08648	Fr. Camilo González	Mediterranean
1949.07.25	08649	Fr. Luis Valbuena	United States

**65 Years of priesthood**

1949.07.03	07890	Fr. Georges Pizet	France
1949.07.10	07869	Fr. Joris Baers	Belgium/Holland
1949.07.24	07715	Fr. Archibald Daley	Lacombe

**60 Years of religious life**

1954.07.25	09683	Fr. Valentín Fernández	Argentina-Chile
1954.07.25	09724	Fr. Teótimo González	Mediterranean
1954.07.25	10267	Bro. Alfredo Hernández	Mediterranean
1954.07.25	09723	Fr. Joaquín Martínez	General Administration
1954.07.26	09725	Fr. Alexis Atangana	Cameroun
1954.07.26	09726	Fr. Rémi Cadieux	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1954.07.26	09736	Fr. Laurent Desaulniers	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1954.07.26	09728	Fr. Robert Lesmerises	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1954.07.26	09731	Fr. Pierre Pépin	Notre-Dame-du-Cap

**60 Years of priesthood**

1954.07.04	08609	Fr. John de Nobrega	Northern S. Africa
1954.07.04	08758	Fr. Alexis Fuseau	France
1954.07.04	08756	Fr. Louis Gouraud	France
1954.07.11	08734	Fr. Jan Severins	Belgium/Holland

**50 Years of priesthood**

1964.07.09	10457	Fr. Francisco García Pintado	Mediterranean
1964.07.26	10845	Fr. Aloys Kapp	Namibia
1964.07.26	10440	Fr. Vitus Laib	Central European
1964.07.26	10629	Fr. Heinrich Mayer	Central European
1964.07.26	10631	Fr. Alfons Schüling	Central European

**25 Years of religious life**

1989.07.16	13347	Fr. Michael Twigg	Australia
1989.07.16	13361	Fr. Gregory Watson	Australia
1989.07.24	13388	Fr. Aloysius Kok	Indonesia
1989.07.24	13389	Fr. Antonius Rajabana	Indonesia

**25 Years of priesthood**

1989.07.15	12908	Fr. Jose Cassio da Costa	Brazil
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## Prayers for our deceased

No. 41-43

Name	Prov./Del.	Born	Died at	Date
Fr. Arsène Caby	France	07/12/1913	Pontmain	16/05/2014
Fr. Charles Sellars	United States	28/09/1927	San Antonio	23/05/2014
Fr. Pierre Racette	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	06/03/1932	Richelieu	25/05/2014

*“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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