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## Formation for Oblate life and mission today

*Fr. Benedicto Frías, a member of the General Formation Committee, speaks of its recent annual meeting.*

Each year, the General Formation Committee meets to carry on the mission of formation in the Congregation. One could ask, “What is the work of this committee?” First, it is made up of a representative of each Oblate region, together with the First Assistant of the General Council; its principal task is “...to study questions relating to vocations and formation and to make recommendations to the Superior General and his Council.” (R 49b) Secondly, this committee has a consultative role in service to the Congregation; it is named by the Superior General in Council.

In order to clarify a bit the why and wherefore of this committee, I would like to share some impressions and some of the work that we did in these days at Marino, where the Mediterranean Province has a ministry with youth that has had positive results for the past 50 years. The meeting began on Monday, February 13, in the afternoon, when we gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and share a delicious supper with the Oblates of the province who work in youth ministry. The Superior General presided at the Eucharist since he had given a talk to the Oblates who had met for a day of reflection at the Youth Center in Marino. We were about 15 Oblates and five youth who make up the Marino community.

The next day, Fr. Cornelius NGOKA (in charge of the committee) showed us the work that was awaiting us and which would keep us quite busy for a week. Fr. Giuseppe RUBINO, representative of the Region of Europe and currently the Novice Master

of the Mediterranean Province, told us of the work that the Oblates are accomplishing in this part of the world. Other members of the committee are Fr Raul SALAS, representative of the Region of Canada-United states and superior at the scholasticate in San Antonio; Fr. Alexius IGBOZURIKE, representative of the Region of Africa-Madagascar and formator at the scholasticate of Yaoundé; Fr. Roshan SILVA, representative of the Region of Asia-Oceania and Novice Master in Sri Lanka; and yours truly, Fr. Benedicto FRÍAS, superior of the scholasticate in Mexico and representative of the Region of Latin America. On the second day of our sojourn, we were able to visit the community of the scholasticate in Frascati and witness the renovation of religious vows by a scholasticate from the Delegation of Uruguay.

One point on our agenda was to reflect, in the light of the Acts of the Chapter, specifically on what should be done in Oblate formation and what we Oblates are invited to do in this moment in history. After each one presented a report on formation in his region, we took considerable time to reflect on the Chapter document and to make concrete proposals as to how to put into practice what the Chapter members asked the Oblates to do in formation. Just to mention a few of the items we talked about in the meeting: ongoing formation, formation to interculturality, and the program of the pre-novitiate were thoroughly discussed, with the hope that later, they will be very important items to be dealt with in each Unit during the coming years. We all know that we are part of an international religious congregation, but the question we must ask ourselves is whether we are conscious of the need to be and work like a true missionary family in an intercultural way.

Pope Francis has given us a wonderful document through the Congregation for the Clergy. This document invites us, as a religious missionary family, to look at vocation as a gift from God that “obliges us to offer a serious path of formation.” The Pope wishes that this task, which consists in “caring for and promoting vocations so that they may bear mature fruits”, be an essential element of the missionary activity of the Church. As part of our task, we studied this document and were able to discover that our pre-novitiate program is not far from the mark. In this sense, we formators must work patiently and carefully for vocations in order to be able to help our formandi to be authentic disciples and missionaries of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Definitely one of the riches of the GFC is the possibility to reflect, to question, to propose and

even to disagree among ourselves, which leads us to see together that the formation process is an essential ministry in the Congregation. Even as we are aware of the decline of vocations in some parts of the world, the ministry of formation always needs to have priority in our planning. Personally, I was delighted to discover that there is hope that ministry with youth and vocations will again be a priority in many Oblate Units.

We concluded our meeting on Monday, the 20<sup>th</sup>, with the Eucharist that we celebrated together with the community of the Youth Center in Marino. Needless to say, language was not a problem for praying, celebrating, studying, learning and working together as a team. English was the official language, but we were also able to communicate with the community, using some Romance languages such as French, Italian and Spanish.

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## General Administration

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### **EUGENE DE MAZENOD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE**

#### **“Les Mazenodiens” in Rome**

In the life of Les Mazenodiens (Oblate Aix youth group), February was marked by the trip to Rome where they were received by the International Scholasticate Oblate community. The encounter with Father Louis LOUGEN, Superior General, was an important moment of this journey.

Among the objectives set by the Mazenodians is to create fraternal bonds with Oblate communities and young people working with the Oblates in France and abroad. The encounter with the Oblates of the International Scholasticate and the General House was a totally new discovery. The international dimension of these two communities reflect the universal and missionary character of the entire Congregation.

In his meeting with Les Mazenodiens, Fr. General encouraged them to rediscover the call to holiness, saying, “We need to check every day if we are still on the journey of holiness.”

The trip to Rome was also a discovery of the four major basilicas and a lot of other sacred places.

Les Mazenodiens also took time to simply tour the eternal city. (Krzysztof ZIELENDĄ)

### **GENERAL HOUSE**

#### **Founder’s portrait restored**

The “Curator” of the Museum of Marseille, Jean-Joseph Dassy, brother of an Oblate, Louis-Toussaint, between 1832 and 1834, painted one of the most famous portraits of Bishop Eugene de Mazenod. The young bishop is shown wearing the rochet, the mozzetta and the rabat. Besides the pectoral cross, he wears the insignia of a Commander of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus, a title conferred upon him in 1827 by King Carlo Felice of Piedmont because of the interest he took in Italian migrant workers in Marseille.

On his face is a lively and attentive expression. He appears to be a self-confident and very determined person. His head is turned to the left and his eyes are fixed on something or someone; the lips are parted as if about to begin speaking. The chair on which he is sitting is located under a canopy; the curtain is raised to reveal, in the distance, the church dedicated to St. Lazarus, the parish he started with his personal funds when he was still Vicar General of Marseille.

The original is found in the bishop's house in Marseille; there is a copy in the General House of the Oblates in Rome, dated between 1833 and 1837.

At the General House in Rome, there is a second oil painting dating to the same period. The quality of the painting leads one to think that this portrait is also by Jean-Joseph and from the same period. Now Eugene de Mazenod is standing. His right arm is bent over his body and the index finger is inserted into the Constitutions and Rules which he has in his hand. In the upper right-hand corner, there is his episcopal coat of arms and his motto. The painting was restored in 1984 and was chosen as the official image for the canonization.

A later unknown painter seems to have been inspired by this portrait, still in the 1800's, and perhaps in the years immediately after the original. This picture, which was kept until about ten years ago in the house in Aix, was roughly cut from its frame and then brought, in the worst of conditions, to the General House of the Oblates in Rome. It needed a massive restoration, carried out by Marta Gelsumini in her studio "Spazio MABI." (<http://www.martagelsumini.it>)

The canvas had tears that had been stopped with

unsuitable and difficult to identify materials which further aggravated the conditions. It was necessary to intervene by at least partially removing these fillings and patches of cloth. The back of the painting was then relined because of the presence of a larger tear on most of the canvas which no longer guaranteed stability.

The front of the painting had been heavily retouched, changing the original image. The clothing had been repainted in red, with oil colors from a later period, in large strokes, different from the original ones. The overlay of red was perhaps to make the episcopal office immediately visible, ignoring that the original mozzetta of Saint Eugene had the color of the kings of France, blue. They had also painted over the cross and the awards. It was decided to restore the original, removing the superimposed paint. The tears were repaired and the portrait was resealed and retouched.

A new gilded frame was built.

Now we have a "new" oil portrait of Saint Eugene, almost unknown till now, and which will adorn the conference room of the OMI General House. (Fabio CIARDI)

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## Africa-Madagascar

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### **SOUTH AFRICA, NORTHERN PROVINCE** **Recognizing the Oblate Cross**

*Excerpts from a February 16 e-mail of Fr. Ronald CAIRNS, Provincial of the Northern Province of South Africa, to Fr. Louis LOUGEN, Superior General.*

Last night, after a beautiful Oblate celebration in Germiston where I installed Fr Rodney GEORGE as Novice Master and received the 12 new novices, on my way home and thanking God, I was praying the rosary when I was carjacked in a suburb called Kew. As I stopped at the traffic light at 7:30 pm, suddenly I saw a young man in the front of the car pointing a gun at my head and the next moment, another young man with a gun pointed at my head by the driver's door

of the car. ...The guy pulled me out and the two jumped into the car and drove off...

Cars behind me and cars on the other side of the road did not stop even to assist me. But suddenly two young men under the influence of alcohol or drugs rushed up to me and said: "My priest, my beautiful priest and you are an Oblate." It so happened that one of these guys used to be an altar server of mine; he now lives in Soweto and knows Fr. Zweli and recognised the Oblate habit. I was surprised.

These two guys (drug dealers) took me on a long walk to their house where there were people who were drunk or under the influence of drugs. They gave me water with sugar and asked me to bless and pray for them and they organised it so that a

neighbour with a car could take me back home. It is amazing how God works. While we waited for the neighbour's car to arrive I was able to share with them and beg them to change their ways and they promised to come to next Sunday's Mass...

The news had somehow gone viral and on my return home, two priests and many people were waiting anxiously for me.

They then took me to the police station and for hours, I had to write two statements as there was a power struggle between two captains. But the police were helpful and polite and concerned. Then a plainclothes detective saw me and said: "You are an Oblate." He recognised the habit and told me that he grew up under the OMI in Soweto. Then things moved faster. But it took hours.

I don't know why the good Lord and Our Lady permitted the car to be hijacked. But I offer it in reparation. Through consecration to Our Lady whose rosary I was praying and through the protection of my Guardian Angel and St. Eugene, the good Lord protected me. Normally these guys shoot one dead or they body-search you. But they did not...body-search me or take my wallet with documents and they did not steal my Oblate cross to melt down and to sell for money for drugs. They did not shoot or even harm me... And here I am safe and sound; the Lord sent me helpers and I was not stranded and I am alive and not hurt... I thank God and Our Lady that I am safe and sound and while exhausted from it all, I am not in trauma and feel deep inner peace and gratitude.

## CONGO

### Acts of vandalism against the Church

Fides Agency, 21 February 2017: Kinshasa -- "There is a resurgence of fear, anger, uncertainty", says Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in a message sent to Agenzia Fides in which he denounces the attacks against the Church in the last few days.

"We have learned with indignation, Saturday, February 18, of the fire in part of the Major Seminary of Malole by uncivilized people

who later spread terror at the nearby Carmelite sisters in Kananga," writes the Cardinal, who also recalls the demonstrations that occurred on three occasions in front of the Archbishopric of Kinshasa, by groups of young people who "created an atmosphere of panic". These incidents were followed by the desecration of the parish of Saint Dominic, Limete, by a "group of about twenty spiteful young people" who "knocked over the tabernacle, looted the altar, broke benches, and tried to set fire to the church. The community of the Missionary Oblates was not spared".

*Words of an eye-witness: Father Augustin MULELE had a terrifying surprise which he recounts in an e-mail.*

It was almost 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, February 19, 2017, when I opened the door of my room to gather some avocados that I had heard falling from the tree. I saw the gate of our store wide open and a group of young intruders at work before my eyes. There were five or six of them.

Was it a dream? They had bottles filled with gasoline.

--*Likambo nini ? What's going on?*

--*Tokotumba bino Cenco. We are going to burn you, you CENCO. (National Bishops' Conference of Congo).*

--*Te, botika, famille, boye te. No, dear friends. Don't do that.*

While I was trying to dialogue with them, I saw the tires of a car set on fire. I grabbed a cloth to extinguish the fire and the young men came toward me. One of them threw a bottle at me.

Then I called my confreres for help. "Father Willy, come down quickly; we are being attacked."

At this, the assailants fled, in sight of our neighbors.

When my confreres arrived, we got in a jeep to follow them. But we stopped and decided to go



to the police. Captain Charly of the police of the communal hall received us. We went back with him so that he could examine the scene of the crime. On the way, he asked us to call instead the colonel at the Seventh Street station. We decided to go there. The colonel was not there.

The captain suggested that we go home on Zinnia (Road) but by taking a street different from the little boulevard. On our way there, I recognized some members of the group that had tried to sabotage us. They ran away.

--*There they are; let's follow them.*

So two of the criminals were caught on Seventh Street by the police who had been called. Both

were taken to the police station at the Limete communal hall.

Having returned to our community, we were visited by three agents of the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Congo (MONUSCO). They reported the damage and advised us to be cautious in this time of crisis in the country and in the capital Kinshasa.

The attackers had probably come from the parish church of St. Dominic which had been desecrated a short time before. They vandalized the altar, broke the statues of the Virgin, and pushed over the tabernacle. And in the street on Sunday morning, others had pulled off the veil from a nun and pelted her with insults.

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## Asia-Oceania

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### INDIA

#### Closing of OMI Bicentenary

The district members of Andhra Pradesh had a well-planned bicentenary celebration on January 27. It was grand success and meaningful to the Oblates and the people in our parishes.

The evening began with a Mass presided by Most. Rev. Thelagathoti Joseph Raja Rao, SMM, Bishop of Vijayawada. Concelebrating were the Oblate provincial, Fr. Chinnappan SANDHAPPAN, other Oblates, diocesan and religious priests. Religious women and faithful from the Oblate parishes participated as well.

In his homily, the bishop explained to the faithful the nuances of religious life in Catholic Church. He explained the three evangelical councils in detail with biblical references and Church documents. In his advice to the Oblates, he stated: "A real vowed Oblate is the one who is always available in the mission to his given people leaving his family as secondary."

After the mass, there was a short cultural programme. During this programme, there was the presentation of a bicentenary souvenir; the release of a book by Fr. G. BALA (*Last Journey of Jesus*); the release of an audio-

video CD by Fr. Joseph THAMMBI (*With your Grace*).

There was also a skit on St. Eugene by the Oblate novices from Arpanalayam; a dance by the Holy Family Sisters from Ramankapet; a prayer-dance by people from Chintalavalasa Parish; poems by people from Musunuru Parish; and documentaries by Frs. Basil, Nirmal and Benjamin. Almost two thousand persons participated in the Mass and the agape meal. (Fr. Yesuraj in BORN, February 2017)

### BANGLADESH

#### OMI Bicentenary: Message of the Nuncio

The first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis is *Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel*: its basic theme is the new evangelization for the transmission of the faith; i.e., to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world. By means of new evangelization Pope Francis describes his vision of a Church that is poor and for the poor, urging us, along with evangelization, to pay particular attention to those who are marginalized in the society, including the homeless, die addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, and the elderly.

It is noteworthy that 200 years ago when St. Eugene Mazenod founded the Congregation

of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), he had thought of including love for the poor and marginalized in his charism of apostolic work of evangelization. Now, around 4000 Oblates are working in 66 countries all over the world; in Bangladesh Oblates are working in 4 dioceses -Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Rajshahi. I am very happy to take note that the Holy Father has entrusted the diocese of Sylhet to the pastoral care to the Oblates. This is a sign of the trust and confidence placed on the spiritual and social and charitable apostolic activities of the Oblate Fathers in Bangladesh.

I am a personal witness to St. Eugene de Mazenod's charism that is running through this Noyanagar Church. I have visited this church many times since it is the nearest one to the Nunciature and from the beginning of my mission in Bangladesh; I have experienced the spirit, zeal and enthusiasm of the Oblates here. This church is catering to the needs of all kinds of races, creeds, and particularly migrants, and is engaged in school, dispensary, and social services, like giving care to the handicapped and marginalised. A number of people are touched, directly or indirectly, by the generous service of the priests, sisters, and other lay leaders of this Noyanagar church.

As we celebrate the Bicentenary of the Oblates, I take this opportunity to convey to you, dear Fr. Dilip Sarkar OMI and all Oblates working

in Bangladesh, the appreciation and gratitude of the Holy Father Pope Francis for your self-sacrificing and commendable service to the people of Bangladesh.

+ The Most Reverend George Kocherry  
Apostolic Nuncio to Bangladesh

### **JAFFNA, SRI LANKA** **Celebrating our anniversary**

Fifty-four Oblates gathered at Thodarpaham, Jaffna, on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017, to celebrate the anniversary of the approval of their Constitution and Rules in 1826. Fr Joseph Das Jebarathinam, Vicar General of Jaffna Diocese, was the chief celebrant.

In his homily Fr. Jebaratnam quoted extensively the letter of the Superior General written for the closing of the Oblate Triennium. Fr. Jebaratnam went commented on and commended the seven points highlighted in the letter. He has a witty way of communicating profound matters.

The pre-novitiate choir from Gnanodhayam, Mannar, enriched the celebration; although only five in number they filled the chapel with their devotional way of rendering the hymns. One more pre-novice from the Colombo Province and five from the Pakistan Delegation are expected to join the pre-novitiate program in the coming days. (*Yazhathoni*, February 2017)

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## **Canada-United States**

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### **UNITED STATES**

#### **OMI Partners address Christian-Muslim Relations**

The 2017 De Mazenod Conference of the Missionary Oblate Partnership was held February 10-12 at the Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, Texas. The theme of this year's conference: Christianity & Islam: Can We Talk? provided opportunities for enlightened conversations on a highly-charged and often emotional topic.

Friday night's keynote presentation, A Survey: What Catholics Think About Islam, was an

instructive and often surprising snapshot of opinions held by U.S. Catholics regarding Muslims in the U.S. and around the world. Mark Gray, PhD presented the results of a comprehensive survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). The attitudes revealed in the survey, shows that much work remains in order to bridge the gaps in the knowledge and understanding of Islam by U.S. Catholics. The survey clearly shows that beliefs of the Catholic (and broader U.S. populations) are often based erroneous information and headlines filled with terrorist activities of a small number of political radicals. A lively question-and-answer session followed with presenter, Mark Gray

providing more details and analysis of the results of the ground-breaking survey.

Saturday's presentation, *Preparing to Dialogue with Our Muslim Brothers & Sisters*, began the process of providing the education and understanding of Islam. Scott Woodward, D. Min., of Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio led the discussion focusing on two topics: *Basic Principles of Islam: Pillars of Faith and Nostra Aetate & Our Tension With Islam*. Throughout the presentation Woodward took questions and provided an excellent capsule understanding of the Islamic Faith and official Church teachings.

The afternoon was devoted to a visit to the Muslim Educational, Cultural & Children's Center, San Antonio. The visit and dialogue arranged by Scott Woodward allowed for face-to-face interaction between Partnership members and the local Muslim Faith Community. In addition, a panel was led by Imam Beytulla Colak, of The Islamic Institute, and Mrs. Sarwat Hussain, President of the Council of American Islamic Relations, San Antonio Chapter. Many issues, assumptions and misconceptions were addressed by a welcoming Islamic community. The lovely weather allowed for additional fellowship outdoors along with refreshments and food provided by our hosts.

That evening after a liturgy celebrated by Fr. Louis STUDER, the group witnessed Muriel and Bob Klosterman receiving the Blessed Joseph Gerard Award for service to the Oblate Partnership.

"If it is true that 'to dialogue is missionary,' then we can gratefully conclude that the 2017 De Mazenod Conference was a much-needed missionary effort in service of increased understanding and kinship with our Muslim brothers and sisters," said Partnership President and conference director, Artie Pingolt. (Willard Shaw in [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org))

### **NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP "We are the Church"**

The story of Oblates in Canada cannot be told without talking about our presence among the First Nation communities. As a matter of fact,

four years after the arrival of the Oblates in Canada in 1841, Fr Pierre FISET, visited Sept-Îles, in the Northern Coast of Quebec, to meet the Innu First Nations people. Five years later, in 1850, the Oblates were charged with all the First Nation missions of the Northern Coast of Quebec, from Tadoussac to Labrador.

This mission grew with time, drawing many Oblates, both Brothers and priests, to all the nooks and crannies of the vast territory of this North Shore. Though the mission had its glories and weaknesses, it remained a mission where the First Nation people and the missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate walked together in the vast field of evangelization.

The missionaries worked with the communities in the systematization of their language, in the recording of their ancient histories and traditions, in the translation of many important documents, etc. But after many years of glory, the number of missionaries started seriously to dwindle. Fortunately, the communities are already on their feet; they have their linguists and professional translators; their anthropologists and ethnographers; their own teachers and school directors, etc. The missionaries are thus relieved of their social pastoral programs.

But then the communities that had missionaries dwelling permanently among them started finding it difficult to have even a visiting missionary. And true to our love of the First Nation Mission and the First Nation people, the Oblate province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap made a missionary choice of assuring a qualitative pastoral presence among the Innu Nation of the Northern Shore of Quebec.

Today, we are four missionaries, from four different countries, in charge of seven communities. Our communities are not as they were a few years back. In most cases, the average age of those who come to our activities is above 70 years. And this reality affects our relationship with the younger generation.

But the community of Matimekush-Lac John has proven that they can transform the life of their

Church. At the beginning of 2016, the community decided to reinvent its pastoral organization. Without a pastoral team, we gave ourselves two years to go through an unending list of youths who have not yet received their first Holy Communion. Once the challenge was launched, up to 13 members of our community decided to volunteer in teaching catechism. Recently, they proved their preparedness by presenting forty youths to receive Holy Communion. It was a

community activity since the last time half of this number participated in such a celebration dates to 22 years ago.

During the celebration, the women expressed their desire to assure a continuous accompaniment of our youth in the preparation of sacraments and in showing other Innu communities how to be a Church in this era of laity empowerment. (Ali NNAEMEKA)

## Europe

### SPAIN

#### A pilgrimage to Paracuellos

On February 13, a meeting of the Oblates in the Spanish sector of the Mediterranean Province was the context of this simple yet meaningful action which took place at Paracuellos del Jarama (Madrid).

After a quiet morning of fraternal encounter in the Oblate community at Diego de León, where we were able to share various themes related to the life of the Congregation and other more administrative issues, the afternoon's activity consisted in a pilgrimage to the cemetery of Paracuellos.

The reason was twofold: to be able to see the recently erected commemorative monument of the Oblate Martyrs; and to take advantage of the confluence of a large number of Oblates so as to renew, in this very meaningful place, our religious vows in anticipation of February 17, the commemoration of the approval of the Constitutions and Rules of the Missionary Oblates.

This simple but significant gathering of Oblates ended by remembering "the best sons of St. Eugene", the Martyrs, and living our brotherhood. ([Http://nosotrosomi.blogspot.com/](http://nosotrosomi.blogspot.com/))

### FRANCE

#### The mother-province closes the bicentenary

In the "Letter to Consecrated People" which opened the Year of Consecrated Life (2015), Pope Francis invited religious to "look at the

*past with gratitude: to reap its inspirational impetus, to confess our fragility in order to live it as an experience of the merciful love of the Lord; to live the present with passion; to live the gospel radically and sincerely, in order to become become 'experts in communion' and to live the mystique of the encounter; to embrace the future with hope; to examine the horizons of the current world with vigilant caution."*

It was in this spirit that the Oblates lived the year 2016 and the bicentenary of the Congregation. It was actually on January 25, 1816, that Saint Eugene de Mazenod and his companions moved into the former Carmelite convent in Aix-en-Provence.

While it was a year rich in commemorative events on the level of the entire Congregation, the Province of France focused on two gatherings: a province assembly in February 2016 and a meeting which brought together Oblates and their friends during the Festival of Lights in Lyon on December 8.

Far from cultivating a more or less sterile nostalgia, rather, the idea was to take a look at the journey taken in order to discern policies that could inform the future. In this sense, after having taken the time to welcome people from all over France, Vincent GRUBER, the provincial, opened the day by asking Bertrand EVELIN to review these 200 years of Oblate life in France. Bertrand did so by focusing on the long and beautiful experience of the Oblates in the region of Lyon.

After a meal (conviviality is at the heart of the Oblate charism!), it was time to hear testimonies:



why in the world would people organize their lives around the Oblate charism? Benoît DOSQUET answered the question with a brief presentation on the “Sermon at the Madeleine”.

Bernard WIRTH replied: “the world of the student” and “the world of the prisoner” from an interfaith perspective. He has been living in Thailand for more than 40 years, where he is also a university teacher and a prison chaplain.

Thierry and Sophie replied “companionship.” They lead their lives as a couple by sharing and they wondered why and how, as a couple, they were brought closer to the Oblate community of Chavril.

Dominique DESSOLIN answered “the search” for new expressions of spirituality; from Aix-en-Provence he carries on an interior quest through fraternal community among artists.

The afternoon was spent in small group discussions where all was able to express their questions and beliefs on the role of the laity in the Church and on the meaning of an evangelization faithful to the charism which Eugene de Mazenod used in his famous “Sermon at the Madeleine.”

The Festival of Lights demanded it: the evening program was obvious – a walk around the illuminated streets of Lyon.

Sunday was intellectually “lighter:” Eucharist with the parish community of Sainte Foy in order to remember that the Oblate charism is received and lived in the Church, before finishing this meeting around a buffet in the community of Chavril. (<http://www.oblatfrance.com>)

## UKRAINE

### Oblates with people in the war zone

*(Fr. Paweł WYSZKOWSKI, Superior of the Ukraine Delegation, recently traveled to the war zone in that country, together with scholastic Bro. Andryi HAVLICH. Here is his story of an ongoing crisis overlooked by much of the media.)*

In Ukraine, for about three years, there has been

war in the East. Some call it simply a “conflict”; the Western media has stopped mentioning it, but the reality deeply touches our Delegation in Ukraine and Russia, where 31 Oblates serve in 18 parishes scattered throughout the country. It is of concern to us, even though these houses are not located within the regions torn by the war with Russia.

As missionaries, we cannot ignore that which affects so deeply and bitterly the people of our country and their families, nor the people in our parishes, some of whom are the refugees from the war-torn areas.

The Oblate house nearest to the war area is a community in Poltava (in the Kharkiv - Zaporizhzhia diocese). Although the distance from the battle area is about 200 kilometers, the Oblates could hear distant military helicopters, transporting dozens of the wounded to the overcrowded hospitals.

Quite recently, together with the scholastic Andryi Havlich, as part of the Christian Rescue Service, we set out for the battlefield to serve soldiers and civilians. Since it was not possible to drive along the bombed roads, we reached the destination by train.

We could take along only the following things: personal belongings, a cassock, oil for anointing the sick, the Blessed Sacrament, bandages, and a bulletproof vest. Other items were sent by ordinary mail. We had parcels containing items for civil population (e.g. everyday necessities, medication, food, clothing, blankets, cleaning detergents). A vehicle of the Christian Rescue Service met us at the station and took us to the place of service. It should be noted that this place is located on the front line, which often comes under heavy fire.

During our week there, we travelled to several places, spending just one night in a bed, sometimes on the floor, or on the ground in a tent - “as in a war.” As a part of the pastoral ministry we had conversations, heard confessions, anointed the sick, the wounded and the dying; we celebrated the Eucharist (in huts, tents, hospital

corridors, attics and when it was warm, simply in the open air).

Over the past two years the people have endured much; for more than a half year there has been neither electricity nor heating. Salaries have not been paid for a year; every day they just live “in the present” and on their lips there is only one expectation: “that at last this war will be over!” Some have suffered strokes because of the shock; others have lost their homes; others have fallen into despair that has led to alcoholism; others live in hope and anticipation of better times.

The volunteers of the Christian Rescue Service and the Christian School of Life and Evangelization provide this service to good and simple people. The volunteers are young people who have devoted their time, hearts and courage to show through the example of their own lives that the victims of war are most important to God and God will never abandon them.

They serve children who are growing up beneath explosions of gunfire and shelling. Many of these children have spent more than one night in a cellar, hearing explosions that turned the night as white as the day. Upon hearing explosions,

the children start to tremble but every new day, they have courage to leave for their kindergartens and schools.

The volunteers live in real poverty and lead a very modest life. Everything that they get from benefactors is passed on to the poor. They go there not only to bring one more type of “humanitarian aid” for the people or for the soldiers, but to bring them the Cross. Quite often our encounters are very touching. It is impressive to see the joy in the eyes of a man who has gone to confession for the first time in decades and who understands that God has found him, even under these adverse circumstances.

Many older people who lived through decades of communism during the Soviet era are unbaptized and have never been to church at all. But when spiritual help is offered to them, their emotional well-being improves; they feel safer and their stress is reduced. They are at peace, even when faced with horrors and death.

According to the United Nations, the overall number of documented deaths in the war in Donbass, which started on 6 April 2014, has been put at 9,800.

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**Anniversaries -- April 2017**


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**65 years of religious life**

25.04.1952	09229	Fr. Gustav Grosse-Venhaus	Central European
25.04.1952	09223	Fr. Wilhelm Henkel	Central European
25.04.1952	09228	Fr. Walter Lange	Central European

**60 years of priesthood**

06.04.1957	09175	Fr. Julien Belin	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
06.04.1957	09039	Fr. Amador de Lucas	Mediterranean
06.04.1957	08837	Fr. Donald Dietz	United States
06.04.1957	09215	Fr. Józef Kuc	Poland
06.04.1957	09040	Fr. Otilio Largo	Mediterranean
07.04.1957	09229	Fr. Gustav Grosse-Venhaus	Central European
07.04.1957	09228	Fr. Walter Lange	Central European

**50 years of priesthood**

01.04.1967	11160	Fr. Costante Baron	Mediterranean
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**25 years of religious life**

04.04.1992	13596	Bro. Burkhard Rottmann	Central European
04.04.1992	13512	Fr. Thomas Wittemann	Central European

**25 years of priesthood**

25.05.1992	12856	Fr. Ramon Maria Bernabe	General Administration
25.05.1992	12855	Fr. Wilfredo Cabrera	Philippines
25.05.1992	13030	Fr. Alberto Cahilig	Philippines
25.05.1992	13052	Fr. Lauro de Guia	Philippines
25.05.1992	13031	Fr. Romeo Marcelino	Philippines

## Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 16-22

Name	Prov./Del.	Born	Died at	Date
Fr. Normand Harvey	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	28/11/1929	St-Jean-sur-Richelieu	14/02/2017
Bro. Cecil Marcus Perera	Colombo	09/04/1945	Colombo	16/02/2017
Fr. Edward de Leon	United States	14/09/1953	San Antonio	22/02/2017
Fr. Gabriel Nanayakkara	Colombo	16/12/1935	Nagoda	23/02/2017
Fr. Lawrence Jayatilleke	Colombo	22/10/1939	Kohuwela	28/02/2017
Fr. Léo Cantin	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	10/07/1920	Richelieu	28/02/2017
Fr. Richard Kosian	Assumption	14/01/1932	Toronto	14/03/2017

*“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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