



## Launch of the new Cruz del Sur Province

On February 19, the ceremony to launch the new Cruz del Sur Province (Southern Cross) took place in the chapel of the central house of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Paraguay, Villa Morra, Asunción. The new province brings together the former provinces of Argentina, Chile and Paraguay and the former Delegation of Uruguay of the Mediterranean Province. The Mass was presided by Bishop Guillermo STECKLING; principal concelebrants were Frs. Jorge ALBERGATI (the provincial-elect) and Alberto HUAMÁN (General Councillor for Latin America).

In his homily, Fr. Alberto highlighted the celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first writing of our Constitutions and Rules (cfr. message of the Superior General) and how this event gives the members of this new province the possibility of writing new pages that are evangelically productive, as Pope Francis invited the capitulars, with the same heart as the first Oblates in their desire to give their lives for the most abandoned. New pages that make our lives new wineskins; new pages that make our communities productive homes of brotherhood, fellowship, teamwork, places of dialogue and listening, of forgiveness and reconciliation. New pages that do not seek to fortify our projects and pastoral activities but to see, in community discernment, the calls of those new faces of the poor and the answers we will give.

On the other hand, he recalled that the “Southern Cross” is one of the smallest constellations in the sky, but at the same time the most brilliant one. In the province, that will only be possible if we allow ourselves to be led by God, and we build

communities that are witnesses for young people who are looking for a home where they can rest their deepest hopes, their fears, their desire to join forces to change the world. Many of us find the Southern Cross in the firmament by some stars that are nearby and which assure us that this is the Cross we are looking for. We have the poor, the indigenous people, the young people, the laity, many people around us, and especially Mary the Mother of God who indicate that these are the Oblates we are looking for.

After this, Fr. Jorge Albergati made the profession of faith, and after the proclamation of his appointment before 30 Oblates, lay associates and parishioners present, he readily assumed this new task. He expressed gratitude for the trust that has been placed in him. He highlighted the efforts of his eight councilors to be present at this celebration (those from Uruguay arrived just 5 minutes before the Mass). He also thanked the Mediterranean Province in the person of its delegate, Fr. Adriano TITONE, present at the ceremony, for everything it had done in Uruguay and for allowing the delegation to enter into this new structure. He stated that the first task is to get to know the members and the Oblate communities. This will be a time for him to visit the communities to learn more about their reality.

The oldest Oblate presence in the region dates from 1925, when German missionaries began a difficult mission in the Chaco, later the “Vice Province of Pilcomayo” and finally the “Province of Paraguay”.

In 1930, Spanish and Italian Oblates arrived from Texas and accordingly began to work in Uruguay,

which later became the Delegation of the Province of Italy, where the missionaries came from. After the unification with Spain, the Delegation became part of the "Mediterranean" Province.

In 1935, Spanish Oblates from Uruguay also arrived in Argentina and gave origin to that province.

In Chile, Oblates from Canada founded the province in 1943, which in 2003 was unified with that of Argentina.

Paraguay and Uruguay launched a dialogue in 2007 with the aim of uniting. As of 2011, Argentina / Chile joined this effort, which received with the "green light" of the Central Government.

The new province covers an area of 4,119,470 km<sup>2</sup>. Seventy Oblates live in it -- among them the dean of the whole region: Olegario

DOMÍNGUEZ, 98 years old -- located in 23 communities. They come from 15 different countries. Could there be another province which is more pluricultural in the Congregation? Currently, 3 prenovices, 4 novices and 5 scholastics are preparing for their mission.

Besides many parishes, in the province there are a vicariate, shrines, schools, and ministry with indigenous peoples, with youth and with homeless children and youth.

The new provincial has chosen Buenos Aires, Argentina, as the seat of the new province. In addition, from February 21 to 22, the first meeting of the Provincial with his Council took place, where they made their first governing decisions. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, they made the gesture of planting a tree together, as a symbol that this new tree will stay alive with the help of all those who make up the new province. (P. Alberto HUAMÁN y P. Miguel FRITZ)

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## General Administration

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### EUGENE DE MAZENOD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

#### Trip to the Czech Republic

The Mazenodians are a group of young people passionate about Christ Jesus after the example of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. They live the missionary spirituality of the Oblates and participate in their mission by serving the Church.

Mazenodiens from Lyon and Aix, accompanied by Fr. Bonga MAJOLA and Bro Patrick VEY, a scholastic from the Province of Central Europe, in Aix for a year of regency, travelled to the Czech Republic from 24 to 27 February 2018. The main purpose of the trip was to discover the reality of the Church in that country and the mission of the Oblates, as well as to meet young people who minister with the Oblates.

There are two Oblate communities in the Czech Republic, one in Plasy and another one in Tabor. The parish territories where the Oblates minister are enormous. Currently, only about 11% of the Czech population is Christian. It is

interesting to note that even if there aren't many Christians in the Czech Republic, nevertheless, traces of Christianity can be found everywhere: old churches, buildings that belonged to the Church, statues of saints, chapels, crosses in the cemeteries, etc. The country experienced a first anti-Catholic wave after the first world war when the monarchy was overthrown. A second anti-Catholic wave was during the Communist regime which lasted for more than 50 years. As a result, today almost 80% of the Czech population claim to be atheist.

This moving and painful history of Catholicism is apparent: a lot of churches and buildings are in a very bad condition. But the hope of a resurgent religiosity is also visible, evidenced by the joy with which young people and the Oblates, in particular, live their faith and their mission of evangelization.

We were received with great hospitality and generosity. The sharing of personal experiences, community prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist brought to us all great joy and

encouragement. With great fidelity, Christians in the Czech Republic seek to be a sign of the presence of God in the midst of a society that seems to care little about the faith.

During our stay we attended a lovely evening prayer of praise and worship. We also had Sunday Mass with the faithful of the Oblate parish in Plasy. The next day we celebrated the Eucharist

with the homeless in Plzeň; the extremely cold weather made the distribution of soup even more touching. We then visited the second Oblate community ministering at the Marian shrine in Tabor. Enriched by everything we lived and experienced, we returned to France with the certainty that this journey will bear abundant fruit in our daily lives. □ (Patrick Vey, omi, in <http://www.centremazenod.org/>)

## Africa-Madagascar

### CONGO

#### Father General's visit

##### *With the formators*

The Superior General of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Fr. Louis LOUGEN met with the Oblate formators in the DRC, on Sunday, March 4<sup>th</sup> in the Oblate Retreat House in Ifwanzondo, Diocese of Idiofa, Kwilu Province.

The fifty Missionary Oblates finished five days of retreat preached by Father Jacques-Marie Nzir, a priest of Idiofa, on the theme of renewal of the inner man. The participants regularly recited the “prayer for Oblate vocations”.

Before beginning a meeting of three days with all the Oblates in the Provincial Assembly, Fr. Lougen spoke of the importance of the task incumbent on all formators. Father Gabriel MATAKUMBA, Provincial Director of Oblate Vocations and formator at the Idiofa Pre-novitiate, participated in the formators' meeting. He recalled the insistence of the Superior General on the vocation of the coadjutor Brothers, which is becoming rare in the DRC and throughout the Congregation.

The Year of Oblate Vocations responds to the call of Pope Francis who dedicated the year 2018 to youth. The Missionary Oblates carry on a campaign for vocations in the dioceses where they are present. ([www.oblatcongo.org](http://www.oblatcongo.org))

##### *With the Province Assembly*

On Thursday, March 8, at Ifwanzondo, some 70 Oblates, priests and Brothers, finished a three-day Assembly held after five days of annual retreat. They came from the three dioceses of

Angola (Ondjiva, Caxito and Luanda) and the six dioceses of the DRC (Kinshasa, Kikwit, Idiofa, Isangi, Lolo, Matadi) where they serve.

The Superior General participated in the retreat and the work of the Assembly. The dean of the Congolese Oblates, Bishop Louis MBWOL, Bishop Emeritus of Idiofa, accompanied the Superior General from Kinshasa. Together, they were received in Idiofa by Bishop Joseph Moko.

The provincial superior of Congo, Father Joseph NTUMBA, presided over the closing Mass. He thanked his confreres and exhorted them to live in faith the values they acknowledged in the Assembly as the foundation of their consecration and their life, including the conversion to the Oblate ideal, the love of personal prayer and community, “speaking well” about confreres and fraternal charity. Father Ntumba recalled that the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is not an NGO, a philanthropic organization ...

The Superior General congratulated the Oblates of Congo and Angola for their seeking of the essentials of the Oblate ideal. He thanked them for praying and working well, explicitly in this “year of vocations”. (Father Jean-Baptiste MALENGE)

### ZAMBIA

#### **“Come and See” the progress!**

*(United States Provincial, Fr. Louis STUDER; his Vicar, Fr. Arthur FLORES; and the US Treasurer, Fr. James CHAMBERS attended the recent assembly of the Delegation of Zambia. What follows are excerpts from Fr. Studer's report of the visit.)*

An African proverb states, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” This adage summed up well the tone and purpose of the General Assembly of the Missionary Oblates in the delegation of Zambia. Forty-seven Oblates met for four days in Lusaka, the week of January 14, 2018 at the Jesuit Retreat Center there.

The theme of the Assembly was “Come And See” which underlined the necessity of familiarizing all the Oblates of the delegation with the many and diverse ministries of the Oblates in Zambia, as well as continue the strategic planning for future new ministries vis-a-vis the six directions for Oblate ministry outlined at the 2016 General Chapter in Rome. Fr. Vincent SAKALA, Delegation Superior, opened the Assembly with Eucharist. In his welcoming address, he reminded the Oblates of some of the accomplishments achieved on behalf of the poor since 1984 when the Oblates from the former U.S. Southern Province began ministering in this South Central African country.

Oblates are known and recognized for their closeness to the people they serve at Mary Immaculate Parish in Lusaka, which they founded. They identified several lay leaders who could help the Oblates get established in this new missionary venture. Eventually, these leaders built a new church building, social hall, rectory and helped make possible educational, social, spiritual outreach for a couple thousand parishioners and others beyond parish boundaries.

Statistics can begin to tell the story of the success of the Oblate presence these past 34 years in Zambia. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate are the largest male religious order in Zambia. Currently, 24 prenovices are preparing to become Oblates, living at the seminary residence built to house them in 2011.

The Oblate parish in Kalabo currently serves 65 parish out-stations; in Shongombo, the Oblates serve 25. This vast outreach from the central main parish is typical.

Because of unreliable transportation, or none at all, poor roads, seasonal flooding and very

few vehicles, the Oblates know many of the parishioners cannot get to the main parish. So the Oblates meet them where they are, as often as they can, often experiencing these same transportation difficulties themselves. Poor transportation was also one of the primary reasons for the establishment of Radio Liseli (Light). The Oblates provide catechetical and evangelical teaching as well as educational, social, spiritual and even sometimes political education, particularly to the people of western Zambia where transportation is particularly challenging.

One complicated, complex issue which Radio Liseli has brought to the attention of its listeners is deforestation. Deforestation is the cutting down of trees for sale, usually to other countries who pay handsomely for this wood. It is unclear who benefits from these sales but the government does little to stop it, even though the forests are on public properties. Trees attract the rain, necessary for crops to grow. Bishop Evans CHINYEMBA of the Mongu diocese has often spoken publicly about this grave concern.

The second half of the Oblate Assembly addressed the possibility of beginning some new ministries as the delegation continues to implement the six directions of the General Chapter in prioritizing its ministries.

The Oblates are recognizing “the new poor with their many faces” in the new ministry of coordinating the prison ministry in Zambia. Correctional Ministry is currently “hit and miss,” if at all. Oblates hope to ensure that through this correctional ministry, dear to the heart of Oblate Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, prisoners will be given renewed hope, new assurance of their dignity as sons and daughters of God. Other new ministries include ministry with youth, with a plan to establish an office to coordinate this ministry in the delegation and assign an Oblate to this ministry full-time.

In the diocese of Livingstone where Bishop Valentine KALUMBA was installed in September 2016, the Oblates are planning to eventually build a Marian Shrine. With Victoria Falls nearby, a major world attraction, the Oblates may put the



Shrine under the patronage of “Our Lady of the Falls.” With heavy tourism to this beautiful area in this very poor diocese, they hope to be able to provide spiritual sustenance for thousands of weary travelers from all over the world.

The Oblates will soon staff a parish currently being built in the Livingstone diocese. Three Oblates plan to arrive February 17th, with the hope that the church, in the process of construction, will be finished soon, once funds are available. The current small building used as a church is terribly inadequate for the 500 or more expected to attend when the church is completed.

It is said that a missionary “worth his salt” can adapt to whatever situation, familiarize himself with whatever circumstances in which he finds himself! This would certainly be true of the Missionary Oblates’ ministries in Zambia! (Fr. Louis STUDER in OMIUSA, March 2018)

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

### Re-embracing the Founder’s obedience in 1851

On the 21st May 2018 on the Feast of St Eugene de Mazenod, Oblates from all over the new Province of Southern Africa will gather at Mazenod Centre in Germiston to witness the installation of the new Provincial, Fr. Neil FRANK, and the council.

A short excerpt from the book: *We Remember them*, compiled by Fr Eric BOULLE in July 2015 and edited by Jenny Duckworth, briefly explains the arrival of the Oblates in Durban and immediately outlines the enormous scope that such an undertaking would encompass. Today that same territory is largely identified with the borders of the new OMI Province of Southern Africa after the Church, in its development, created dioceses. These diocese subdivided the territory and its Catholic population, as well as the original Oblate Unit, into new Units under bishops who were also the provincials of the Oblate Units at the same time.

Marie Jean-François ALLARD was ordained Titular Bishop of Samaria and Vicar Apostolic

of Natal on the 29 January 1851 by Bishop DE MAZENOD himself. He was assisted by Bishop Joseph-Hippolyte GUIBERT, who later to become Cardinal Archbishop of Paris.

*“Allard, accompanied by Frs Jean-Baptiste SABON and newly ordained Irish Oblate, Lawrence Joseph DUNNE, a deacon Julian Alphonse LOGEGARAY and a lay brother, Joseph COMPIN, set sail from Marseille on 13 November 1851 on the ship La Providence. They finally arrived at Port Natal on 15 March 1852, after having spent six weeks in Cape Town. There was no one to welcome the new arrivals except a very kind Protestant who took them ashore in his boat and sheltered them in his house until they could find suitable accommodation. A small house was rented in Smith Street which then served as presbytery and chapel where the first Mass was said on 19 March 1852. On 1 April the Bishop and his companions left for Pietermaritzburg, leaving Fr Sabon in charge at Durban. So began the missionary outreach into the interior which was to spread into Basutoland (Lesotho), Orange Free State (Free State), Kimberley, Bechuanaland (Botswana), Transkei and later the Transvaal (Gauteng). Allard made his headquarters in the capital, Pietermaritzburg. His vicariate covered an enormous portion of South Africa. With very little finance, and with only three priests at his disposal, Allard faced an almost impossible task”.*

Allard, like the new Provincial, would have to spend a lot of time on the road to consolidate and animate the missionary efforts of the Oblates in the vast territory. So Fr. Neil Frank is already on the move meeting Oblates, Bishops, Honorary Oblates and Oblate Missionary Associates. (<http://omi-bfn.blogspot.it/>)



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## Asia-Oceania

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**CHINA****A Haitian missionary in Hong Kong**

I am Paul Vladimyr EUSTACHE, born on September 02, 1986, in Haiti. I am the eldest of two brothers and two sisters. My journey with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate began in 2002. I made first vows in the Congregation in September 2007 and perpetual vows in February 2014. On February 28, 2015, I was ordained a priest by His Excellency, Most Rev. Quesnel Alphonse, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Liberté (Haiti). After almost three years as assistant parish priest ministering in Haiti, I arrived in Hong Kong for an *ad extra* missionary experience. In a few words, I will tell you why I come to Hong Kong.

In fact, I must tell you that before coming to Hong Kong, I never thought about it, not even a second: "To be a missionary in Asia, especially in China". Generally, the Haitian Oblates go on mission in America (United States, Canada, Colombia, French Guyana, Paraguay, Venezuela and Cuba).

In January 2016, I spoke with my provincial, telling him that after the experience I did in France (2010-2013), I would like to do an international experience again. I studied theology at the Catholic University of Lyon (France). In Lyon, we were from four different nationalities: Haitian, Vietnamese, Cameroonian, French. We were only seven Oblates (four young people in formation and three formators). Our experience helped us realize that cultural diversity is a great wealth that leads to true wisdom.

In July 2017, a request came to my provincial, Fr. Loudeger MAZILE for an international missionary cooperation. It came from the Oblate China Delegation. The provincial followed my request of January 2017, and informed me of that missionary call. After some reflection about it, asking for advice from my spiritual advisor and praying on it, I said YES.

Since December 29, 2017, I am here in Hong Kong. The question I always asked myself after

having given my consent and before coming to Hong Kong is this: "What am I going to do there?" I really did not know how to answer. I can simply say that I am here like Abraham in the Book of Genesis (Gen 12, 1-9). The Lord calls me to leave my country for a new mission in an unknown land. I trust Him and I will go. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, I answer by saying: "I am the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word". And like Jesus, I confide in the Father saying: "Not my will, Lord, but yours". My motivation is to work in the vineyard of the Lord, in the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I am an Oblate priest willing to work in the Church wherever the need arises.

Come and see (John 1, 39). Do not be afraid; advance in deep water (Lk 5, 4-7). These are the tips I would like to share with each new missionary. The biggest challenge is to overcome fears and to face what seems to be unknown to you. For me, it is a way of responding to the call of Pope Francis: "Church in Exit" in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*. (China Delegation Newsletter, February 2018)

**BANGLADESH****Launching of the Year of Oblate Vocations**

On March 15, in the presence of His Excellency Most Rev. Archbishop George Kocherry, the Apostolic Nuncio to Bangladesh, the Oblate Delegation of Bangladesh launched the year of Oblate Vocations. The launching coincided with the Oblates' monthly retreat and meeting.

The day began with Fr. Angelo MARTYN, the veteran Oblate in the Unit, who enlightened the members of the Delegation with his inspiring talk on the theme: "Passionate love for Jesus Crucified." After his talk, the hours were spent in personal prayer and meditation. In the afternoon, the members listened to the personal vocation stories of four Oblates: Frs. Henry REBEIRO, Dilip John SARKAR, Kajol Linus GOMES, and Pintu Louis COSTA.

Those present thanked and praised the Lord for the vocation of every member to the Congregation and especially prayed for the members who shared their vocation stories. The plan is that the members will take turns inspiring one another through sharing on the charisms of the Congregation and through personal sharing of their vocation stories in the bimonthly Delegation meetings throughout the Oblate year of Vocations.

In the evening, Archbishop Kocherry officially inaugurated the Year of Vocations and together with all the members of the Unit, celebrated the Holy Eucharist. Fr Ajit Victor COSTA, the Delegation Superior, gave to the head of each Mission Centre and each Formation House a logo of the Vocation Year and prayer cards, inviting each one to "...live this Year of Vocations in prayer ad intra -- with interior conversion -- and ad extra -- inviting others to discover the gift of vocation." (Fr. Pius POHDUENG )

## CHINA

### Year of Oblate Vocations

Last December, during the annual MAMI mass that celebrates the feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, the Year of Oblate Vocations was officially inaugurated. The evening of the 7th of December, the Oblate community in Hong Kong gathered in St Alfred's Church to celebrate the occasions with Holy Mass followed by dinner.

The Oblates were joined by Beijing-based Fr Luc YOUNG, whose Silver Jubilee of priesthood was celebrated on the following day. Guangzhou-based Fr Irek DAMPC and other members of the Congregation also were present. In addition to the Oblates, a considerable number of other members of the Oblate family took part in the event. They include MAMI members, principals, teachers and members of the four Oblate schools, parishioners of St Alfred's and Notre Dame, Oblate Youth and other friends.

As the entrance hymn was being sung, Fr Paul SHEN led the way with the Oblate cross, with members of the Oblate Youth carrying icons of the Oblate Madonna, St. Eugene de Mazenod and

beatified Oblates. Fr Slawek KALISZ, Superior of the China Delegation, then announced the commencement of the Year of Oblate Vocations.

As is the tradition, this annual celebration of OMI's beloved patroness ended with dinner. More than two hundred participants at the Mass stayed to share roast pig, wine and other food and drinks in the parish hall. Besides enjoying the food, the youth group seized the opportunity of having such a large audience to launch the 'world premiere' of their short video on OMI's food distribution ministry. The video is also available on 'Oblate Youth Hong Kong' Facebook page and Youtube. (Bernard Yeung in China Delegation Newsletter, February 2018)

## INDIA

### Empowering youth for the Church

A one day seminar for EYE -- Eugene Youth Empowerment -- took place in St. Joseph's parish, Musunuru on January 17. The youth programme aimed at providing opportunities for the youngsters especially to know their role in our Catholic Church and also to get to know each other. Nearly 150 youth and catechists from 16 villages of the Musunuru parish and youth from the Buttayagudem parish also participated in this youth meet.

Fr. John Thomas DAVID, the parish priest of Musunuru gave a warm welcome to Mr. Abraham, the chief guest and Mrs. Jaya Lakshmi, the guest of honor, and the youth gathered there. While highlighting the day's theme, "The Role of youth in the Catholic Church", Mr. Abraham stated that the youth need to develop the leadership qualities which will uplift our society. In addition, he also spoke about self-care and healthy decision making in life. Finally he concluded by saying that the youngsters can definitely make a vast difference in the Church through their active participation and collaboration in the missions.

Mrs. Jaya Lakshmi exhorted the youth to have perseverance towards achieving their goals and never to give up when difficulties and challenges come their way.

After lunch group interaction and dynamism made for lively and participatory session. Afterwards, Fr. Kumar, a son of the soil, presided over the Eucharistic celebration with the other Fathers concelebrating. During the evaluation, the participants said that this one day programme was meaningful and enriching. (Frs. John Thomas and Fr. Augustine in BORN, February 2018)

## CHINA

### **No más mulas – No more mules**

Father John WOTHERSPOON has spent much of his Oblate and priestly life as a missionary in Hong Kong, China. Originally from the Province of Australia, of which China is an Oblate Delegation, he went to Hong Kong as a teacher in a school run by the Oblates in 1985. Currently, he ministers as a prison chaplain. But this ministry has taken him from dark prison corridors to airports throughout the world as he travels to meet the families of prisoners who are behind bars because of their participation in smuggling illegal drugs. These were the “mules” that drug lords use to get their product across international borders. In effect, the “mules” are couriers who risk their own lives and freedom by smuggling drugs in their luggage, their clothing and sometimes even by swallowing plastic-wrapped drugs.

For the past few years, Fr. Wotherspoon has travelled to the homelands of some of these imprisoned “mules” to meet with the families they left behind and to enlist their help and the help of others to warn possible future “mules” of the dangers of getting involved with trafficking gangs. Among other means of communication, there is a Facebook account called: *No más mulas – No more mules*. He also works with government officials and judges in Hong Kong to get the laws regarding the sentencing of “mules” changed. In many cases, the vulnerable “mule” receives a harsher prison sentence than the drug traffickers themselves who often go unpunished entirely.

Late December and into January of 2018, the priest traveled thousands of kilometers to meet the families of prisoners from Central and South America and to spread the message of his

campaign. His journey from Hong Kong took him to Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.

One of his means of communicating his crusade is to connect with the local media: newspapers, radio, TV. He often finds that a “mule’s” family member or friend knows someone in the media who might be interested in reporting this story.

One of the positive notes of this long journey into South America was Fr. John’s contact with Oblates in some of the countries. They could help him contact families of prisoners and also spread the message of his battle against the drug traffickers. In Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, he met the local bishop, Mons. Guillermo STECKLING, former Superior General of the Oblates.

Here is a brief excerpt from his blog where he tells of a dangerous encounter with some of the drug traffickers in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In a large mall, he went to a place “...where the Nigerians hang out who have sent so many drug mules to HK and other places. Over the past few days I've checked the possibility of someone from police or media to accompany me....but (I found it) not possible/practical....so, with time running out...I went today by myself. I had my Cross on, identified myself and was taken by a ‘lookout’ to the cafe where the group of men hangs out. When some of them saw me they criticised the lookout for taking me to their location....but he cooled them down ...and I shook hands with each of them and gave each of them my card... and told them I was helping Biafra (Eastern Nigeria where they all come from) before they were born (I helped organize a walkathon of some 10,000 Monash University students in Melbourne to raise funds for the people starving in Biafra during the civil war). The items I gave out were immediately taken up a staircase inside the cafe to someone further up the ladder ....

“But when I started showing them photos of my Big Fish ....and they recognized the Fish named Emeka...my guide advised me to leave before there was trouble....and he took me to a nearby cafe for a drink and a threatening lecture....which included the words ‘If you don't want to lose your



trolley, if you don't want to lose your passport and your money, if you don't want to be penniless begging on the street....etc. etc...you go back to your own country and pray for the world'. ...

“I made a fairly prompt exit....feeling like someone who'd just thrown a hand grenade into a nest of soldiers....and I took a taxi ... to make sure I wasn't followed.

My lookout was in fact quite kind...he's an asylum seeker...been here 2 years he said...said his name was Bobby. I had told him how I'd been to Africa 3 times, had saved maybe a 100 Africans from going to prison in HK, was trying

to stop S. Americans from going to prison, just wanted the whole drug mule thing to stop. He was half sympathetic, half threatening...not really sure if I was crazy or what.

“Maybe my action was crazy, but I have a feeling that it...together with a few other activities of these days....will cause a noticeable reduction in the number of poor people from this part of the world going to prison in HK.

“My Mass this morning had been for the Nigerian Drug Lords in Sao Paolo ...that in this city named after Saint Paul they would have the same sort of experience as St Paul ...”

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## Canada-United States

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### UNITED STATES

#### **Prenovices join March for Life**

Four prenovices from the prenovitiate community in Buffalo, New York, Chris Din, Mateusz Garstecki, Mark Anthony Hernandez and Henry Zayomoe, accompanied by Mateusz' mother, Barbara, and brother, David, came to Washington to join tens of thousands of others from around the nation for the 45<sup>th</sup> annual March for Life, held this year on Jan. 19.

They arrived in time to join in the celebration of the Vigil for Life Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Jan. 18. Oblate Frs. George KIRWIN, Charles HURKES and Dwight HOEBERECHTS were among the concelebrants at the Mass led by Timothy Cardinal Dolan of New York City.

For many of the 45 years of the March, the Shrine has hosted a National Prayer Vigil for Life, following the Mass itself. Led by groups of seminarians from dioceses around the nation, hundreds of marchers spend a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament throughout the night.

After last year's March, one of the prenovices contacted the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, offering to lead one of the Holy Hours. Some time later, Fr. Alex ROQUE, formator in the prenovitiate, received notice from

the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities inviting them to join the seminarians of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary of Wyncewood, Pennsylvania, for the 1:00 a.m.--2:00 a.m. period.

After spending some time getting to know the seminarians from St. Charles in the Shrine Crypt sacristy, Christopher Din led the procession to the altar. A deacon from St. Charles gave a homily and seminarians from other seminaries led the various prayers.

During silent meditation time, each of the seminarian groups played or sang a couple hymns. The whole hour was a beautiful time spent with Jesus, praying for the unborn, and we were very blessed and honored to have had the opportunity to participate in leading it. (by Mateusz Garstecki in OMIUSA, March 2018)

### UNITED STATES

#### **Thomas Benson, HOMI: 1927-2018**

Thomas Benson, HOMI, 90, died on March 15, 2018 in Jefferson, Louisiana, with his wife, Gayle at his side. His body lay in state for public visitation for two days at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. The Mass of Christian burial took place at the famous St. Louis Cathedral, formerly under the care of the Oblates, and was broadcast live on television on March 23. The presiding celebrant was Archbishop Gregory

Aymond, the local Ordinary. In the traditional “New Orleans style” funeral procession, his widow was seen carrying Tom’s Oblate Cross. (<https://goo.gl/oS4i7x>)

To the eyes of the secular world, Tom Benson was a very wealthy man who owned two professional sports teams in New Orleans: an American-style football team, the New Orleans Saints; and a basketball team, the New Orleans Pelicans. But to the Oblates and the Catholic Church, he was much more than that.

During his lifetime, he suffered the sad death of two wives and two of his adopted children. But he was a man of great faith and was extremely generous in supporting institutions of the Church, especially in New Orleans and San Antonio, Texas. The original “De Mazenod Scholasticate” located at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio was, a few years ago, renamed the “Gayle and Tom Benson Theological Center”.

Fr. William MORELL, who knew him well, speaks more about Tom Benson’s Oblate connection. “He had a decades-long friendship with countless Oblates. During the many years Tom lived in San Antonio, Oblates were constant guests in his home and at his ranch...and often at Saints games. He was also a frequent visitor in Oblate houses and ministries, including the

General House where he had come to visit his friend Fr Louie LOUGEN early in his first year in office. He and Gayle [Editor: his third wife] were married at the Immaculate Conception Chapel at Oblate School of Theology.

“Tom’s support of Oblate works, especially education and formation, was most generous. He donated his former home in San Antonio to the Oblates and it still serves as an Oblate residence. The total of the gifts Tom gave to the Oblates (that I know of) amounted to over 12 million dollars.

“In my many visits with Tom, I noticed he wore his little Oblate Cross with pride. On one visit to his office in New Orleans, Tom gestured to the wall covered with his many certificates, awards and honors. Then, with pride, he pointed to the Honorary Oblate certificate which was at the very center of the wall. He said it was put in the most important place for a good reason. He said it was at the center of all his honors. It’s perplexing that none of the obituaries I have read of Tom mention anything about his 60 years of his deeply personal and markedly generous relationship with the Oblates. But, in fact, over the years that relationship has certainly been much more personal than public. May he rest in God’s love... now a member of the saints in a whole new way.”

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## Europe

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### **LOURDES, FRANCE**

#### **A real closeness to the pilgrims**

The Executive Board of the Provincials of Europe met on February 8-11, 2018, in Lourdes, where we remembered in prayer all our brothers from our provinces and the Congregation. We talked about our involvement at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes and its future.

The actual community is temporarily made up of four members: Nicola VENTRIGLIA from the Mediterranean Province and the superior; Paul HORROCKS from the Anglo-Irish Province, Mark KEMSEKE from the Belgium/Holland Province; and Linus SOSAI from the Jaffna Province.

The bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, Bishop Nicolas Brouwet, having become aware of international issues facing the missionaries at the Shrine, has called upon the Oblates to continue their participation in the international coordination, particularly in the face of the language needs for Polish, Ukrainian, Tamil, Sinhalese, Vietnamese and Chinese. From the community point of view, he recently facilitated the grouping of the Oblates in the same corridor of the chaplains’ house, with a large common room, a chapel and bedrooms. The chaplains’ house is now made up of several communities: the Capuchins, the St. Martin Community, the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception of Garaison, the Brothers of Ploërmel and the Missionary Oblates.

Msgr. Xavier d'Arodes, the one in charge of international coordination and our primary contact, in a letter tells how he, the Rector and the Bishop consider us: "In fact, the Lourdes Shrine first of all needs the Oblate charism as lived by Oblates. It would be helpful to think first of all about the contribution that the Oblates could make through their charism to a missionary dynamic and the evangelization of the crowds pouring into this international Shrine. The Missionary Oblates have a sincere love for the Blessed Virgin and a deep understanding of the graces She gives in abundance here in Lourdes. They have a real closeness to the pilgrims: our Oblates really seek to live and understand the difficulties that the men and women of this time have to face. We recognize their unstinting generosity. These are qualities that make us say that we need the Oblates because they have something specific for the Lourdes Shrine."

Msgr. Xavier d'Arodes presented us with a pastoral project still being formulated, aimed at a ministry of encounter. We can no longer be content with making great sermons and liturgies, but it is necessary to organize a more personalized welcome for small groups; for families; for people with more unusual issues; for new linguistic groups (Chinese, Tamil, Portuguese ...); for networks of like-minded people; for persons who are no longer touched by parishes or movements; for those who are waiting for healing, to be touched by grace.

A conversation can begin from a simple request; evangelization becomes possible. As a result, a greater place will be given to lay volunteers in pastoral care because pilgrims say things to them that they do not dare to say to the priest. The appeal made to the Oblates also concerns specific needs for the development of this project of the Shrine: a priest or a religious able to reach people digitally (an editor of the spiritual components of the online conversation). Someone who can do evangelization with young people (in the languages of international culture). Someone who can work on the formation of the lay volunteers for pastoral care (through the Lourdes or another hospitality program) and work to help them adapt.

On the European as well as at the global level, we are currently looking at how we are going to renew the partnership contract. We intend to look at how we can meet one or the other of these needs and whom we can send. Any candidates out there? (Vincent GRUBER, Provincial of France)

## SPAIN

### **Engracia Menéndez Fernández, HOMI: 1923-2018**

Last March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Engracia Menéndez Fernández, Honorary Oblate, died in Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid). After 95 years of life during which Engracia lived an intense love for her natural family and her spiritual family, the Missionary Oblates, she left for her ultimate encounter with God.

Engracia was born on April 25, 1923, in Madrid on Calle del Espíritu Santo. Since she was a little girl, she had close ties with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Pozuelo de Alarcón.

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Oblates decided to open a house in Pozuelo for the scholasticate, it was Engracia's father (his name was Robustiano) who told the Oblates that there was a house for sale that seemed to be just what the Oblates were looking for. It would become the Scholasticate of Nuestra Señora del Pilar.

Engracia's father and Fr. Vicente BLANCO began a connection of friendship and family ties that has lasted to this very day. The Oblates of the community would visit the family from time to time and the family would often come to the scholasticate.

Engracia was 13 years old and a student at the Colegio de San José de Cluny, in Pozuelo de Alarcón, where the Oblates were chaplains. She was a schoolmate of Teresa Castán Giral, daughter of Cándido Castán, who would be martyred along with 7 Oblates in the Casa de Campo, at dawn on July 24, 1936.

Engracia's father was twice taken prisoner to the Peoples' Jail in the Oblate house. She went there to visit her father, but they did not allow her to enter the house and she had to limit herself to seeing him

through a window. However, she could clearly see clearly how the militants were in the patio at the entrance of the house burning books, cassocks and religious objects taken out of the house.

This relationship between Engracia and the Oblates only grew over the years, so much so that she was able to say that she knew all the Spanish Oblates. This close relationship was passed on to her family: her husband Javier Negro (also an Honorary Oblate) and her children, Javier and Blanca, close friends of the Oblates. In addition, as long as her health allowed her, she took part in celebrations of the Oblate Family.

During his last visit to the Spain, the current Superior General of the Congregation, Fr. Louis LOUGEN, visited her at her home and was able

to share with her and her husband Javier a lovely family moment.

On March 20, at her funeral Mass and at her burial, the Oblate Family bade her a final farewell based on Christian hope. Fr. Ismael GARCÍA spoke in Engracia's name the prayer that Jesus offered for his disciples at the Last Supper, "Father that those whom you gave me may be with me and contemplate my glory" -- like the prayer that Engracia will be saying for her own family and her Oblate family.

As Saint Eugene liked to recall when one of his Oblates died that now we recognize that we have an intercessor in the Oblate community of heaven. May she rest in peace. (<http://nosotrosomi.blogspot.it>)



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**Anniversaries -- May 2018**


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**75 Years of religious life**

17/05/1943	07618	Fr. Rosaire Langelier	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
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**75 Years of priesthood**

09/05/1943	06797	Bishop Georges-Hilaire Dupont	Cameroon
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**65 Years of religious life**

01/05/1953	10094	Bro. Eugène Caillet	France
11/05/1953	09452b	Fr. Werner Rörig	Central European
13/05/1953	09629	Fr. Kevin Davine	Australia
31/05/1953	09454	Fr. Teodoro Pfeifer	Mexico
31/05/1953	09450	Fr. Cornelius Scanlan	United States
31/05/1953	09456	Fr. Harry Schuckenbrock	United States

**65 Years of priesthood**

26/05/1953	08497	Fr. Joseph Menker	United States
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**60 Years of religious life**

01/05/1958	11034	Bro. Patrick Flanagan	Anglo-Irish
01/05/1958	11033	Fr. Terence Keogh-Williams	Anglo-Irish
01/05/1958	10440	Fr. Vitus Laib	Central European
01/05/1958	10436	Fr. Pio Stock	Paraguay
21/05/1958	11173	Bro. Werner Landgraf	Central European
21/05/1958	11043	Bro. Hubert Otto	Central European
31/05/1958	10479	Fr. Eugene Cañas	United States
31/05/1958	10475	Fr. Isidore Garcia	United States
31/05/1958	10476	Bishop Michael Pfeifer	United States

**60 Years of priesthood**

18/05/1958	09165	Fr. Kevin O'Connor	Anglo-Irish
25/05/1958	09477	Fr. Raymond Kirtz	United States

**25 Years of religious life**

21/05/1993	13423	Fr. Gene Gilos	Philippines
21/05/1993	13422	Fr. Rizalde Orola	Philippines

**25 Years of priesthood**

01/05/1993	13015	Fr. Maurus Kakuru Kantana	Namibia
01/05/1993	13086	Fr. Thomas Mpiyamanga Zondi	Natal
22/05/1993	12999	Fr. Laurence Mokhali Takatso	Lesotho

## Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 18-23

Name	Prov./Del.	Age	Died at	Date
Fr. Patrick Hollywood	United States	84	Tewksbury (USA)	05/03/2018
Fr. Arsène Perbost	France	88	Marseille (France)	13/03/2018
Fr. René Gauthier	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	80	Richelieu (Canada)	22/03/2018
Fr. Valentín Fernández	Cruz del Sur	82	Córdoba (Argentina)	31/03/2018
Fr. Charles Donovan	OMI Lacombe	77	Ottawa (Canada)	02/04/2018
Fr. Bertram Tirimanne	Colombo	88	Kohuwala (Sri Lanka)	03/04/2018

*“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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