



OMI Information No. 591 (English)

November-December 2018

**Letter of Fr. Superior General for the Solemnity
of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Dear Brother Oblates and all who live the Charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod,

Happy Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary! This feast brings joy and hope to all of us as we continue to draw new meaning and insights from the 200th anniversary of the Rule, written by Saint Eugene de Mazenod for the Missionaries of Provence, and of the first vows of those same missionaries on November 1, 1818. This feast of Mary also takes on special importance in this Year of Oblate Vocations, as every Oblate renews his commitment to work for vocations!

The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a celebration that attracts us because we are fascinated by the beauty of the call to holiness. Pope Francis writes: “Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church.” (GE #9). The Immaculate Conception is also a mystery of God’s love that calls us to deepen our faithfulness to our missionary commitment. In this sense, as I will mention in this letter, the feast we are celebrating has a deep connection to the Synod on Youth, Discernment, and Vocation.

The Immaculate Conception proclaims our belief that Mary was free from original sin from the first moment of her conception, and was filled with grace, completely loved and cherished by the Holy Trinity. What God accomplished in gracing Mary, God would like to do in all of humanity: transform us into holy women and men by the gift of grace, God’s very own life. This gift is gratuitous, free, underserved, not earned! Pope Francis writes that the gift of grace “...invites us to live in joyful gratitude for this completely unmerited gift.” (GE#54)

As we celebrate Mary’s Immaculate Conception, we celebrate the vocation made by the Holy Trinity to every follower of Jesus: the call to holiness. Saint Eugene placed this call at the heart of our charism. “In the name of God be saints!” In his glowing Preface of 1825, he repeatedly invites us to strive with all our power to be continually converted, transformed, and transfigured by the gift of grace. He writes that, if we could be zealous and holy apostles, centered on Jesus, there would be reason to think that in a short time, the world would be converted to Christ.

This we must constantly bear in mind: there is a direct relationship between the holiness of our lives and the efficacy of the ministry we do on behalf of God’s mission. St. Eugene ardently desired that we live in apostolic communities to incite holiness among us: no smoldering wicks! If Oblates would be holy, there would be reason to believe that, in a short time, society, that had gone far astray, would be brought back to the Gospel. The rich fruitfulness of Fr. Dominic Albini’s preaching was attributed to the holiness of his life.

We often have outdated ideas of holiness, and rather medieval ideas of what it means to be a saint. The recent apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis brings holiness down to earth. He speaks of an ordinary holiness of daily life: “We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy.” (#14 G.E.) Live our commitment with joy! What a revolution, when too often we live this with mediocrity, selfishness, divisions among us and lack of integrity.

The call to holiness is found in simple gestures of love, forgiveness, acceptance of one another in

apostolic community; in living our vow of poverty by a simple lifestyle, and by sharing all that is earned and received with my community; by a life of chastity, cultivating a pure heart, with transparency and unconditional love for all; by seeking to persevere in love, even in the face of weakness, discouragement, conflicts and disappointments. Holiness is based on a life of prayer and fed by the Eucharist each and every day. Holiness is serving the poor with patience and generosity in ministry.

So many small ways are invitations to live in holiness by loving. Mary's Immaculate Conception reminds us of this incredible call of the Lord, that we be transformed by God's gift of grace. This feast not only recalls that our vocation is to become saints, but the prayers of Mary assist us on our journey of holiness. As Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we are called to nourish a tender devotion to her, whom we call the Mother of Mercy. She will help us grow in holiness.

I want to emphasize that the feast of the Immaculate Conception is also a missionary celebration. Mary was saved from all sin and filled with grace in light of the mission the Holy Trinity had for her from all eternity: to become the Mother of God's only-begotten son. What a missionary parallel for our lives! God invites us to holiness so that, in us, through us, and with us, God's love will be revealed. We bear Christ to the world and become his presence to others, especially to the poor and most abandoned.

Mary's Immaculate Conception is not simply a beautiful honor and privilege for her for which we stand around her applauding and cheering! No, the beautiful gift of Mary's gracing is all about the mystery that God hid from ages past and now revealed in the end times: the mystery of love for all humanity. We bear the name of the Immaculate Conception and we are commissioned as missionaries to bring Christ into the world, not settling for a bland and mediocre existence (GE#1), but fully charged with the glory, the love and the mercy of God. What a marvelous call to be cooperators in God's saving plan!

A final word: on our feast day, we cannot overlook the recent Synod on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. The celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary also celebrates the reality that God chose for his dwelling-place the body of a poor, young, Jewish woman, Mary of Nazareth. The glory of God moved away from the Temple and took up residence within the womb of a young maiden from a marginalized family! It was in Mary that God chose to reveal his preferential love for all humanity, beginning with the poor.

Mary's Immaculate Conception commits Oblates to the mission of preaching the Gospel to the poor, to and with young people, and to those most excluded by society. On our 200th anniversary, the 2016 General Chapter affirmed and strengthened this call in faithfulness to the charism. The recent 2018 Synod reiterates this vocation: we must listen to the signs of the times in the excluded, the poor, and all the marginalized of our society. There we see the faces of the poor who cry out for salvation, which can only be found in Jesus Christ. This is the place in which the Trinity reveals God's call to mission for us today.

Our Lady's Immaculate Conception is not a triumphalistic dogma of a bygone theology, piety or spirituality. It is a Christo-centric and faith-filled missionary belief of the Church that reminds us Oblates, that like Mary, we are called to a profound holiness of life, and this is intimately connected to mission to and with the poor. We can never give up believing in this ideal of holiness, because it is the gracious initiative of the Trinity. Our patronal feast calls us to again strive for holiness, and to renew our missionary commitment to the poor.

We know how much Saint Eugene delighted in this belief in the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which he learned about as a young child in his catechism class in Aix-en-Provence, even before the dogma was defined by the Church. He advocated passionately for the definition of this dogma, and rejoiced with childlike enthusiasm and joy when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854. Saint Eugene was there! As the family of Eugene, let us too be filled with rejoicing and gladness on this day, celebrating our Mother and honoring her with great joy and happiness. Happy feast day to all!

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate!

Fr. Louis Lougen OMI
Superior General

General Administration

Let us be men of Advent, like St. Eugene. Fr. Paolo Archiati OMI – Vicar General

The liturgical season of Advent brings to mind what Pope John Paul II had to say on the occasion of the canonization of our Founder. Here are his words, spoken in that unforgettable celebration:

“Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, whom the Church proclaims today, was a man of Advent, a man of the Coming. He not only looked towards that Coming, but, as Bishop and Founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he devoted all his life to preparing it. ... Eugene de Mazenod was one of those apostles who prepared for modern times, our times”.

These words, for which we are proud to be Oblates, present us with a man who dedicated his life to preparing, in history, the coming of the end of time, the coming that will end human history. He waited for it and prepared it in the heroic exercise of virtue, involving the religious family he founded, in this human-divine adventure of the religious family he founded. He was a forerunner, able to see and read the signs of the new times, to prepare for them and the coming of the Savior who will lead us into the Kingdom of Heaven, whose work he wanted to associate with “his” Oblates.

The connection between St. Eugene, the Oblates, and the liturgical season of Advent does not stop there... Even Pope Francis, meeting the capitulars on 7 October 2016, in the *sala clementina*, took what was said years ago by his predecessor, inviting the Oblates of today to be “men of Advent” as well. It is an invitation that Pope Francis addressed not only to the members of the 36th General Chapter, but through them, to the whole Congregation, to each Oblate. Having said that St. Eugene was “obedient to the Holy Spirit in reading the signs of the times and assisting the work of God in the history of the Church”, the Pope addressed to us this invitation: *“May you also be ‘men of Advent’, capable of grasping the signs of the new times and guiding our brothers and sisters in the ways that God opens in the Church and in the world”.* It is a challenging

invitation, especially if we consider what he said immediately after: “The Church is living, together with the whole world, an era of great transformations, in the most diverse fields. She needs men who carry in their hearts the same love for Jesus Christ that lived in the heart of the young Eugene de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for her, which strives to be ever more open. It is important to work for a Church that is for everyone, a Church ready to welcome and accompany! The work to be done to accomplish all of this is vast; and you too have your specific contribution to offer”.

With these words, the Church, in the person of Peter’s successor, again entrusts us with the mission to which Eugene felt called when he gathered around him his first companions, the mission to respond to the cry of the abandoned Church of his time. This Church needs, perhaps today more than ever, “men who carry in their hearts the same love for Jesus Christ, who lived in the heart of young Eugene”.

The Savior comes into the world. He comes as the Redeemer to save those who are lost, to look for the lost sheep, to gather the scattered children of God in unity. Eugene wanted us to be “collaborators” of the Redeemer precisely in this work of salvation. Well aware of how demanding it is to carry out this task, Pope Francis tells us that we too have our contribution to offer. And now, we Oblates are called to seek together and discern what is this contribution that the Church asks us to offer.

On the first Sunday of Advent in 1995, our Founder was canonized; on the third Sunday of this same liturgical season, in 2011, the martyrs of Spain were beatified, and, in December of last year, again on the third Sunday of Advent, the martyrs of Laos. We could say that Advent is truly “our” favorite liturgical time, because it reminds us that, through our mission, we are called to prepare the coming of the Redeemer in the hearts of those who, even without knowing it, await it.

Reading and meditating on the documents of our last General Chapter, we are perhaps scared to see

how much work we have to do, how much to accomplish, how much “homework” needs to be done... May the words spoken by John Paul II be a light to us when he spoke of Saint Eugene “in his expectation, he reached the intensity of heroism, that is, he was characterized by a heroic degree of faith, hope and apostolic charity”. These words, far from inducing us to discouragement, stimulate us to a renewed commitment.

Eugene, too, found himself faced with an immense task: “This vast field to be covered!” he had written in the Preface to the first Rule. Nevertheless, without letting himself be discouraged by the immensity of the work to be done, he wondered how to respond to that specific situation, rolled up his sleeves, and went to work. Having now entered with enthusiasm into the third century of our history, we can also imitate today his love for Jesus Christ, his apostolic zeal, his love for the poor and the most abandoned, his unconditional passion for the Church.

GENERAL COMMITTEE OF OBLATE BROTHERS

“Every vocation has its source in baptism”

The General Committee of the Oblate Brothers met at the General House in Rome from November 9 to 14, 2018.

The Committee welcomed the positive response given by the Oblate units around the world for the committee’s proposal for community prayer on the occasion of the bicentenary of the first Rule. It hopes that this new tradition will continue in the future as well.

It was in this enthusiasm that the committee experienced its meeting as a true spiritual journey.

Thanks to the visit to a community of *Focalari* in the outskirts of Rome, the contribution of Sandra Prather (layman of the OMI Lacombe Province), and the presence and witness of Sr. Yulia Venglovska (Misioneras Oblatas de María Inmaculada), the committee rediscovered that every vocation has its source in baptism and that it is through baptism we receive our mission. In order to recover this identity of our religious vocation, the committee recommended meditation on the document “Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church”.

Accompanied by Father Fabio CIARDI, we walked the streets of Rome in the footsteps of our Founder, where we understood how much Eugene de Mazenod loved the Church. Likewise, on Tuesday morning, we had the grace to celebrate Mass at the tomb of Saint Peter; by this gesture, we renewed our confidence in the Church, which unfortunately is going through a period of turbulence.

Through the reports of the delegates of the regions, the committee expressed its concern about the situation of the vocation of Oblate Brothers in certain Units: Units with a large number of Oblates in first formation, but no candidate for religious life as Oblate Brothers. Oblate Brothers in first formation sometimes find themselves isolated in their Unit. That said, the committee reaffirmed its confidence in the Lord’s work, the complementarity of our vocation as Oblate Priests or Oblate Brothers for the mission and the importance of community meetings to share the experience of our mission.

The committee also examined the role of its representatives at the meetings of the Regional Conferences and all the animation work to be done in the regions, especially in units where there are only few Oblate Brothers.

To accompany us in this meeting, we were delighted to have, among other translators, Fr. Daniel LeBLANC. He shared with us his work at the United Nations. Echoing the document “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation - Companion in Mission”, he told us how he makes the voices of the voiceless heard (cf. Constitution number 9). His members helped the members of the committee to reiterate the importance of working with the most neglected, the poor with their many faces, as the Chapter reminds us.

In this year of prayer for Oblate vocations, when the Lord invites us to pray to the master of the harvest to send workers, the committee has committed itself to pray for vocations and to make a booklet of the meditated rosary in the three languages of the Congregation.

The meeting ended with a time of sharing and the Eucharist with the Superior General, during which the members of the committee renewed their oblation. The committee would like to thank the members of the General House for their hospitality and all those who accompanied the

meeting with prayer. Representing their regions, Brothers Benoit DOSQUET (France), Rafal DABKOWSKI (Poland), Gorgonio BONGAO

(Philippines), Jean Marie DIAKANOU (Cameroun) and Jose Diemeson de Moraes GOMES (Brazil) attended the meeting.

Asia-Oceania

COLOMBO PROVINCE, SRI LANKA The Province meets in Congress

The Colombo Province in Sri Lanka met in Congress at the Retreat House close to the National Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka from 17th – 21st September. Over 50 Oblates took part in this congress which included the officially elected representatives from the various communities with their superiors together with and the superiors and representatives from the provincial delegations of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Korea and Japan. Fr. Derrick Vernon, the Superior of Pakistan delegation was the facilitator. The Oblate Congress began with the solemn opening Eucharist celebrated by Fr. Irwin Morais, the provincial superior.

There were five main addresses. First, Fr. Provincial who presented the blueprint of contemplated action for the future. It was followed by the keynote address by Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera entitled: “The Changing phases of oblate life and apostolate in our history. Challenges and opportunities for oblate ministry in the future”. It pointed out the various moments of change in the apostolate styles of oblate activities and the historical causes that created those paradigm shifts. The speaker also ventured into a vision for relevant ministries in the future. The third important presentation was done by Rt. Rev. Kumara Illangasinghe, the Anglican Bishop who had been invited by the Provincial Council to be the chairman of a three-member Committee that conducted an Independent survey of all the Oblates based in Colombo. It contained a synopsis of the various views, critiques, reactions and the proposals of all the Oblates who were consulted including those in the houses of formation. Finally, the reports from the four delegations (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan and Korea) and the financial report presented by the Provincial Treasurer provided the five main sources for the discussions that followed in the course of the 5-day Congress.

The Participants having scanned all the incredibly multiple ministries that are currently operative in the province including the commitments to

the overseas delegations and foreign missions, came up with three central topics for congress dialogues: namely Mission & Community Life, Initial & On-going Formation, Administration and Finance. In addition to the Steering Committee headed by the facilitator, the congress members appointed a drafting committee and an implementation committee at the end of the congress to oversee and accompany the implementations regarding the above three areas of oblate life and apostolate for the coming three-year timeline. The official 9-paged “*Document of the Acts of the Congress*” was ready for presentation to all the congress participants before their departure. It was presented by the Chairman of the Steering Committee at the end of the Final Closing Eucharist.

On the final day of the Congress, the participants voted unanimously in favor of the “Document of the Acts of the Congress” as well as of the Vision and Mission statements that were formulated. The *Vision Statement* says: “We, as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in a process of being configured to Jesus Christ, envision a fuller life (Jn. 10:10) for the most abandoned, pursued in a spirit of daring like our Founder St. Eugene de Mazenod.”. The *Mission Statement* says: “We, the Missionary Oblates of Colombo Province, as “men of Advent” commit ourselves to journeying together interdependently as apostolic and prophetic communities among the most abandoned to promote the Reign of God and the integrity of creation in collaboration with the People of God”.

The five-day sessions witnessed moments of lively debate on matters that were both agreeable and those of a controversial nature but were marked always with opportunities for freedom of expression and views and anchored on a spirit of mutual understanding, respect and charity. The Postulator for the Cause of the Servant of God, Thomas Cardinal Cooray OMI announced to the Congress the good news of the closing of the diocesan phase of the Canonical Inquiry for his canonization and invited the oblates to join the prayer-campaign launched by the archdiocese of Colombo which is the promoter of the cause, for

its success. As the Congress zeroed in on the vision and mission statements, there was an air of satisfaction of five days spent fruitfully in oblate community, sharing and serious planning. The feeling of trust in divine Providence and the accompanying maternal intercession of Mary Immaculate kept the Congress in good spirits and assured them of a very hopeful future in life and ministry.

COLOMBO PROVINCE, SRI LANKA
Bro. Rabindra Rajapakse, OMI – 1956-2018

At the Oblate General House in Rome, there are many people who work quietly in the background to support the Central Government and the entire Congregation. One of those persons was Brother Rabindra RAJAPAKSE, who died on October 5, 2018, in his home province.

Brother Rabindra, or “Rabi” as he was known at via Aurelia 290, came to the General House in 2001 to serve primarily as the printer for the Oblate Communications Service and the General Administration. In the years when thousands of copies of various Oblate publications from Rome were still printed and mailed, Brother worked quietly in his basement “office.” Undoubtedly every Oblate in the world at that time held in his hand something that Brother Rabi had printed.

He had a God-given gift for music. For his silver jubilee of Religious life, he produced a CD in Sinhala language, which included his own lyrics and music compositions. He was also an accomplished artist. Whenever he could get out of the printshop into the extensive gardens at

the General House, he could be found caring for flowers. Or, he would be designing some creative way of enhancing the prayer life of the community in the chapel with an Advent wreath or a Christmas creche that was full of symbolism beyond the ordinary. From the community bursar, Fr. Clyde RAUSCH, he learned the art of painting icons.

The former Superior of the General House Community, Fr. Jean-Pierre CALOZ, wrote, upon hearing of Brother’s death: “He was a good confrere, a faithful printer. He was quiet; he was able to adapt himself to the General House in all modesty”.

Brother Rabindra was the first Oblate to live in the “*Suba seth gedara*” in Buttala, Sri Lanka, after the assassination of Fr. Michael RODRIGO on November 10, 1987. He was a strong admirer of Fr. Rodrigo, and he often told the story of the great Oblate who died because of his promotion of interreligious dialogue.

In 2008, Brother Rabindra returned to his home province and served at the Oblate Scholasticate in Kandy, St. Vincent’s Home in Maggona, and finally, once again at “*Suba seth gedara*” in Buttala. While he was there, his health condition worsened and forced him to retire.

The memory of Brother Rabi will remain for a long time to come, not only in the hearts of the members of his Province, but also by all who knew him at the General House.

Canada-United States

UNITED STATES

Lowell Celebrates 150 Years of Oblate Presence

The Shrine of St. Joseph the Worker in the heart of downtown Lowell celebrated the 150th anniversary of the start of Oblate ministry in this city in 1868 with a concelebrated Mass and reception on Sunday, October 14.

The leadership of the American Oblate Province (Frs. Louis Studer, Arthur Flores and James Brobst) presided at the noonday liturgical celebration – some 200 faithful participated in the rites along with a dozen Oblates from the local area. The service rendered in English,

incorporated hymnody in French and Spanish saluting the ethnic diversity that has always characterized Oblate ministry in this city.

The prayer of all those assembled was for the many faith communities established by the Oblates in the Lowell area over the past 150 years, that the faithful so inspired might continue to be energized by the Oblate charism in their ministries and in their outreach to the marginalized; and for the Shrine of St. Joseph the Worker itself, that the blessings of its daily sacramental ministries, its educational outreaches, its work with young adults and its involvement with the exploited in our midst

might continue to be that steadfast, inspirational beacon for area Catholics that it has been for the past 150 years.

With the help of Oblate Associates and other generous folks committed to the Shrine and its works, a reception was hosted in the Shrine's Conference Hall following the Mass – some 100 folks joined in these festivities that lasted well into the afternoon.

A souvenir Program that captured the trajectory of Oblate ministries in the local area over these 150 years was distributed to all and carried away as a prized memento of the anniversary celebration. A videographer recorded most of the liturgical celebration and this footage should soon be available on various Shrine and OMI platforms.

A professionally rendered 340 page historical text: "St. Jean Baptiste Parish and the Franco-Americans of Lowell, Massachusetts" chronicling the larger context of Oblate ministry in the city as well as a recent professionally produced DVD celebrating this history, remain available in the Shrine's Gift Shop/Bookstore for any who might want to further explore the fascinating story of the truly missionary endeavors of the Oblates straddling 150 years beginning with the start of the industrial revolution in this "Mill City" and to the present day.

OMI LACOMBE

Sacred Heart Church Celebrates World Day of the Poor

Last year (2017), His Holiness Pope Francis, in his Apostolic letter, *Misericordia et Misera* invited the Catholic faithful to celebrate the 33rd Sunday of ordinary time in commemoration of the World Day of the Poor. Seeing the contrast that exists between "empty words so frequently on the lips of many people who call themselves disciples and the concrete deeds against which we are called to measure ourselves", Pope Francis invited the Catholic faithful with the words of the Apostle John; "Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth" (Message of First WDP, #1).

Heeding this call, Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples organized a meal on 17 November 2018, in commemoration of this year's World Day of the Poor. In conjunction with Catholic Social Services of Edmonton, at least 600 people had a chance to have a warm and well-prepared meal. The meal took place in the Church Hall

(Kateri Hall) from 11:30 am to 2pm. Archbishop Richard Smith was present and opened the day with a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving for this gathering. Also in attendance was Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain LAVOIE, Fr. Mark BLOM, the Sisters of Providence, and many parishioners who volunteered to help. We were also blessed to have volunteers from the nearby Marian Center.

Indeed, more than just a day to provide a meal for the poor in our neighborhood, this event was for many a time of encounter. Even before we began serving the meal, an atmosphere of sharing our stories and listening to each other was already evident. It was a joy to see barriers of fear and indifference being broken and the recognition that we are all brothers and sisters emerging. It was good to see the young, the youth and older people work together for the common good. It was as Pope Francis observes, "the rediscovery of our capacity for togetherness" (Message of second WDP, #6).

As we look forward to celebrating the feast of Christ the King, it is pertinent to let ourselves be taught by Christ what it means to create relationships with the poor with whom Christ so often identifies himself and loves, and encounter the world around us upon which are found divine imprints.

We thank the many volunteers who showed us the evangelical way of looking up to Christ in creating the culture of encounter and the promotion of Justice, peace, and integrity of creation in our community.

UNITED STATES

La Lomita mission and the Oblates

The U.S. federal government's plan to run the planned border wall at the site of a historic mission along the Rio Grande would amount to an illegal government intrusion into the practice of religion, the Diocese of Brownsville says.

At issue is a chapel in Mission, Texas, about 75 miles west of the mouth of the Rio Grande. The chapel, known as **La Lomita Mission**, served as sort of a regional hub beginning in the mid-1800s to care for the spiritual needs of "widely separated Catholic churches, baptizing newborns, performing marriage ceremonies and blessing the dead." according the city of Mission's website.

The government last month filed court papers notifying Brownsville Diocese Bishop Daniel

Flores, that it intends to survey about 67 acres where the chapel, built in 1899, sits near a horseshoe-like bend in the river that separates the United States from Mexico. The survey is seen a prelude to the government taking at least some of the land through eminent domain to build the wall.

Bishop Flores, in a statement issued by the diocese, said no. "While the bishop has the greatest respect for the responsibilities of the men and women involved in border security, in his judgment church property should not be used for the purposes of building a border wall," the statement said.

"Such a structure would limit the freedom of the Church to exercise her mission in the Rio Grande Valley, and would in fact be a sign contrary to the Church's mission. Thus, in principle, the bishop does not consent to use church property to construct a border wall."

Rev. Fr. Robert WRIGHT, a Catholic priest of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and a professor at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, said La Lomita was part of a series of South Texas missions established by the Oblate Missionaries after the Mexican-American War.

The war firmly established that the U.S.-Mexico boundary was the Rio Grande and not the Nueces, American Catholic authorities wanted to ensure the church had a presence in the once-disputed territory, Wright said.

"So the Oblates were asked to come in take care

of those new Catholic parishes along the Texas side of the border," he said.

A mission was started in Brownsville and another in Roma, about 120 miles away. Because of the distance between the two cities, the missionaries established La Lomita, which in Spanish mean "little hill," as a midway point.

"So that's where the chapel was built and there was a little ranch house and a house for the priests," Wright said. "And that was the new mission center for the whole part of the Valley which is now Hidalgo County."

The original mission was destroyed by flood. The one that still stands, after several renovations, was built in 1899.

"A village began to grow around the chapel as the Oblate Fathers constructed a rectory, guest house, quarters for the lay brothers, a blacksmith shop and buggy shed and small houses for the families of the laborers," says La Lomita's entry on the Parks Service's website.

"It goes against the First Amendment, freedom of religion," said David Garza, a Brownsville lawyer who is representing the South Texas Catholic diocese in its battle with the government. Garza said that despite the religious and historic significance of La Lomita, the matter remains far from settled and the diocese is in an uphill fight.

"We've got a rough row to hoe, no doubt," Garza said. "Eminent domain cases are hard to win, whether it's for a dam, to widen a highway or to build the wall."

Europe

POLAND

"Missionary Roads" and its website awarded by the Polish Episcopate

On 25 October 2018, the Polish Episcopal Conference awarded the persons and institutions involved in missions with the "*Benemerenti in Opere Evangelizationis*" medal. Among them, the Oblate magazine *Misyjne Drogi* ("Missionary Roads") and its website, www.misyjne.pl were honoured. The gala event took place at Warsaw's Porczyński Gallery.

The founder and the first editor-in-chief of "Missionary Roads" was Fr. Alfons KUPKA, former provincial of the Polish Oblates, who died on November 9, 2018. For 35 years, the magazine has been sharing stories about missionaries and missions all over the world, especially those of the Oblates. Various material for missionary formation and animation is also included. For the past five years, the magazine has been running the prayer campaign, "Missionary for Lent" supporting missionaries. It also coordinates the programme supporting education in missionary countries. Since 2016,

it has been contacting readers via the www.misyjne.pl website and other new media.

During the ceremony, the Polish provincial Fr. Paweł ZAJĄC, honoured Fr. Kupka by saying that he was not only an editor-in-chief and provincial, but was also a polyglot, an architect and a designer of missionary objects. The present editor-in-chief, Marcin WRZOS, expressed his gratitude for the award and appreciated the efforts of all the award-winning editors in evangelization, and did not forget to thank his own editorial staff for their commitment, passion and professionalism. During his speech, he also admitted that missionary media can demonstrate the reality of missions in either a better or worse manner.

The "*Benemerenti in Opere Evangelizationis*" medal was an initiative of the Polish Episcopal Commission for Missions in order to honour outstanding missionary achievements.

BELARUS

Another new website in the Oblate world

We, the small community of Oblates in Belarus, have taken the initiative to launch a new website for ourselves for the first time in our short history. The new website has the domain name www.oblate.by. Although it is in the Belarusian language, in this era of the internet where online translations are ever so easily available, the website will certainly function as a great source of information about Oblate life in Belarus for everyone.

According to Wikipedia, about 17% of the total population of Belarus is Catholic. Most of these belong to the Latin Rite. The Missionary Oblates of Immaculate Mary have been ministering in Belarus since 1938. Before the Second World War, they had two mission stations, in the Archdiocese of Vilnius and the diocese of Pinsk. After the war there was only one Oblate - Fr Wojciech NOWACZYK - who worked, among other places, in Waszkiewiczach and Nowogródek. After the collapse of the USSR, the Oblates returned to Belarus in 1992.

Right now there are 4 Oblates ministering in the country. Two are missionaries from Poland, and the other two are locals. There is also a novice

and another priest who belong to the mission, in Poland at present. Our services in Belarus are generally extended to people from different cultures and nations.

We expect that the new website will be a good support, especially to those young Oblates who desire to be missionaries, and will facilitate their contact with the Oblates in Belarus. We also extend a special thanks to the diocesan seminarian Eugene Shymanovich for his generous cooperation in the realization of this Oblate venture.

We invite you all to have a look at our website and wish you a pleasant viewing!

MEDITERRANEAN PROVINCE

Spreading the Spirituality of Communion

Fr. Domenico ARENA is an Oblate of the Mediterranean Province, who returned to Italy after more than thirty years of mission in Africa. Currently he carries out his mission mostly in the teaching of missiology, having at heart to promote missionary communion as proposed by the Magisterium of the Church today. For a year now, with the encouragement of his superiors, he has been part of an inter-congregational community. It is a community that is at the service of the Work of Mary (better known as the *Focolare* Movement), a point of reference for many religious throughout the world and eager to live their vocation in the light of the Testament of Jesus.

Recently, last October, he went to Burundi to participate in an initiative promoted by the Work of Mary, to collaborate with other friends of this movement in the animation of three retreats planned for priests and religious of Burundi on the theme of "Spirituality of Communion". A spirituality launched by the post-conciliar magisterium to help all the components of the people of God to live in mutual love and thus build that Church, which wants to present itself to the world as "home and school of communion" (*Novo millennio ineunte* n. 43). The initiative wanted by the Bishops of Burundi and carried out in collaboration with the Foyer de Charité of Bujumbura, has been supported in many ways by the members of the *Focolare* Movement of the country and sponsored by the Episcopal Conference of the United States.

The program was intended to accompany the priests towards the discovery of the evangelical value of communion, starting with the exegetical commentary of Chapter XVII of the Gospel of John. It should be noted that the animation involved the intervention of three people, Florence Gillet (a member of the Focolare movement), abbé Léon Sirabahenda, (a Burundian priest) and Father Dominic himself. This three-voice intervention was an innovative method that made it possible to integrate biblical study into the ecclesial and pastoral experience of priests and religious.

"To me, Fr. Dominic said, the interventions were concerning God's Love as the source of communion; God's Word as the way to build unity and universal brotherhood; and Mary, as a model to look up to in order to grow in union with God and with our neighbour. I gladly accepted to engage myself in the preparation of these themes also because they were connected to our oblate charism".

The three retreats that took place in an atmosphere of silence according to the tradition of the Foyers de Charité, also had a meeting each day of sharing between priests divided into groups and the communication of life experiences, by lay men and women, at the end of the two conferences scheduled each day.

He further said, "Participating in the spiritual animation of these retreats was a great grace for me. It made me feel very close to our Founder who had shown great enthusiasm for the reality of communion. It was the first time I had done this service in collaboration with others and the results were better than expected. The Lord also used the unity that had been established among us animators to accompany us with His grace; and so we were able to touch with our own hands the action of the Holy Spirit. The 149 priests, five of whom were religious, generously welcomed the message of communion and many of them proposed to live it and bring it into their own environments. We animators were full of joy because it seemed to us that spreading the ideal of communion was a way of proclaiming the heart of the Gospel. I think that this could bring so many benefits to the Church and the nation of Burundi in terms of peace and reconciliation".

CENTRAL EUROPEAN PROVINCE Oblate worlds meet

During the first weekend of October, Oblate lay associates, who share with us the charism of St. Eugene and our apostolate, gathered in the Oblate House in Hünfeld, Germany.

The Oblate laity of the Central European Province meet twice a year. In May, at the so-called "Eugenmeeting", which usually takes place in various locations in Germany and the Czech Republic, we celebrate the feast of St. Eugene together. It is an informal gathering where we pray, eat, and talk together. There we deepen our sense of various aspects of the Founder's charism, while learning more about the reality of our communities. The other meeting is usually held in October in Hünfeld, and it is the gathering where they discuss more about themselves, and especially renew their commitment to the Oblate charism. In addition to these two occasions, the individual regional groups, always linked to an Oblate community, organize their own meetings during the year.

For this October's meeting in Hünfeld, we left the Czech Republic in a bus and three other vehicles. We are growing...! In the Czech Republic, there are in fact two groups of members: a group consisting of "the seniors" that is linked to the community of Klokoty, and a group of seven young members linked to the community of Plasy. This time, three of the five new young candidates also went with us. The journey was long but our joy of being together made the time pass quickly. This year there was also a "special guest" with us: Saverio Sapia from Italy, who came to the Czech Republic at the invitation of one of our youth who had participated in a popular mission in Italy last spring. Simply, the Oblate worlds meet. Saverio is a member of the MGC (Italian Oblate youth group). He shared his vocational history (vocation was in fact the main theme of our meeting), and his encounter with the charism of St. Eugene was one of the high points of the gathering.

On the way, we stopped to take with us Tom Harke, a young German who studies in Erlangen, almost halfway between Hünfeld and Plasy, and who often came to our meetings in the Czech

Republic or to participate in our apostolate. Yes, the oblate worlds meet. Tom was part of the group of four candidates who made their first association at this meeting on Saturday night. The same night, others renewed their commitment. It was certainly a very profound and a touching moment. The members were all in a circle in the sanctuary of the church in Hünfeld, and, one after the other, they pronounced their names promising to live the charism in their daily lives. The new ones received the small Oblate crosses as a sign of belonging to the family. Then it was time

for handshakes, hugs, pictures, and of course a beer! Let us not forget that the Central European Province geographically belongs to the world's superpower in the production and consumption of beer!

That wasn't all... We went on a trip, presented our experience of last year, and elected a new leader at the provincial level. However, above all, the most important idea was, as always, the meeting between us. The family grows and the Oblate worlds meet.

Latin America

BRAZIL

A time to celebrate, a time to remember with joy

"We are called to live for Christ, to spend ourselves entirely for his sake, to serve him and to make him known to others." Saint Eugene of Mazenod.

On November 4, 2018 the Parish of Saint Eugene de Mazenod in the diocese of Campo Limpo – SP celebrated its 20 years of foundation. It was a time of grace for us Oblates and the parishioners to praise God for all the blessings He had poured upon the community during the past twenty years.

The Eucharistic celebration and the fellowship lunch were the highlights of the day. The current parish priest, Father José CÁSSIO, and his vicar Fr. José de PAULO, together with Oblate seminarians and the parishioners had organized the event beautifully. The Eucharistic celebration was presided by Fr. Rubens Pedro CABRAL, the first Parish Priest, with the presence of Fr. Paulo MEDEIROS, who also served in the parish for many years.

This special occasion was considered, as the *kairos* to acknowledge and thank the laity, the Fathers, the Deacon, the Religious, and the Seminarians who have selflessly given themselves to the Parish. The fruits that we have been able to reap today were generated from the love, effort and dedication of many people of yester years. We remember with affection the beginning of this community and of so many Oblates, some already in eternity, who spared no effort to provide pastoral care in order to arrive

thus far.

It was on November 1, 1998 that Bishop Emilio, Bishop of the Diocese of Campo Limpo, decreed the creation of our Parish of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. However, to count on greater participation of the faithful, we transferred the celebration to Sunday, November 4. Everybody gathered on that day, took time to remember stories, renew friendships, build bonds, and generate unity in communion and participation, thus building the kingdom of God among us!

Every celebration also has to be a moment to reaffirm our commitments. We too, took up with enthusiasm what Pope Francis asks us to be – to be an "outgoing Church", a Church that reaches out; not concerned with itself, with its own structures and achievements, but rather able to go, to move, to find the children of God in their real situation and to heal their wounds.

May Saint Eugene and Mary Immaculate protect us and intercede for us all! And may the Holy Spirit impel us on our mission, encouraging us in the years to come. I conclude with the spiritual testament of Saint Eugene de Mazenod: "Among you practice charity, charity and zeal for the salvation of souls!"

FRENCH GUIANA

A missionary appeal to Oblates

Fr. Ellince MARTYR, Provincial of Haiti and I, visited the 13 Oblates of French Guiana from October 15th to 24th, 2018. The purpose of our visit was to learn more about their realities and

to consult them individually regarding the new Mission Mandate for 2018-2021.

French Guiana, as a French overseas department (DOM) and European territory on the South American continent, attracts many citizens from neighboring countries in search of a better life. Thus, the Guyanese population doubles every 20 years while the GDP per capita decreases regularly. Its population in 2015 was 259,865 inhabitants. More than half of these are of foreign origin: Amerindians, Bushinengues, Creoles, Europeans, the Hmong, Brazilians, Chinese, Surinamese, and Haitians are all found here!

In the past three years, more than 11,000 asylum applications have been filed in French Guiana, and 88% of them came from Haiti. The school system is also overwhelmed. Often the migrant children have no place in the middle and high schools. Due to lack of reception facilities, shantytowns are multiplying and in the face of this unprecedented migratory wave, French Guiana is at a dead end.

OMI Missionaries in French Guiana -

Of the thirty-seven priests in French Guiana, thirteen are Oblates. The objective of all of them is to bring the local Church, composed of Guianese Creoles, Hmong, Brazilians, Haitians, Surinamese, and Amerindians, on a path of living together; shifting from a multicultural to an intercultural model of fraternal universal communion.

We were struck by the closeness to and concern for the people, on the part of the Oblates, especially for the neediest in the rural forests as well as in the populated neighborhoods. In every place, we saw the missionaries' efforts toward intercultural mixture in the membership of the choirs, catechists' groups, pastoral councils and other ecclesial structures.

The country is comprised of one single diocese, the diocese of Cayenne. In the context of the diocesan grand missions begun three years ago, the Oblates continue to help parishioners to form house-visiting teams and they themselves get actively involved in it. The goal is to gradually form small neighborhood ecclesial cells, and giving them formation for evangelization.

We continue our presence among the Hmong (in Cacao) who greatly appreciate their Oblate pastor, Gary MOROSE. We also serve among the Haitians who since 1960 continue to be the largest number of migrants. We want to increase our work with Haitians, by communicating with them in Haitian Creole since many of them do not speak French yet. We wish, without limiting ourselves, to revive a true pastoral missionary presence among these Caribbean newcomers with social difficulties and to integrate them into the parishes.

Due to the massive arrival of immigrants and the development of new neighborhoods, the diocese is opening new parishes. Wilson FOUQUET, a young Oblate, is meeting with the young Afro-Surinamese - who are tempted by violence and delinquency. He is launching a musical 'club' to help them organize and develop their talents.

All the Oblates of the Mission wish to live in communities for a fruitful living of their Oblate charism. They believe that by doing so, they may be more effective, in carrying out a missionary pastoral ministry in our Oblate style. With the arrival of three young Oblates, Harry, Nathaniel and Ronel, it was possible to form two other small communities. They want to develop a missionary program with goals and structures so that they can call Oblates from other units.

Having participated actively in the formation of the laity through the efforts of Georges LAUDIN, Antoine CHYV, Elie LAGRILLE and some others, the present Oblates wish to relaunch this service to the committed laity of the diocese, particularly in the fields of Justice and Peace, and youth ministry.

Oblates arrived here from France in 1977 to serve the Hmong; from Haiti in 1997 to serve the Haitians; and from Brazil in 2002 to serve the Brazilians. Having had Oblates from France, Laos, Vietnam, Haiti, Brazil, and Cameroon, we do not want to leave our Haitian missionaries alone and they themselves do not want that. In this multicultural land, we consider the international and intercultural dimension in our Oblate communities of great importance, in strict accord with the General Chapter of 2016.

As provincials of France and Haiti, we commit ourselves to seek more missionaries from other units and to contact Oblate Major Superiors from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Call to the Congregation -

For all these reasons, we, the provincials of France and Haiti, believe that it is relevant and eminently missionary to continue our presence in French Guiana. In this Amazonian land, which is a small laboratory of cultural globalization, the integral human development in its anthropological dignity and its spiritual hope, await us.

We therefore appeal to Oblate missionaries ready to meet these challenges. We are looking for Missionary Oblates who possess the following skills and talents:

- speakers in French, Portuguese, Spanish, Hmong, English and Creole;
- men who can engage with people in their own neighborhoods who are not intimidated by shantytowns or the rainforest;
- missionaries ready to be founding apostles of Christian communities;
- men, committed to justice and peace and ecology;
- those who wish to be champions of interculturality, capable of universality and adaptation;
- musicians, youth leaders, teachers of adult catechesis and Bible education

Fr. Vincent GRUBER (Provincial of France)

PARAGUAY

Indigenous pilgrimage

In 1987, as a first-time experiment, some indigenous representatives were invited to be present and to read a reading at the Sunday Mass during the novena in preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a big celebration in Paraguay. Paraguay is one of the most "Catholic"

countries in the continent, with the Basilica of Our Lady of Miracles, Caacupé, its national shrine, which gets filled with devotees in December. That Mass with indigenous representatives was so impressive that it was repeated the following year, without even thinking of creating a tradition that would have an ever greater participation with each year.

This year, there were 3,500 indigenous people who, for months, prepared to pay for more than 50 buses that were needed to transport them to Caacupé. The great majority comes from the Apostolic Vicariate of Pilcomayo in the Chaco (which, since 1925 is entrusted to the Oblates), for whom it is about 500 km away.

There was a coordinating team, led by the first indigenous priest, who prepared the Mass in detail, making space for the representatives of each ethnic group present at the occasion. Various languages, dresses and typical costumes, dances, symbols: everything had its place inside the celebration. The choir is normally entrusted to one of the many "Nivaçle" choirs; they are not only the ethnic group with the highest percentage of Catholics, but also born musicians. This year, it was the choir of "Corazón de María", whose 80 members managed to get uniforms and special folders. It was feast for the eyes and for the ears as well!

Every year, it is Monsignor Lucio Alfert OMI, head of the pastoral care for the indigenous in the Episcopal Conference (since 1986!), who preaches and presides at the Mass, which is broadcast throughout the country. His inspiring homily is always a much-anticipated feature of the day. Despite his age and illness, he was able, once again, to put his finger on the wounds of our society and awaken us: lack of respect, expulsion of the indigenous from their lands, and corruption (even within the communities themselves). He urged young people not to fall into drugs and vices, but to know how to be proud of their origin and serve their communities.

There is no doubt that the Indians have learned how to take their place, since they discovered that the "Virgin of Caacupé" is the Mother of all.

Anniversaries for December 2018

65 Years of priesthood

1953-12-19 Fr. Desmond O'Donnell Anglo-Irish

60 Years of religious life

1958-12-08 Bro. Paul Görlich Central European
 1958-12-08 Bro. Willy Grütjens Belgium and Netherlands

60 Years of priesthood

1958-12-27 Fr. Joannès Rivoire France

50 Years of religious life

1968-12-08 Bro. Raymond Carrière Notre-Dame-du-Cap
 1968-12-08 Fr. Rénald Doyon Notre-Dame-du-Cap

50 Years of priesthood

1968-12-18 Fr. Josef Essl Central European
 1968-12-18 Fr. Christopher O'Leary Philippines
 1968-12-21 Fr. Paul Decock Southern Africa
 1968-12-21 Fr. Paolo Miceli Thailand
 1968-12-22 Fr. Gerhard Löffler Central European
 1968-12-22 Fr. Karl Meindl Central European

25 Years of priesthood

1993-12-05 Fr. Lourdy Dorismond Haiti
 1993-12-05 Fr. Maxime Eugène Haiti
 1993-12-05 Fr. Frans Van Wyk Namibia
 1993-12-27 Fr. Brian E. Harris Australia

Prayers for our Deceased
No. 112-125

Name	Prov./Del.	Age	Died at	Date
Fr. Nobert, Léo-Paul	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	87	Richelieu	26/12/2018
Fr. Dufault, Norbert	Lacombe	94	Winnipeg	24/12/2018
Fr. Dwyer, Patrick	Australia	78	Dublin	23/12/2018
Fr. Nisiewicz, Roman	Poland	64	Koden	13/12/2018
Fr. de Mel, Widanalage Stanley	Colombo	81	Colombo	08/12/2018
Fr. Byrne, Paul	Anglo-Irish	86	Dublin	04/12/2018
Fr. Quiogue, Vicente Ramon	Philippines	81	Cotabato City	01/12/2018
Fr. Clark, William	United States	89	Belleville	29/11/2018
Fr. Vethanayagam, Hilarion	Jaffna	89	Jaffna	29/11/2018
Fr. Carricaburu, Oscar	Cruz del Sur	67	Paraná	29/11/2018
Fr. Parent, Norman	United States	81	Burlington	18/11/2018
Fr. Lynde, Michel	France	92	Strasbourg	12/11/2018
Fr. Kupka, Alfons	Poland	87	Lubliniec	08/11/2018
Fr. Lombardi, Mario	Mediterranean	82	Travagliato	01/11/2018

“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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