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Letter of the Superior General to the Congregation for the Feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod

Dear Brother Oblates and all our Brothers and Sisters living the Oblate Charism,

The feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod always brings us the renewed desire to live more faithfully as he insisted: with charity among us and zeal for the salvation of souls. May this day be a special day of prayer, communion and joyful celebration!

Very shortly, in July, the Major Superiors of the Congregation will be meeting for the Interchapter in Obra, Poland. We will be evaluating how the decisions taken in the 2016 General Chapter have been carried out and how to further implement them; the remote preparation for the next Chapter will also begin at the Interchapter. Please pray to the Holy Spirit so that we may achieve greater effectiveness in responding to the Chapter directions.

In January of this year, the members of the Central Government spent several days in Palermo, Sicily, following the footsteps of Eugene de Mazenod. It was in Palermo that he spent the last stage of his exile, from 1799 to 1802, before finally returning to France. He would have been there from the age of 17 to 20 years. We were guided on this pilgrimage by a member of MAMI, Enzo David, and by the president of the secular Institute, Oblate Missionary Cooperators of the Immaculate ((COMI), Ileana Chinnici.

We spent hours in the streets of Palermo, seeing the places where Eugene lived, the palazzi of important families whose circles he frequented and the churches he attended. We accompanied his life as a young noble, stopping at various sites to read excerpts from his letters and memoirs. We came in touch with different aspects of Eugene's personality and we recognized experiences from his sojourn in Palermo that surely left marks on

his personality, his future and the Oblate charism. We visited what had been a working-class neighborhood of the leather-tanners where he dwelled for a short period. He lived among these laborers, met them in the streets, saw them washing the animal hides in the river and working in their shops. He was aware of their hard toil and their plight.

Also, his close attachment to the Cannizzaro family and, especially to the Duchess, whom he loved as a mother, was an important influence on him. Not only was her maternal presence and love deeply significant in these youthful years when his own mother had returned already to France, but the Duchess was a woman of faith and engaged Eugene in the responsibility for much of her charitable work for the poor. This ministry brought him directly in touch with the difficulties experienced by the most impoverished inhabitants of Palermo and must have increased his own compassion and concern for the poor.

Looking back over two hundred years ago to this period, it certainly contributed to the formation of a man whose first sermon at the Madeleine fills us with pride and expresses our way of seeing the faces of the poor.

"Come now and learn from us what you are in the eyes of faith. You, the poor of Jesus Christ, the afflicted and wretched, the sick and suffering and covered with sores, etc., whom misery overwhelms, my brethren, my dear brethren, my dear respectable brethren, listen to me. You are the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the co-heirs of his eternal Kingdom, the cherished portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of Saint Peter, the holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are, in some way, gods: 'Dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes!'"

Eugene's life in Sicily increased his closeness to the poor, his awareness of the challenges they faced each day, his love for them and his respect for their dignity as beloved sons and daughters of God.

Along with visiting places connected to Eugene, mentioned in his letters from this period, we also accompanied present-day Oblates and members of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) and COMI as they live the Oblate charism today. It was striking to see the new place of Oblate ministry in the heart of old Palermo, Saint Nicholas of Tolentino Parish, recently taken on by the Mediterranean Province. An international community of Oblates has been established in this parish with a missionary outreach.

Two Oblates have been ministering to the migrants and refugees for many years, while living with other Oblates at Madonna delle Grazie Parish on the outskirts of Palermo. They have been commuting back and forth each day to the old part of Palermo for ministry where the immigrants and refugees are clustered. The Oblates emphasized that the new place of ministry at St. Nicholas is innovative in two ways.

First of all, the ministry with immigrants and refugees will be the common ministry of all the members of the Oblate apostolic community, with the parish as their base. They are actively integrating in various ways, lay associates, young people living the Oblate charism and members of COMI in the mission. The other new dimension to this apostolic community is that the Oblates are living at the parish house, right in the midst of the poor, among the many immigrants and refugees coming from around the world to Sicily.

On January 27th, the members of the Central Government celebrated the Eucharist with the local Oblates at St. Nicholas Church. It was packed with people of every shade of human flesh, celebrating in many tongues the Eucharist, each contributing something beautiful from his or her local culture in prayers, songs and dances. We saw the new faces of the poor. We encountered Christ the migrant, the refugee. It was a beautiful celebration of communion.

In order to take on responsibility for this parish in the heart of Palermo, the Mediterranean Province had to decide to withdraw from the parish on the

outskirts of Palermo, Madonna delle Grazie. Some 15 years before, the Oblates had taken the responsibility for this parish and gradually it had become a very life-filled parish community with strong lay leadership and many ministries. The Central Government had an evening social with the leadership of this parish, and in speaking with them, I found it both truly surprising and refreshing that they, the parish leadership, were not complaining and lamenting that the Oblates were withdrawing from the parish!

The leadership, very conscious of the Oblate charism, have understood that the Oblates have accomplished our mission at their parish and, called to be faithful to our charism, we must now move on to new missionary territory. They wish us success in this new project so that we continue to respond to the urgent needs of the poor. Congratulations to the Mediterranean Province, responding to the call of recent General Chapters to welcome new missionary challenges and to seek the new faces of the poor, even if this means having to give up very good ministry!

Being in Palermo was a time of grace for the members of the Central Government. Those days brought us a deep awareness of the last period of exile of young Eugene de Mazenod. It also showed us many Missionary Oblates, MAMI members and COMI, living the Oblate charism today, not only in Palermo, but also in strong apostolic communities, diverse ministries and collaboration with laity and youth in Misilmeri and Messina, in a beautiful communion of life and mission. An added touch to this rich experience was that during these days, while being warmly welcomed by the Oblates and the Sicilian people, we were also invited to enjoy the delicious food and wine of this enchanting island!

In communion with our first brother Oblates, who chanted the Salve Regina around their beloved Father as he lay dying, we invoke the Mother of Mercy with tender devotion as one Oblate family. Let us ask Mary to help us be creatively faithful and audacious in living the missionary charism bequeathed to us by our Founder. Saint Eugene, pray for us!

Happy feast day!

Father Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General
May 21, 2019

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

CONFERENCE OF OBLATION AND MARTYRDOM

Let us be challenged by them.

*Fr. Warren A. Brown, OMI
General Councilor for Canada-United States*

The conference on Oblation and Martyrdom scheduled for May 4-7 in Pozuelo, Spain will be an opportunity for the members of the Oblate or Mazenodian Family to come together and reflect on an important theme that goes right to the heart of the spirituality of our Oblate charism from Saint Eugene de Mazenod. From his personal experiences of life as a political exile during his own formation as a boy and young man, living apart from his native land and in a separated family life, Eugene came to a profound spiritual experience one Good Friday when the love of Christ poured into his heart and he profoundly felt that despite his own sinfulness and inadequacy, Christ loved him totally and had forgiven all of his sins through his death on the cross. This great spiritual catharsis led Eugene to the realization of his vocation to become a priest and to follow in his own way in the footsteps of Jesus and the Apostles.

Even as a seminarian preparing for priestly ordination in retreat, Eugene reflected on what it would mean for him to imitate Christ so much in his sacrificial love on the cross that he could become a martyr for the faith and even a martyr for charity in his ministry to the poor and most abandoned, such as to the prisoners whom he visited in the prison in Aix. "...What persuades me that this factor really accounts quite largely for this repugnance I have for dying, is that it seems to me I have no fear of it when I envisage it as happening through martyrdom or in a hospital in service to the victims of the plague..." (Eugene de Mazenod, "December 1811 Retreat notes", in *Spiritual Writings*, vol. 14, p. 221) In fact, we know that Eugene as a young priest while serving these prisoners contracted typhus and was near the point of death out of his great concern for these social outcasts. After his priestly ordination and several times

in his ministerial experiences, he remarked on his readiness to be a martyr, beginning with the intentions he prayed at the celebration of his First Mass: "First mass, Christmas Eve: for myself... The grace of making reparation for my faults by a life wholly and solely employed in his service and for the salvation of souls. The Spirit of J.C. Final perseverance, and even martyrdom or at least death while tending victims of the plague, or any other kind of death for God's glory or the salvation of souls." (Eugene de Mazenod, "Mass intentions", in *Spiritual Writings*, Vol. 14, p. 230.)

Therefore, the theme of this conference takes an important experience from the life of St. Eugene and invites us to reflect upon our Oblate spirituality and our history as missionaries who have followed the example of our Founder and Christ the Savior, giving their lives in service to the poor and abandoned and for the salvation of souls. The conference will take place in a very appropriate and significant location for our Congregation, the Oblate house in Pozuelo, Spain, which is the home of our own Oblate Spanish Martyrs.

The speakers for the conference are select Oblate experts from different parts of our Oblate world who will speak of certain Oblates in our history who have given their lives heroically as martyrs. By reflecting upon the lives of these Oblate predecessors, we can apply their situations to our own and provide us with inspiration and insight into how we can better live our Oblate charism in today's contemporary world with its own challenges and opportunities in the faith. Besides the international group of Oblates who will give presentations of Oblate martyrs from the various regions, the list of speakers will also include experts on Martyrdom in the 20th Century and more specifically the situation of the Church in Spain during the time of the Spanish Civil War. Other important local participants to the conference will be some family members of our Oblate Spanish Martyrs. The Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, will also be present and will celebrate Eucharist with the participants. Oblate Sponsors of this Conference on Oblation and Martyrdom are the Mediterranean Province and the General Services of Postulation and Oblate Studies.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

General Mission Committee's first meeting

The General Mission Committee, which was established last year by the Superior General in Council in response to a recommendation from the 36th General Chapter, met for the first time last February 25—March 1, 2019 at the General House in Rome.

All six members of the Committee were present—

- Antonio MESSERI from Cruz del Sur Province, representing the Region of Latin America;
- Jaroslaw RÓŻAŃSKI from the Province of Poland, representing the Region of Europe;
- Romeo SANIEL from the Philippine Province, representing the Asia-Oceania Region;
- Marcel THIAW from the Delegation of Senegal, representing the Africa-Madagascar Region;
- Fernando VELAZQUEZ of the United States Province, representing the Canada-US Region; and Ramon BERNABE, the Assistant General for Mission.

Having to work in English, Spanish, and French, the committee was assisted by three translators—Bonga MAJOLA, Jean Marie SENE, and Joseph IRUDAYA RAJ.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

A new print of our Constitutions and Rules

A new print of our Constitutions and Rules has been prepared and is now ready for limited distribution.

It is not a new edition, it is basically the 2012 edition with some editorial adjustments and corrections, and with the changes made at the 2016 General Chapter. Since we have printed a limited number of copies, this print is **not for every Oblate**, it is meant to be **only for our Novitiates** for the coming years. Major Superiors and/or Novice masters may place their order by writing to Fr. Arun Rozario (genpersec.omi@gmail.com) or to myself (archiati@omigen.org).

The main items in their agenda, as approved by the Superior General in Council, were about

- getting to know each other and the mission contexts where they were coming from;
- surfacing expectations;
- familiarizing with the Statutes of the committee and establishing arrangements for their communication and collaboration;
- getting an overview of realities in the Congregation; and reflecting and sharing missiological insights on four issues—*inter-religious dialogue*; *mission in a “post-Christian” context*; *promoting missiology* and *missionary formation*; and
- promoting inter-culturality in mission.

To achieve their objectives for this meeting, the committee developed four “working papers” on the main issues and reflected on them. They also decided that the papers will be shared with the Regions, other Oblates, and with the Superior General and Council, in order to enrich the reflections further, and then to identify areas about which discernment and animation tools will be designed to help Oblate Units in moving the mission forward.

The committee also discussed some ideas on how the Congregation can celebrate the Extraordinary Mission Month this coming October 2019.

[org](mailto:archiati@omigen.org)). As we did in the past for other Oblate publications, the book is free of charge, but the shipping costs will be credited to the Units that make the request. When sending an order, please indicate the language desired and the number of copies. Please give the exact address (not only the postal office box, if any, but also the physical location) where the parcel is to be sent, along with a phone number that can be called in case of a problem. Without all these elements, the parcel will not be sent.

An exact copy (in PDF format) of the printed version of our Constitutions and Rules is available for download on our website at ... We take this opportunity to wish you a fruitful Lenten season!

Passing on the batons**GENERAL ADMINISTRATION**

With the consent of his Council meeting in Plenary Session on May 9, 2019, the Superior General has appointed Fr. Mokone Joseph RATHAKOA as the Superior of the OMI General House in Rome, and Fr. Henricus Asodo ISTOYO as the Superior of the Eugene de Mazenod International Centre in Aix-en-Provence. Fr. Thomas KLOSTERKAMP, the present Superior of the General House, and Fr. Krzysztof ZIELEND, the present Superior in Aix, will say good-bye to their respective communities in the coming months.

Henricus Asodo Istoyo, OMI

Born on July 14, 1974, in Ambarawa, Archdiocese of Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, Fr. Asodo pronounced his First Vows as an Oblate on August 11, 1996, at Yogyakarta, Indonesia. After completing his philosophical and theological studies, he was ordained a priest on December 7, 2003, in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, Indonesia.

His first appointment was as the Assistant priest at Trinity Parish in Jakarta from 2003 – 2005. That year, he received a different obedience to serve in the same capacity once again, this time at the Calvary Parish in Jakarta. In 2007, he went to Melbourne, Australia, to follow a course on Formation in Spiritual Accompaniment while serving as a member of the formation team of St. Mary's Seminary, Mulgrave. The following year he returned to his country and was appointed a formator at *Wisma de Mazenod*, the Oblate Scholasticate in Yogyakarta. From 2009 to 2013 he served as the Superior of the Scholasticate. It was in 2013 that Fr. General called him to be a member of the newly-formed international community at St. Eugene de Mazenod International Centre (CIEM) in Aix-en-Provence, France.

Fr. Mokone Joseph Rathokoa, OMI

Fr. Mokone was born on November 3, 1965 in Grieselsdam, in the Free State Province of the Republic of South Africa. After entering Oblate formation in 1988, he professed his first vows on February 6, 1991 at Our Lady of Hope Novitiate in Johannesburg. As a Scholastic, he had his initial formation in Natal Province at St. Joseph Scholasticate, Cedara, from 1990-1993, and continued in Rome at the International Scholasticate from 1993-1996. After professing the Final Vows in December 1995, he returned to South Africa and, on December 6, 1997, was ordained a priest at his home parish of Emmaus, Botshabelo, in the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein.

Fr. Mokone received his first obedience as a priest to the former Central Province of South Africa. However, he worked at the Pre-novitiate, Rayton, in the former Northern Province as a Formator from 1997-2000. Then he was sent to Rome, to study at the Institute of Psychology of the Gregorian University, from 2000-2004, to equip himself with more knowledge and the skills needed for a formator. On his return, he became the Superior of St. Joseph Scholasticate from 2004-2009. Mokone was then asked to be the Novice Master at Our Lady of Hope Novitiate, Germiston, in South Africa, where he served from 2010-2011. It was in 2011 that he was appointed Provincial of the former Central Province of South Africa. He remained in that office until the amalgamation of the three South African Oblate provinces in 2018.

While remembering with gratitude the immense services rendered by the two outgoing superiors for their respective communities and the Congregation at large, we wish all the very best for the new leaders, Frs. Mokone and Asodo.

Africa-Madagascar

WESTERN SAHARA

Pope's Historic Visit

The Spanish Oblate Mario León DORADO is the Apostolic Prefect of Western Sahara. Here he shares with us his experience of the recent visit of Pope Francis to Morocco.

On March 30 and 31, the Pope made an historic visit to Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco – a visit that I had the privilege to follow up close, on behalf of the entire mission and the Prefecture. On Saturday, in the esplanade of the Hassan Tower and under a torrential rain – “the Pope brings the blessing of God,” said more than one Moroccan, - “we wait with stoicism and with great joy and expectation the arrival of His Majesty. King Mohamed VI with Pope Francis.” Finally, they arrived together. It seems that there were weeks and weeks of negotiation. In his speech, the Holy Father explained his agenda and his concerns: “the culture of dialogue as the way forward; collaboration, as mode of action; reciprocal knowledge, as the method and criterion” of the already famous Abu Dhabi document. That is to say, the interreligious dialogue, lived from the model that the Oblates can claim as ours: closeness and fraternal, daily coexistence. He also spoke much about the migrants who live in pain, misery, loneliness, abuse and great suffering.

From the esplanade of the Hassan Tower, soaked to the bone, we went to the Mohamed VI Institute, where Morocco prepares and trains the Imams of the Kingdom and those of up to ten other countries, including France. It was a sign of rapprochement, a desire to become acquainted, and of hospitality. The day ended with a visit to the headquarters of CARITAS RABAT. It was a private and very restricted meeting, since the site is small, and the Pope wanted to meet mostly with immigrants: 60 migrants representing different cities. A collaborator of our Dakhla parish was fortunate to have participated. He came out delighted.

WESTERN SAHARA

The disabled Muslim who saved the church

Enrique Vaquerizo told for the Spanish online newspaper El Confidencial the incredible story of the man who saved the last Catholic Church

Sunday was an important day. For the first hour, the Pope visited a center of assistance that the Daughters of Charity have in Temara, in the outskirts of Rabat. And then came the meeting with the Church of Morocco. As an Oblate, I could feel at home: religious women, religious men, priests ... the cathedral of Rabat was overflowing. I invite everyone to read and reread his message. His words not only confirm our faith, but also our life and our mission. How we Oblates are to be and to live, in a specific context, like this one. Thank you, Holy Father!

The day culminated with the Eucharist, held at the Mulay Abdallah sports center in Rabat, with a capacity of 10,000 people (8,000 in the stands plus 2,000 on the track). Upon entering the central corridor and seeing all that crowd, I realized how much the visit of Pope Francis has been a sign, not only for us, the local church, but for the whole country of Morocco. An entire country has followed with attention the steps and the words of this "pilgrim of peace and fraternity". More than ever, the church has been a clear visible sign.

It is an historic milestone for us, Oblates of the Sahara, and for the whole Church of North Africa; but an historical milestone that we must see in light of two others: the Beatification of the Martyrs of Algeria, (Msgr. Pierre Claverie and his companion martyrs) and the Pope's visit to Abu Dhabi, (for the first time, to the Arabian Peninsula) , in which he signed the Document on Human Fraternity. Together they highlight an entire agenda and purpose: to make interreligious dialogue one of the priorities to which we should unite ecological conversion (Laudato Si) and the poor and marginalized (in our case, with the face of a "sub-Saharan" migrant).

Thus, the Pope has not only come to confirm our life and our faith. He has also confirmed our mission, the mission of the Oblates and the mission of the Church of North Africa.

in Dakhla (Sahara) Our Lady of Carmen from destruction. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have been serving there since 1954.

The traces of the Spanish occupation in the Sahara have almost completely disappeared, but in the area

of Western Sahara the signs of the Iberian presence can still be found in what was once called Villa Cisneros, now more commonly known as Dakhla.

While in the last century it was still a city that housed a flourishing Spanish citadel, today of the colonial past only retains the manholes and the church. The building can now be visited thanks to **Semlali Mohamed Fadel**. Although Muslim, you can meet him on Sundays while crossing the aisles of the church in his wheelchair. Sahrawi, Muslim, disabled, Semlali Mohamed Fadel, known as "Bouh", knows and talks about the church as if it were a tourist guide. Born in 1965 and the son of a Sahrawi soldier linked to the Spanish army, he was sent to Spain at the age of four after contracting polio. He spent six years in Las Palmas with the brothers of San Juan de Dios and decided to return to Sahara in 1982, but it took little to realize that Villa Cisneros as he knew it no longer existed. After the withdrawal of the European colonial powers from North Africa, in fact, the territory of Western Sahara was occupied initially by Mauritania and then by Morocco.

Bouh, who embodies both the Spanish and Sahrawi identities, and after growing up in a Catholic reality, found himself in a country that he did not feel was his own. "I didn't know much about Islam, I had forgotten how to speak Arabic... In Las Palmas I went to mass but I didn't take communion, I was in church but everyone knew that I was a Muslim and they respected me. On my return I suddenly became a stranger".

Bouh sought refuge in a place that could be familiar to him, but once he arrived at the church of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* he found it closed and occupied by soldiers. The Moroccan army in fact began to use it as its headquarters after the Spanish retreat.

"When the Spaniards left, the Christian community of the city disappeared with them. In the years following the occupation there were no more than 5 or 6 Spaniards. The Moroccans did not leave anything here that recalled Spain. Father **Luis Ignacio ROIS**, one of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in Dakhla, also remembers those times. "In 1975 everyone left, only the missionaries remained, they remained out of friendship with the Sahrawis and because the Vatican asked us to stay. The Moroccans occupied the church for several years to put pressure on them".

Although the Spanish buildings had already been in ruins for some time, and against UNESCO recommendations, in 2004 the government of Rabat decided to eliminate even the last vestiges of the colonial past by destroying a Spanish fort of the nineteenth century, the oldest building in Western Sahara. If Bouh had not intervened, the same fate would have happened to the church of the former Spanish enclave of Villa Cisneros. At the sight of the soldiers who were about to destroy the sacred building and had already demolished the rear, a neighbor went to call Bouh, who stood between the church and the digger. "The military told me that (the church) was useless, abandoned and would fall... Plus it was a Christian place and they were Muslims. I answered that no, it was ours, it belonged to the Sahrawi people and no one could touch it. I ran to call my neighbors and we didn't move until the governor arrived".

From that moment on Bouh promoted a campaign of social unrest, tried to contact the Apostolic Prefect, the authorities of El Aaiùn and the Vatican, until the governor of Dakhla agreed to leave the church. In return, he asked for an end to the protests about the back that had already been destroyed, and now *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* stands as the only testimony to a bygone era.

Many people now attend the church, such as Pierre André Sené, a native of Senegal. As soon as he crossed the Moroccan border he looked for a Catholic sanctuary but could not find one. It was thanks to the cross around his neck that an old Sahrawi indicated the direction for the church of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*. The first time he attended the mass there were only two French tourists, so Pierre began to invite the other migrants to join him. Today Pierre is responsible for the projects developed by the Catholic Mission in union with Caritas in favor of migrants. "The migrant who arrives does not know anyone, has no accommodation or money after months of travel. Here we accompany them and help them with medical assistance."

Father **Luis Ignacio Rois** assures us that the migration has reinvigorated the Catholic community of Dakhla and tells us how many migrants, once they have made the decision to cross the Mediterranean, go to him and ask him for a blessing.

Asia-Oceania

TURKMENISTAN**A blossoming flower**

ASHGABAT, 20. A flower that is blooming in ever less arid terrain: that is the situation of the Church in Turkmenistan. It is a nation with an overwhelmingly Muslim majority and a Church currently made up of two priests and about two hundred and fifty faithful.

"When I arrived twenty-two years ago," Fr. Andrzej Madej - a Polish priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and superior of the 'sui iuris' mission in Turkmenistan - told Fides agency, "there were no Catholic faithful. Over time, I saw a community rise before my eyes. Being a witness of this birth was a great grace of God, because it means having participated in a birth that was troubled, but full of hope: we live the experience of the Apostolic Church, which starts from scratch and is based on the power of the word of God."

During the period of domination by the Soviet Union, Catholics arrived in Turkmen soil from other regions of Eastern Europe, such as Poland, and considered the faith their greatest value.

"They paid a heavy price to protect it from the impositions of scientific atheism. Today, however, there is a certain difficulty in passing it on to children; paradoxically, it is more difficult to pass on the faith in freedom than in repression. Despite this, our community, albeit slowly, continues to grow: if we baptized only adults before, more recently, the sacrament is also received by children."

There are problems, and not a few, but which nevertheless do not prevent the small community

PROVINCE OF COLOMBO**Oblate – with Mary under the cross**

Shivantha Waas, OMI

St. Eugene de Mazenod, remembering the highest point of his conversion, wrote: "Can I forget the bitter tears that the sight of the cross brought

from making its way upon the Word of God.

"Our faithful are very attached to the reading of the Gospel. We have Bible groups that meet to read the Bible, both in the chapel and in their homes. In addition to this, we celebrate the Eucharist in Russian every day and on Sundays also in English for foreigners, "explains Father Madej. In fact, another difficulty presents itself in the problem of understanding the Gospel message, even though, in recent times, the need to learn Turkmen has become increasingly widespread. "If the knowledge of Russian has been sufficient up to now, today those who come from the ancient Soviet villages do not know this language. Therefore, in July, a third priest should arrive, also from the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who, during his entire first year of residence, will devote himself only to studying Turkmen".

Andrzej Madej has been serving in Turkmenistan since 1997, when John Paul II established the 'sui iuris' mission with which the local Catholic Church was reborn. In a country of five million inhabitants, 90 percent of whom are Muslims, for thirteen years, the presence of the Oblates was allowed only as a representation of the Vatican embassy. In the beginning, the meetings took place in private homes and the liturgical functions were celebrated exclusively in the diplomatic territory of the Apostolic Nunciature in Ashgabat. In 2010, the government officially recognized the Catholic presence, and the community of the faithful meets in the chapel of the Transfiguration of the Lord, in the capital. Most are of Polish or German origin, but there are also Turkmen converts to Catholicism.

streaming from my eyes one Good Friday?" Entering into such a deep experience, the Oblates of the Colombo Province of Sri Lanka were able to help the people to encounter the Crucified Christ on March 9, 2019, at the National Calvary Shrine in Maggona.

It was an important day for the Oblates of the

Colombo Province, since for the first time, they invited all the faithful who are related to the Oblate family to come together for a day of prayer. The response to the invitation was very positive. There were about 2000 people gathered at the Calvary to spend the day in prayer with their Oblate pastors. Among them were the faithful from at least 10 parishes where Oblates serve (including Buttala where Fr. Michael Rodrigo was assassinated in 1987).

There were also others who came in numbers to share their Oblate spirit in prayer. Among them were:

- * Family members of some Oblates
- * Juniorists and their families,
- * Ex-seminarians and their families,
- * Students and the staff of St. Vincent's Home,
- * Hospital volunteer groups and nurses' guild guided by the hospital chaplains,
- * Representatives of the La.Kri.Vi. Children's Movement,
- * Young men and young women of the 'Mazenod Youth' Movement,
- * Inmates of Sahana Madura (Oblate institute devoted to the healing of the mentally ill) and
- * the staffs of Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) and National Communication Centre.

The idea to organize such an event emerged during a recent Young Oblates' Gathering (YOG). Organizing a day of prayer was not their sole intention. They also wanted to bring as many Oblates as possible together for a common mission. It is undisputable that each Oblate is very talented and innovative in various ways. We all do our ministries well as individuals and as communities. Yet, we have not had many occasions where we could pool all these talents together for a single project. Thus, this day

was a great moment when Oblate preachers, pastors, confessors, musicians, media experts, technicians, organizers, etc., both young and old, could gather for a common mission.

At the beginning, when we started the preparations, the initial reaction of many was not very encouraging. Nevertheless, as the Oblates gradually realized the purpose and the value of the event, they started supporting, cooperating and encouraging.

On the day of the event, people turned up in numbers that certainly exceeded our expectation. It was a great success not only because of the number of attendees, but also because of the quality of the program. The feedback we received from the people was absolutely positive. It was also a moment when all felt the unity of the Oblate family - from Father Provincial to the youngest Oblate. All wanted to give their best. It was also a moment to recognize our family spirit and its extent.

The little ceremony we had with the Oblate cross was the highlight of the day. The cross was brought in procession by some Oblates and everybody was asked to hold the cords that were knotted to it. Then we all recited the Oblate prayer of consecration and felt our interconnectedness as one family.

The day brought much joy, since we were able to achieve our purpose of bringing together not only the people of God but also the Oblates ministering in different situations and environments. We wish to thank everyone who supported and cooperated with the YOG in organizing such a prayerful event during this blessed season of Lent.

Canada-United States

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Kusenberger Chair of Oblate Studies - A Change in Approach

The second year of the existence of the courses in Oblate Studies is drawing to a close. What a gift this has been!

Our first Master of Arts Spirituality (Oblate Studies) student has completed the degree and graduated on May 10, 2019. Others are well on the way to completing the 6-courses for the Certificate in Oblate Studies program, while others are following individual courses for enrichment purposes. The students consist of

Oblates, Oblate Associates, members of other religious congregations and their associates, and diocesan seminarians from 12 countries. All the courses are conducted online in English - with the M.A. being offered online and residentially. The five courses that are being taught are:

- Saint Eugene de Mazenod. Historical Background, Life, and Key Aspects of His Spirituality, Charism and Mission
- Historical Expansion and Development of the Mission of the Oblate Congregation from 1816 to Present
- Founders, Charisms and their Expression in Constitutions and Rules

- Mazenodian Spirituality
- A research paper that makes a contribution to Oblate Studies.

The final course, “Oblate Mission Today” will be offered at a later date when the professor completes his doctorate in missiology.

A change has been made to the way in which these courses are being offered in the future to accommodate those who are not full-time students. Each course can be spread over a year of fortnightly lectures, or weekly for one semester. More details can be found at <https://ost.edu/oblate-studies/>

Europe

MEDITERRANEAN PROVINCE

Oblates are called to be martyrs.

The Conference on “Oblation and Martyrdom” held at the Emmaus House of Spirituality in Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid), Spain, was successfully ended on May 5, 2019. Among the participants were the Oblates, nuns, lay associates mainly from Spain and Italy. Fr. Superior General graced the occasion as well. Here is what Fr. Fabio Ciardi, the Director of the General Service of Oblate Studies and Research in Rome and the convener of the Conference, wrote on his blog.

Mission accomplished! The conference on "Oblation and martyrdom" ended successfully: 23 speeches covering different parts of the world; over 60 people present and actively; over 500 who followed via streaming; representatives of all the members of the oblate family; half of them women!

I have collected all the material for a publication in three volumes of “*Oblatio*”, which will help us to know the stories of the martyrs and the message that they continue to address to all of us.

Our Founder, Saint Eugene of Mazenod, was convinced that an Oblate with his act of oblation should be ready to give his life also as a martyr.

In fact, after more than 200 years of existence, a good number of them have been recognized by the Church as martyrs. Most of the other Oblates who died tragically, about seventy, may not be considered martyrs in the strict sense. However, since their death is linked to the mission, they have given an extraordinary oblate witness.

These are not just stories from the past, but events that unfortunately continue to occur in the present, such as the killing of some members of our parish community in Jolo, the Philippines, a few months ago.

Among the many testimonies during the conference, one of the simplest and most beautiful is perhaps that of the first Oblate martyr. I entrusted the task of recalling us the memory of him to a woman, Ileana Chinnici, precisely because he gave his life in defense of the dignity of a girl.

Brother Alexis, a simple, a pure, an obedient one. A man of prayer, a good man, who contemplated nature, in whom he saw God. One of those hidden presences, without which no mission can be accomplished, one of those hidden foundations, without which no building can be built.

From France to Canada. We are in the second half of the nineteenth century. During an expedition, to welcome some of the incoming nuns, Br Alexis

went forward with a caravan. With him, there was a local guide, Louis, some meticulous families, and a 14-year-old orphan, Geneviève, who had to move to another boarding school. Faced with the difficulties of the route, the caravan divides: Alexis must reach the nuns, and goes forward, the families instead go back, leaving Geneviève with Louis and with Brother Alexis.

This is how Alexis meets his martyrdom, and the fulfillment of God's plan to be killed and cannibalized, because it hinders a planned and infamous rape perpetrated against a defenseless girl.

“Who is poorer than an orphaned mestizo teenager?” - Ileana told us. “She had no parents, no affections, no family, no property, no culture... Who could protect her? Who would defend her? How important is your dignity as a girl, as a

FRANCE

Hmong pilgrims visit the General House

On April 29, 2019, a group of pilgrims from the Hmong Catholic community of France visited the OMI General House as a part of their pilgrimage to Rome. Fr. Angelo PELIS, OMI, who had been a missionary in Laos in his youth, was their Italian contact person. After returning to France with joyful memories, Paul Yang, the leader of the group wrote a moving letter to Fr. Superior General and the General House community. In his letter, he expressed his gratitude to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate who brought the Good News to them and freed them “from invisible chains, from ancestral fears, and from servitude”.

Dear Father Superior General, Father Superior of the General House, Fathers and Brothers of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate,

On behalf of the Hmong community of France, I thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the welcome you have given us, starting with the announcement of our 2019 pilgrimage.

By coming to the General House of the Oblates here in Rome, we are renewing the history of our

woman, your intimacy, your femininity? Who would be interested if she became an object of possession, of violence, of abuse, of inhumanity? Geneviève is defenseless against the lust of Louis, a violent and unscrupulous man. But the simple defend the simple, the pure defend the pure... Alexis and Geneviève, killed and devoured, martyrs of purity and poverty”.

Oblation and martyrdom. One cannot understand the depth of oblation if one does not look at its maximum fulfillment. The oblation of Jesus was a love that came to give life. Even the oblation of some Oblates came as a result of their attempt to give life. This climax must always be before our eyes, to remind us that there is no greater love than giving one's life. We must always strive for this radicality and totality of love, always, for everyone.

Faith. You know our human history, which has been painful, made of exile and withdrawal that our elders still carry within themselves by the reticence and reserve that characterize them so much.

On this day, we want to tell you that the Good News brought by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate has freed us from our invisible chains, from our ancestral fears, and from servitude.

It is a true Grace given to us, a source of light for us who lived in darkness, and a Force that gives us the courage to live and act.

Today, we can look at the world with the same Hope and Joy as all of our Christian brothers and sisters in the world, grow and advance in the "present", Confident of being part of God's people, following Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

And most importantly, dear Fathers and Brothers, we can share this feeling of being loved by God because “Yes, only the “Infinite” Love can save us and will save us.”

*Paul Cho YANG / Xaiv-Tsom YAJ
Lay Coordinator of the Hmong Catholic
Chaplaincy of France*

UKRAINE**A new sanctuary under the protection of the Missionary Oblates**

St. Joseph's Church in Hnivan, in the Diocese of Kamieniec-Podolski, was particularly important for the Oblates in the early 1990s. It was there that, in 1991, the first permanent Oblate outpost in Ukraine was created. After considerable difficulties, the church was returned to the Catholic Church, rebuilt, and solemnly re-consecrated in September, 1997. On March 16, 2019, the church will be officially recognized as a missionary sanctuary. It is worth noting that it will be the first of its kind in Ukraine.

This distinction came in a rather unexpected way. During last year's indulgences, the Bishop asked the faithful gathered in the church: "Are you open to the idea of creating a sanctuary here?" Then all God's people unanimously answered "Yes!" The desire expressed by the bishop and the faithful can

be read as an expression of the will of the Lord God who wants to receive even greater worship here through the intercession of Saint Joseph.

Thanks to the establishment of the missionary sanctuary, the services performed by the Oblates will certainly attract an increasing number of people. We hope the sanctuary in Hnivan becomes a special place of prayer and help for families, as well as a place for building and strengthening their Christian identity. A special task of the Oblates will also be to play a positive role in the pursuit of Christian unity through prayer, and for this intention to spread the devotion to Saint Joseph, who is venerated by both the Catholics and the Orthodox.

We are fully aware that we are at the beginning of a spiritual path of deeper involvement in the spirituality of our Patron Saint. However, our hearts are full of trust. We invite all of you to our celebrations, and we ask especially for your prayers for our newly emerging sanctuary.

Latin America

PROVINCE CRUZ DEL SUR**Fr. Olegario Domínguez, OMI has completed 99 years of life**

The Spanish missionary in Paraguay Fr. Olegario DOMÍNGUEZ completed 99 years of life on March 6 but he continues to correct theses of theology students!

On March 10, 2019, celebrating his 73 years of priesthood, the Virgen de Caacupé Community of Asunción, Paraguay wrote the following words:

"We are happy to share the wonderful gift of God that is 'YOUR Life'; we have overcome scares and worries about your health. But our Lord listened to our pleas and so we are here giving thanks for your restored health. God in his immense tenderness, gave you life and filled you with gifts, which we will sum up in two: LOVE and SERVICE. Love and serve God; love and serve the most remote and needy of God's children. With

your words of evangelization, you have always directed us towards faith and salvation, along the path that leads us to our Creator.

You are a humble and submissive son of Mary, our Mother and Protector. You are always ready to listen to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to help us forgive our brothers and to be reconciled with ourselves. You are the example of finding Jesus in the face and in the embrace of the brother in need. P. Olegario, we are a part of your great family of Paraguay; we are your children of the community of Caacupe, who are very spoiled - you never get tired of pampering us. You have been a great evangelizer and a grand master for many generations, a tireless worker of the Father God.

Thanks, Pa'i Olegario. God and our Mother, the Virgen of Caacupe, bless you and protect you every day of your life. And we celebrate another important date for God, for Fr. Olegario and for all of us, on March 10, when he celebrates 73

years of priestly life, in which he is always trying to fulfill the Plan of God.

And so, he arrived in our country on September 4, 1980 at 60 years of age. Thank you for agreeing to come to Paraguay. You evangelized us with your homilies, your counsel and your simple and close lifestyle. In sum - humility. missionary of Jesus, charity and evangelizer!!!!”

Father Olegario was born on March 6, 1920 in Spain. He currently lives in the Central House of Asunción, Paraguay. He always gets up early, prays, concelebrates the morning mass at 6 o'clock, prays Lauds with the community, has breakfast and works to correct the theses of the

theology students; he receives visits of those who wish to confess or to ask for advice, etc. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays he receives medical attention at home to heal his wounds and, with the physiotherapist, he performs physical exercises in order to be physically fit in order to continue serving the Church, the Congregation and the community.

In a word, Fr. Olegario, despite his age and some ailments, continues with great strength and enthusiasm. He maintains his joy and good humor and does everything he can to stay well because he wants to continue serving without rest. He is a living example for all of us the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Anniversaries for May 2019

70 years of religious life

01/05/1949	08621	Fr. Max Risse	Central European Province
01/05/1949	09233	Bro. Joseph Wucher	France
31/05/1949	08639	Fr. James Foelker	United States

65 years of religious life

29/05/1954	08709	Fr. Vincent LaPlante	Lacombe
30/05/1954	08717	Fr. Raymond Crowe	United States
30/05/1954	08722	Fr. Antoni Lesz	Pologne
30/05/1954	08752	Fr. Brunon Wielki	Pologne

60 years of religious life

01/05/1959	10845	Fr. Aloys Kapp	Namibia
01/05/1959	10629	Fr. Heinrich Mayer	Central European Province
01/05/1959	10631	Fr. Alfons Schüling	Central European Province
01/05/1959	10630	Fr. Elmar Theisen	Central European Province
01/05/1959	10681	Fr. Johannes Ziffels	Central European Province
21/05/1959	11214	Bro. Norbert Werner	Central European Province
31/05/1959	10687	Fr. Salvatore De George	United States
31/05/1959	11216	Bro. Louis Gendre	Lacombe
31/05/1959	10684	Fr. Gerardo Kapustka	Mexico
31/05/1959	10683	Fr. Luis Villarreal	United States

60 years of priesthood

03/05/1959	09868	Fr. Jules Daussaint	Belgique et Pays Bas
24/05/1959	09746	Fr. Leo Dummer	United States
28/05/1959	09555	Fr. William Hallahan	United States
30/05/1959	09450	Fr. Cornelius Scanlan	United States

50 years of priesthood

07/05/1969	11223	Fr. Anthony F. Jayamanne	Colombo
07/05/1969	11222	Fr. Joseph Bosco Perera	Colombo
07/05/1969	11220	Fr. Basil Job Silva	Colombo
14/05/1969	11047	Fr. Antony Rex Kulas	Colombo
14/05/1969	11225	Fr. Emilianus Moraes	Colombo
15/05/1969	11323	Fr. Geert Scholten	Belgique et Pays Bas
24/05/1969	11452	Fr. Franciszek Chrószcz	Pologne
24/05/1969	11454	Fr. Henryk Kruszewski	Pologne
31/05/1969	11311	Fr. Jaime Gibbons	Brazil

25 years of religious life

21/05/1994	13666	Fr. Howard Tatel	Philippines
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25 years of priesthood

03/05/1994	13168	Fr. Rito Daquipil	Philippines
21/05/1994	13134	Fr. Emmanuel Tran Quang Khuong	France

Anniversaries for June 2019

75 years of priesthood

18/06/1944	06933	Fr. Philippe Montgrain	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
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70 years of priesthood

04/06/1949	07831	Fr. Aloysius Svobodny	United States
16/06/1949	07753	Fr. André Matton	Belgique et Pays Bas

65 years of religious life

16/06/1954	09675	Fr. Donald Hughes	Australia
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65 years of priesthood

05/06/1954	08660	Fr. James Pillar	United States
12/06/1954	08518	Fr. Jacques Drolet	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
17/06/1954	08684	Fr. Myles Cyr	United States
29/06/1954	08790	Fr. Camillo Prosdocimo	Mediterranea

60 years of religious life

24/06/1959	11228	Bro. Edmond Côté	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
29/06/1959	11230	Bro. Jakob Wagner	Central European Province

60 years of priesthood

05/06/1959	09525	Fr. Eugène Lapointe	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
05/06/1959	09994	Fr. Marc Lortie	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
05/06/1959	09749	Fr. Maurice Provencher	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
05/06/1959	09990	Fr. Rodrigue Vézina	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
06/06/1959	09302	Fr. Denis Dancause	Notre-Dame-du-Cap

06/06/1959	09743	Fr. Tremblay, Juan-María	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
24/06/1959	09694	Fr. Charles Breault	United States
24/06/1959	09695	Fr. Ronald Carignan	United States
24/06/1959	09696	Fr. Roberto Lacasse	Bolivie
24/06/1959	09712	Fr. Antoni Skwierawski	Pologne
28/06/1959	09311	Fr. Gilles Gauthier	Lacombe
28/06/1959	09501	Fr. Justin Trudel	Notre-Dame-du-Cap

50 years of religious life

13/06/1969	12113	Fr. Patrick Gitzen	United States
13/06/1969	12008	Fr. Don McMahon	United States
15/06/1969	11988	Fr. Federico Labaglay	Philippines
15/06/1969	12143	Msgr. Angelito Lampon	Philippines

50 years of priesthood

07/06/1969	11108	Fr. Julien De Lafontaine	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
22/06/1969	11561	Fr. Jan Brinkhof	Belgique et Pays Bas
28/06/1969	11145	Fr. José De Fruyt	Belgique et Pays Bas
29/06/1969	11667	Fr. Jean-Pierre Bonnafoux	France

25 years of religious life

03/06/1994	13531	Fr. David Kumar Anthony	India
03/06/1994	13532	Fr. Varapasatham Anthonysamy	India

25 years of priesthood

04/06/1994	13169	Fr. Dennis Gui	Philippines
04/06/1994	13231	Fr. Eduardo Santoyo	Philippines
12/06/1994	13202	Fr. Uwe Barzen	Central European Province
12/06/1994	12984	Fr. Waldemar Brysch	Central European Province
12/06/1994	13092	Fr. Athanasius von Wedon	Central European Province
18/06/1994	13183	Fr. Wieslaw Badan	Pologne
18/06/1994	13185	Fr. Ireneusz Dampc	Australia
18/06/1994	13181	Fr. Waldemar Janecki	Pologne
18/06/1994	13217	Fr. Andrzej Korda	Pologne
18/06/1994	13182	Fr. Ryszard Kuczer	Pologne
18/06/1994	13178	Fr. Zbigniew Opyd	Pologne
18/06/1994	13189	Fr. Piotr Pisarek	Pologne
18/06/1994	13177	Fr. Cezary Prussak	Pologne
18/06/1994	13186	Fr. Adam Szul	Pologne
18/06/1994	13184	Fr. Pawel Tomys	Pologne
18/06/1994	13206	Fr. Jaroslaw Wachowski	Pologne

Suffrages for our Deceased

March-May 2019

No. 18-36

NAME	UNIT	BIRTH	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Bernard Halpin	Anglo-Irish	22/04/1942	Dublin	05/03/2019
Fr. Marian Wieckowski	Poland	29/03/1935	Lubliniec	15/03/2019
Fr. Rosaire Langelier	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	11/05/1921	Richelieu	22/03/2019
Fr. Umberto Nespola	Mediterranean	01/12/1933	San Giorgio Canavese	26/03/2019
Bro. Roger Durant	Belgium & Netherlands	28/03/1944	Eupen	28/03/2019
Fr. Heinz Ernst	Namibie	11/12/1940	Windhoek	31/03/2019
Fr. Alfredo Epiz	Filipinas	05/09/1944	Makilala	03/04/2019
Fr. Stanislaw Palinski	Poland	07/04/1930	Palinski	04/04/2019
Fr. Giuseppe Rebussi	Indonesia	18/06/1940	Balikpapan	04/04/2019
Fr. Adhemar Deveau	United States	12/09/1923	Tewksbury	06/04/2019
Fr. Anton Lösing	Central European	12/05/1938	Hünfeld	11/04/2019
Fr. Jeevanadas Fernando	Jaffna	24/09/1956	Mankulam	16/04/2019
Fr. Gustav Grosse-Venhaus	Central European	01/09/1931	Hünfeld	18/04/2019
Fr. Leroy Landry	United States	03/11/1935	Tewksbury	18/04/2019
Fr. Rafael Álvarez Muñiz	Mediterranean	31/12/1932	Madrid	05/05/2019
Fr. Michael Guckian	Anglo-Irish	09/10/1938	Roscommon	11/05/2019
Fr. Gérard COUSINEAU	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	23/07/1925	Richelieu	13/05/2019
Fr. Henri Beaudoin	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	29/06/1925	Richelieu	15/05/2019
Fr. Pio Stock	Cruz del Sur	08/05/1934	Asunción	30/05/2019

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