



## Letter of the Superior General for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

L.J.C. et M.I.

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

Several times, I have been asked by Oblates and lay people whether I have a close or special relationship with St. Eugene de Mazenod! It's a fascinating question, and I do feel a special kinship with him in many ways: in his friendship with Jesus; in his closeness to the poor; in his missionary desire to renew the Church; in his love for the Word of God, and in preaching.

In this letter, I would like to share with you another dimension in which I feel a very close bond with Eugene: the witness of his love for Mary, the Mother of Jesus. I invite us all to consider our own special relationship to Eugene in preparation for our patronal feast, the Immaculate Conception. I will describe my connection to his love for Mary with three words: **hope, mercy and joy.**

***Immense Hope:** "A great sign appeared in the sky: a woman, clothed with the sun, the moon at her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head..."* Apocalypse 12:1

I feel a deep communion with Eugene in the extraordinary gift of hope that was given to him on August 15, 1822, as he blessed the statue of Mary we now call the "Oblate Madonna" or the "Virgin of the Smile." This event, six years after the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence, saw the zealous Founder fraught with

difficulties and misgivings. He was worried and discouraged. A number of the Missionaries of Provence had come and gone. There was opposition to his ministry from other priests. Bishops were recalling his missionaries to their home dioceses. Was this his project or God's? In this distressed state, Eugene received a powerful grace: the assurance that this small band of missionaries was indeed the work of God, would produce much fruit for the Church, and be a path to holiness for its members. His fears and doubts evaporated and he received assurance that the creation of this missionary group was the work of the Lord to build up the Church by evangelizing the poor. In a particularly strong time of crisis, Mary's intercession brought hope, confidence and peace.

In the present situation of the Church and the Congregation, we encounter many challenges that can lead to discouragement, pessimism, and cynicism. I have felt strongly encouraged by Eugene to understand that the grace of August 15, 1822, was not just for him at that time. Mary continues to smile on our mission. The assurance that came in this mystical encounter blesses us. The words that Pope Francis spoke in his message to us on October 7, 2016, confirm this grace regarding the Congregation's future and its value for the Church. (See 2016 General Chapter Acts.) We cannot, however, simply rest complacently on Eugene's experience of 1822; we have to do all we can to claim that blessing in our present time.

***Tender Mercy:*** "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother..." (John 19:25)

Many years ago, Fr. René Motte told a group of us in Aix-en-Provence that the Founder's favorite title for Mary was "Mother of Mercy." This is no surprise for us when we consider Eugene's personal experience of God's unconditional love before the cross on Good Friday. He who received so much mercy, extended that to others. In Eugene's personal life, in his relations with his family, with his Oblate sons and in his role as bishop of Marseille, the Mother of Mercy always accompanied him.

I have often experienced God's mercy through the presence of Mary in my missionary life, and, in this I find a deep kinship with St. Eugene. Whether in personal failures and weaknesses, or in the challenges facing the Congregation, the Mother of Mercy stands with us, filled with strength, faithfulness and compassion. As she stood at the cross, both in communion with her Son in His agony and in solidarity with all of humankind, Mary stands with us. Her active presence calls me and our entire Oblate Family to a profound union with Jesus and with the faces of the poor, in whom Jesus suffers today.

***Exuberant Joy:*** "The angel Gabriel came in to her, and said, 'Rejoice, O highly favored, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women!'" (Luke 1:28)

I find a close relationship with Eugene in the joy he so spontaneously expressed about the Immaculate Conception. We are familiar with his 1825 letter to Fr. Tempier in which, referring to our new name, he exclaimed, "...this is a passport to Heaven! How have we not thought of it sooner? Acknowledge that it will be as glorious as it will be consoling to be consecrated to her

in a special manner and to bear her name. The Oblates of Mary! This name satisfies the heart and the ear." (Selected Texts # 99, p. 120). The Founder's lively joy was especially evident at the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. His immense happiness overflowed at the Church's recognition of this singular grace given by God to the Mother of Jesus. He was filled with gratitude for her constant presence in his missionary journey.

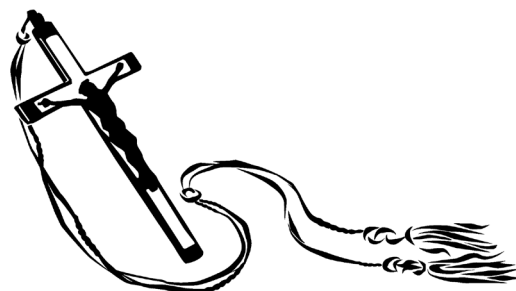
I feel a deep communion in joy with St. Eugene, rejoicing over this beautiful mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception. This is not just another privilege of Mary, but reveals the intrinsic connection between holiness and mission. Mary was conceived without sin and full of grace in view of her mission as Mother of the Savior. Grace, holiness, God's life in us is intimately connected with our oblation and mission. St. Eugene didn't want us merely to have devotion to Mary. He wanted us to live her *fiat*, her oblation; to be committed to the prophetic missionary spirit of her *Magnificat*; to stand in faithfulness with Jesus and with the poor in their suffering; and, like her, to be steadfast in prayer in apostolic community, invoking the Holy Spirit to anoint us for mission.

My heart is very close to St. Eugene's as we celebrate the Immaculate Conception: gratitude, praise, joy, wonder... All of us, inspired in the Oblate charism, have a special relationship to St. Eugene. I invite us to consider our own singular bond with him and to share this with others in a prayerful way.

May this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception be filled with immense hope, God's tender mercy and exuberant joy.

Happy feast day!

Rome, December 8, 2019



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## General Administration

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### LAY ASSOCIATIONS

#### As we journey towards the 2nd Oblate Lay Associations Congress (2 ObLAC 21) July 2021

*Fr. Peter Stoll, OMI  
Councillor for Asia-Oceania Region  
Portfolio Lay Associations in the Internal Mission Committee*

To begin, I quote from the Introduction written by Fr. Louis Lougan OMI, the Superior General, to the **revised Directory of Oblate Associations** (D.O.A.rev.) during this 200th Jubilee of the foundation of the Missionaries of Provence.

“Before Saint Eugene de Mazenod brought together the first Missionaries of Provence on January 25, 1816, he was collaborating with lay people in his ministry to prisoners, in his work with young people and in charitable works. From the very beginning of his ministry as we know, Saint Eugene lived a special quality of closeness to the poor and to those lay people who were collaborating in his apostolic works. There was a deep sense of respect for the diverse gifts that lay people brought to the various ministries and he regarded them as real co-operators in mission.” (D.O.A.rev. pg.3)

This certainly is true, the Oblates have kept this tradition, and we use the motto, **“The Oblates always close to the people!”** What is this closeness? To be close to people is good but the call of the General Chapters calls us to be close to people so that the Oblates can mission with people, empower them and with them grow in holiness and witness to the Kingdom of Jesus.

Pope Francis explains clearly, that “around each religious family, every Society of Apostolic Life and every Secular Institute, there is a larger family, a “charismatic family”, which includes a number of Institutes which identify with the same charism, and especially lay faithful who feel called, precisely as lay persons, to share in the same charismatic reality.” (cfr. Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People, III, 1)

The Oblates do not have a Third Order similar to some other Congregations / Orders. “The situation of the organization of the Lay Associations in the Oblate Congregation is complex, because in some Units, there are different groups of lay collaborators, such as Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI), Oblate Associates, Oblate Collaborators, Oblate Partners, Lay Associates, Friends of St. Eugene, Mazenodian Family, etc. and in some places, they include sections of Youth Groups. In some Units, these Associations overlap with each other and they do not share the same objectives.” (D.O.A.rev.p.4) This is seen as a reality and also a great richness. The first international congress of lay associates was held in Aix-en-Provence from May 18 to 21, 1996. It was attended by 32 lay people and 11 Oblates. The laity came from 13 countries, representing each of the Oblate regions: 11 from Europe, 8 from Canada, 5 from the United States, 4 from Latin America, 2 from Asia-Oceania and 2 from Africa-Madagascar. A final document was drafted and voted on: “Impassioned for Christ, the Church and the Mission.”

In tune and feeling with the universal Church, the 2010 Chapter wished to state the following and I quote only several points:

- We encourage all Oblate Units and Regions to work closely with lay groups to identify priorities that consider especially the poor of today and engage in a process of mutual personal and communal conversion to the values of God’s Kingdom.
- We call on all Oblate Units to work together with the Associates in promoting the ministry of Oblate missionary vocations.
- We wish to persuade all Associate groups to live the specific characteristics of St. Eugene’s charism as enunciated in the 1996 Aix Congress through Regional Congresses, regular meetings with Oblates and encounters in daily life. We draw inspiration from our common charism, which strengthens the spirit of the Oblate family.

- We support the laity in their efforts to invite others to live and share the Oblate charism. (2010 Chapter Document, Conversion, Chapter 5, C, “Declaration to Oblates and Associates”)

The good news is that Chapter members of the 36th General Chapter (2016) wanted to follow it up and a recommendation was made:

**“That the Central Government facilitate and call an international gathering of members of various lay groups within the Mazenodian Family.”**

At the Interchapter meeting in Obra last July, the plan for the **second Oblate Lay Associations' Congress (2 ObLAC 21)** was launched, and the Superior General and Council has fixed the date of the Congress to **July 16-18, 2021**.

#### □ **The Aims of this Congress**

1. To revisit and develop the wonderful spirit experienced at the Oblate Congress of Lay Associates in Aix on May 18- 20, 1996: “Impassioned for Christ, the Church and the Mission”;
2. To deepen some themes (capture the spirit and enthusiasm) that rose up through the Charism Congress 2015;
3. To strengthen and deepen the identity of Oblate lay associations;
4. To encourage youth to be an important part of the Oblate family;
5. To celebrate our close relationship with the laity in all our ministries;
6. To spread and deepen the Oblate charism amongst the laity that are together with us in ministry;
7. To share locally, regionally, and at the congregational level, the depth and variety of ways of connecting as a big family joined together through the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod;
8. To ensure that the Oblates themselves are aware and see the Oblate family as truly family and partners in mission and not merely recipients or minor players in the whole Oblate mission

#### □ **The method**

It will be similar to the Congress of Oblate Charism in Context in 2015. There will be centers in each region where Oblates and lay people will gather for a program of animation and celebration, at some point of which there will be a connection by internet and live streaming to share across the Congregation the richness, inspiration, and fruits of our charism.

#### □ **What needs to happen at the Unit level**

- In the one-and-a-half years leading up to this weekend in 2021, there can be meetings and gatherings on a local Unit level of their various lay groups (MAMI, honorary Oblates, co-workers, etc.). This can be over several weekends or other types of sessions.
- The content will be basically around the themes of our Oblate charism.
- There are many resources available, especially the Oblates who have gone through the De Mazenod Experience in Aix.
- A second stage could be a unit-wide weekend for representatives from the centers.

#### **In summary**

- October 2019—June 2021: local Unit gatherings and animation of Oblate lay associations; preparations for *2 ObLAC 21* by a designated committee
- July 16-18, 2021: 2nd Oblate Lay Associations Congress 2021 through regional gatherings connected by live streaming
- Post-Congress animation through a designated charism animator in each Unit or Region
- Our goal is not to achieve some uniformity of organization but to inspire each group in the wonderful charism of our founder.

I conclude with quoting our Superior General, “I would like to encourage all vowed Oblates to deepen the mutual relationship between us and all those who share in the Oblate charism. This communion in the charism of Saint Eugene will strengthen the mission to preach the Gospel to the poor and most abandoned.”(D.O.A.rev.p.3)



## GENERAL SERVICE OF OBLATE STUDIES

### Holiness: an ideal, a reality

(The homily given by Fr. Fabio Ciardi, OMI during the Holy Mass at the General House in Rome on November 1, 2019)

For us Oblates November 1 is an important day: every year it takes us back to Aix-en-Provence. If January 25 marks the beginning of the community, November 1 recalls the beginning of our oblation and therefore of our religious life.

The first group of the "Missionaries of Provence", who would soon become "Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate", had just finished the first General Chapter, which took place on October 24, 1818, and had approved the Rule written by Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

The Chapter was followed by a one-week retreat, which ended on November 1, 1818. Fr. Suzanne and Fr. Moreau, two young missionaries (but then they were all young!), wrote the minutes of that memorable day:

"By three in the morning the members of the Chapter were already awake. Before four, they were already in the chapel, prostrated before the altar, preparing for the most beautiful, the most lovable of all the sacrifices.

After invoking the light of the Holy Spirit with the singing of the *Veni Creator*, the superior [Saint Eugene] addressed a moving exhortation to the assembly [the whole Society at that time was composed of 7 fathers, 3 scholastics and 6 novices]. It was sweet, and we shed tears of joy listening to those words that seemed to have been addressed directly by Our Lord Jesus Christ through the lips of the beloved Father [Eugene].

Once the exhortation was over, Father [Eugene], dressed in priestly vestments, prostrated himself at the foot of the altar, took a candle in his right hand, and said in a high and intelligible voice: "In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of Most Holy Trinity, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of all the angels and of all the saints, of all my brothers gathered here, I, Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, profess, promise to God and vow chastity and obedience

perpetually. I likewise vow perseverance until death in the holy institute and the society of the Missionaries of Provence. So help me God. Amen".

Then the Mass began... At the moment of communion, while the superior held in his hands the adorable Body of our Divine Saviour, we advanced one after the other, holding a lighted candle, and pronounced our holy vows with a feeling of ineffable joy...

One would have said it was like one of those assemblies of the first faithful who once gathered in the catacombs, by candlelight, in the darkness of the night, to sing the praises of God, far from the idolaters.

After the Mass, the Superior General intoned the hymn *Te Deum* in thanksgiving. Then all the members of the community went to the altar of the Blessed Virgin to put the holy commitments they had just made, under her protection. They also put themselves under the protection of all the saints by reciting the litanies.

With how much enthusiasm we all embraced one another, once we were back in the sacristy! What an outpouring of the heart! What a tenderness! What a moving affection! Now, we are brothers; now we are one! Now we really love each other!"

The General Chapter of 1826 decided that this ceremony would be repeated every year.

"We will repeat it again today, hopefully with the same joy. Why the oblation? Because it is our way of holiness."

Eugene was the first to nurture an ever-increasing desire for holiness. He wanted it for himself and for all those to whom his ministry was directed: he wanted to lead people first to be human, then Christians and finally help them become saints. He desired it for the Oblates and pleaded: "In the name of God, let us be saints".

He created the Oblate community as a place of sanctification. We will help each other in our "common sanctification", he wrote to his future first companion, Fr. Tempier already in 1815.

He embraced religious life as an effective

means of sanctification, he chose the mission as a ministry in which to sanctify himself and sanctify others. He understood and constantly emphasized the intrinsic link between holiness and mission. He lived his life so as to reach the goal of holiness.

For him, in fact, holiness is a dynamic becoming, a constant journey that lasts a lifetime. The Oblates, we read in the Preface, "must work seriously to become saints, [...] live [...] in a constant will to reach perfection". "There are no limits to our personal holiness," exclaimed one of our superior generals, Fr. Léo Deschâtelets when reading this text.

Already in the Supplique adressée aux vicaires généraux capitulaires d'Aix, the first planning document of the new community (January 25, 1816) Eugene had written: "The end of this society is not only to work for the salvation of one's neighbour, dedicating oneself to the ministry of preaching". Its members "will work for their own sanctification in conformity with their vocation".

The Preface of the Rule of 1818 confirms: "work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for one's own sanctification", "for one's own sanctification and for the salvation of souls".

At the end of his life, as if to synthesize his own ideal of life, he writes to the missionaries of Canada: "Every day I pray that his grace will keep you all in great holiness. I cannot think

in other terms of the life of sublime devotion which is the life of our missionaries."

His ideal has not remained a dream. It became a reality: "Holy priests, this is our wealth!" he said, looking at his religious family.

These words testify that holiness, in the Congregation of the Oblates, is not just an ideal. It has been lived by many of its members. The Church has officially recognized 25 of them and another group is about to be proclaimed saints. For Saint Eugene it was normal to believe that in his family "all the members work to become saints in the exercise of the same ministry and in the exact practice of the same Rules". The holy death of Oblates was for him the certainty that his ideal of life could really be lived: "The gate of heaven - he wrote on the occasion of the death of Fr. Victor Arnoux, in 1828 - is at the end of the path on which we set out".

Another time, looking at his Oblates, he writes: "In the absence of my virtues, I will boast of those of my brothers and my children, and I am proud of their works and their holiness."

The example of the sanctity of Eugene and of so many Oblates continues to keep alive in us the desire and commitment to holiness. "Noblesse oblige, - wrote another superior general, Bishop Dontenwill on the occasion of the first centenary of the Congregation - Sons and brothers of saints, we must work to be saints ourselves".

## **GENERAL ADMINISTRATION**

### **Calendar of Masses for MAMI members**

Fr. Peter Stoll, OMI, the General Councillor for Asia-Oceania and the liaison for lay associations, has sent us the Calendar of Masses to be celebrated for the intention of MAMI members throughout the Congregation.

"It was on the occasion of the publication of the 1947 Administrative Circular Letter that the first "calendar" of Masses to be celebrated by Oblates was established. There we read: 'Since the Congregation has committed itself to have Mass celebrated each day for the living

and deceased members of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, it was decided that the responsibility for this was to be shared among the different provincial directors... each provincial director will be obliged *sub gravi* to celebrate or to have celebrated a certain number of Masses according to the dates determined...'

From that time on, several editions of this timetable have been published in order to keep pace with the development of the Congregation. It is a living example of the continuous prayer of the Missionary Oblates for members of the MAMI, a prayer which, in a way, circles the globe."

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## Africa-Madagascar

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**CAMEROON****Maroua Counseling Centre: Another Oblate Initiative**

*Fr. Thomas Bang, OMI*

The city of Maroua is the capital of the Far North region of Cameroon. This region is often a victim of Boko Haram Islamic terrorism. The city of Maroua hosts many Internally Displaced People (IDP's) with refugees from Nigeria as well. There are also displaced people from the English-speaking regions of North-West and South-West Cameroon. These two regions are victims of the violence of the political crisis, which has already caused more than 2,000 deaths and more than 6,000 displaced, according to the local press.

Maroua, therefore, is now transformed into a large centre for victims of war and poverty. Most of these people have often undergone various types of physical and psychological abuse. There are children and women who have been raped, beaten, maimed, and deprived of their families, schooling, and even food. There are parents who have lost their children, and children who have lost their parents.

Passionate about the poor, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the Province of Cameroon have opened in August, 2019, a Counseling Centre in Maroua. The name of this centre is "Maroua Counseling Centre" (MCC). The centre is an initiative of Fr. Edouard DAGAVOUNANSOU, provincial superior. Fr. Thomas BANG has been appointed as its first director. The centre works in collaboration with psychologists, a medical doctor, a lawyer, and the police officers of the city.

**CAMEROON****Giving life to displaced people**

Pikba is a large village of persons, displaced by war, and immigrants, located 34 km from Poli, a part of our parish territory. Due to the lack of roads, in the rainy season, access is only possible by motorcycle.

In early 2014, people displaced by the war in

Father Thomas listens to each victim and refers him or her to the collaborators according to the person's need. The centre welcomes victims of abuse and violence in all its forms. So far, the majority of victims are children and women.

The main difficulty we face is that the demand is much more than what was expected. Listening to a victim can sometimes take more than 2 hours. Apart from Father Thomas, the centre has no permanent staff due to the lack of financial means. The director of the centre also has other responsibilities parallel to the centre, which makes his availability limited at times. Some people come to the centre for material assistance, like school fees for children, medical bills, food and even housing.

One of the many positive aspects of the centre is that the victims of abuse tell us how they already feel relieved just by being listened to. They are happy that there is finally a place where they can go to share and express their feelings freely, thanks to the goodwill of our volunteers and collaborators!

We also have some future projects to accomplish. Having a refectory, and utilizing it to offer at least one meal a day to those most desperate victims, is one of those projects. Further, the centre needs to be equipped with more toilets and showers for the victims for the time they spend at the centre. We also wish to have two or three resource persons as our permanent staff, so that we could serve more people a day. These are our dreams, but in faith we believe that it will soon be a reality.

the far north of Cameroon, who were victims of terrorist activity by the Islamic sect, Boko Haram, settled in Pikba. Today, Pikba has about 1,500 inhabitants, with the displaced people accounting for more than half of its population. So, it is this refugee community that I visit and follow regularly. During our meetings, several difficulties were identified, mainly the absence of a school and the lack of water.

The school: thanks to our efforts and those of our benefactors, a school has been created. Today, it is officially recognized and has more than 500 students and the number is growing. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Provincial, Fr. Edouard DAGAVOUNANSOU, for his support in providing school supplies and sports equipment. Thank you to Brother Jean-Marie DIAKANOU who came to this village to offer school supplies to all the children in the school as well as linens and toiletries to some families. Thanks also to my friends, Jacques TEMPIER and Daniel BRESSY, from France for their many donations.

Lack of drinking water: There was no drinking water supply in this large village. The population obtained supplies from polluted ponds and for that, they had to contend with domestic animals and other animals. Consequently, there were many diseases caused by water. We were very moved by this situation and decided to do something for them. Thus, thanks to the generosity of the ASMG Association, through Fr. François CARPENTIER and several other friends, three wells have been dug to provide drinking water for the entire village.

These wells were inaugurated during a solemn Mass presided over by Fr. Gérard VONDOU, parochial vicar of Poli, followed by the blessing of each well. In a letter, the villagers asked me

to express their deep gratitude to all the donors. Here is the full text from the population:

"Dearest Brother Ernest,  
It is with great joy that the entire population of Pikba welcomes you to the official inauguration of the wells. This day will remain etched in our memory, because it has been a long time since we have had drinking water. Your arrival in Pikba is like the arrival of the Lord Jesus. We were in the darkness and today we are in the light. You thought of us when you dug wells for us. May this work be engraved in the archives so that the youth of tomorrow can credit this to your name. May the Lord guide your steps in all your actions. Today Pikba is proud because we have benefited a lot from the donations of your friends... We are still thirsty. We ask you to knock on your friends' doors about the situation of our school without classrooms. The village is a long way from a health center and our chapel is without a roof. We are very affected by your departure. The only thing we ask you is not to leave us. Yet we say goodbye and wish you the best in your new mission."

Personally, I am happy and humbly proud of myself to have given "life" to these displaced people, because water is life.

*Bro. Ernest Grégoire Mbemba, OMI*

## GUINEA BISSAU

### The first Bissau-Guinean Oblate: Brother Aful Sanha

The Oblates began their mission in Guinea Bissau in 2003, coming from Senegal, a Delegation of the Mediterranean Province. The first mission was Farim, located northeast of the capital Bissau in the namesake diocese. Since 2011 we have opened a mission in the suburbs of Bissau, and in 2014 the mission of Calcine in the diocese of Bafata in the southeast.

Currently, eleven Oblates are working in Guinea Bissau. The time is not yet ripe for the abundant harvest, but some fruits are beginning to ripen. Last month, the perpetual profession of Brother Aful Sanha allowed us to give thanks to God for the first son of the Guinean land to enter definitively into the Oblate family. A Brother,

moreover, makes us foresee a real rooting of the Oblate mission. Originally from the Farim Mission, Brother Aful did his formation in Dakar and Yaoundé, as well as a professional training in building construction.

The local Church shared the joy with the followers of the traditional religions and the Muslims who came in great numbers to experience this rare event. After the celebration of the Perpetual Profession, about ten young people approached Brother Aful and expressed their interest for a vocational discernment in order to join the Oblate family.

For the past three years a formation house has been open in Bissau for a first contact with the young people who will then continue their formation in Dakar. Some of them are already on their way to respond to God's call in the family of Saint Eugene.



**SAHARA****Christians and Muslims give thanks for missionary presence in the Sahara.**

In July 1954, during the Holy Marian Year commemorating the centenary of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius XII created the Apostolic Prefecture of the Sahara and entrusted it to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. With this act, the first seeds were sown for the Church to take root in this territory where the local population was and is entirely Muslim. Father Leo Deschâtelets, OMI, then Superior General, had written to the group of missionaries: "We will not be true missionaries if we do not deal with Muslims." The first Oblate missionaries, headed by Felix ERVITI, the newly appointed Apostolic Prefect, arrived in August 1954. He would be followed by no less than 35 Oblates who left their mark. Sixty-five years later, Muslims and Christians remembered gratefully their beneficial presence on this earth.

The celebrations of this Jubilee took place on two different dates and in two places separated by more than 500 kilometers: Sunday, November 17, 2019, in Dakhla and the following Sunday, in El Aaiún. In the morning, the small Christian community thanked God, solemnizing the Eucharist with African rhythms in the first of the celebrations, and then, in the second, we widened the horizon to the entire world in recognition of representatives from all continents. Our Christian communities are made up of itinerant workers or migrants who are present only on a temporary basis. The Oblates, the only permanent presence, make their way with these people, learning together how to be witnesses of Jesus and his Gospel in an Islamic context. We are a small Church, a ferment of fraternity and sowers of hope who, together with our Muslim brothers, walk in this desert that surrounds and inspires us; and we fight for a more fraternal, just world. A small church, like a mustard seed, we are talking about thirty-five of us who celebrate in Dakhla

and fifteen in El Aaiún...

The second part of the celebration was a meeting with the local population to thank one another and to thank God together. And here, all our expectations were exceeded, not only by the very large influx of those who came, but by the environment that was created. The memory of the missionaries who passed through is very much alive among the Muslims who appreciate that simple presence of the Church in their land. Emotions increased as we remembered them, looking at photographs, and as stories and anecdotes arose in the small gatherings. Some tears were shed as we remembered happy and painful moments that were lived together and especially when listening to the video recorded message of Fr. Camilo GONZÁLEZ, who spent more than 45 years on the mission.

Mario LEÓN, Apostolic Prefect of the Sahara, stressed that for us, Oblate missionaries, it is a gift from God to be here and that this meeting of so many Muslim friends with the small Christian community was also a commitment to continue walking together. Signs of recognition were evident on faces, while listening to parts of his intervention in Arabic that included quotations from the Koran and which were repeated in French, Spanish and English. Even the local press and television echoed it. Later there were some small interventions by people, prominent in the local society, who wanted to express thanks for the presence of the Church during these last sixty-five years. We also had some local representatives of the Ministry for Religious Affairs who insisted upon the beneficial coexistence of the two religions.

We ended the meetings with a fraternal 'agape' that allowed us to keep talking and dreaming so that we can keep walking together. And by dreaming this, even though many years distant, and in a very different context, we are simply sharing the Founder's dream when he sent his Oblates to Algeria.

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## Asia-Oceania

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**JAPAN****Work takes priority over religion in Japan', says Oblate priest ahead of Pope's visit**

*Ahead of Pope Francis' Apostolic Journey to Japan, an OMI missionary priest explores how the face of the local Catholic Church is changing and the challenges of preaching the Gospel where people give priority to work, not religion.*

Catholics are a tiny minority in Japan, numbering 536,000 in total, or just 0.42% of the population. But that won't keep them from turning out in (relatively-large) droves when Pope Francis makes his Apostolic Journey on 23-26 November.

*"Although the Catholic population is quite small, I think people are looking forward to [his] visit and that it might help them strengthen their faith and the Church at large. It's going to bring hope."*

That was how Fr. Bradley ROZAIRO, described the faithful's expectations, in an interview with Vatican Radio. The missionary priest from Sri Lanka serves as the Delegation Superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and lives in Itami City.

"Many are getting ready to go to Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and Tokyo, practically from every church there are people going to attend," he said, adding that many people from his church in Osaka are making travel plans.

**Church's new face**

Those 'droves' are not just Japanese Catholics. There is a growing number of migrant workers who hail from the Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Brazil, and Peru.

"The total [Catholic] population in some dioceses is very foreign," said Fr Bradley.

This influx of foreigners comes as quite a shock in Japan, which has long had strict immigration laws. Parliament just last year passed a law to allow an unprecedented 300,000 migrant workers

in over the next 5 years, due to a labor crunch. So more change is coming.

"Many Bishops encourage the Japanese community to welcome migrant workers," Fr Bradley said.

Religious missionaries like him have their own role to play in this new stage in Japan's history.

Fr Bradley said ministry to migrants is "not only about the Sacraments" but includes helping foreigners as they face language or legal problems. "If they don't speak the language we help them with translation" or bring in someone to teach them Japanese, he said.

**'Difficult mission'**

Pope Pius XI once called the Oblates of Mary Immaculate "specialists in the most difficult missions." The phrase even appears on the OMI Japan website.

The hardest thing about being a missionary in Japan? "People don't have time to come to Church. Here, work gets the priority, not religion."

Fr Bradley said people respond well to Church-organized events, if they can find a free moment. He added that this can be difficult for missionaries to grasp when they first arrive in the country.

Returning to the Pope's visit, Fr Bradley said that "for a country which does not give priority to religion, to welcome a religious leader will be a big blessing. The presence of Pope Francis and his message will help strengthen their faith and belief in Christianity."

**OMIs in Japan**

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate first arrived in Japan in 1948, after the end of the Second World War.

One of their initial missions was educating children, and they opened several Montessori kindergartens, 6 of which they still operate. "We

still continue with this mission,” Fr Bradley said, “because we really try to give the Gospel values to kids and to teach them about God.”

Now the Oblates in Japan work mostly in parishes. Some also serve as prison chaplains, and one runs a pro-life desk.

Fr Bradley has one hope for the Pope’s upcoming visit to Japan.

“I wish and pray that God may interfere in the lives of people, especially the non-Christians in this country, through Pope Francis.”

## VIETNAM

### The Blessing of the New Scholasticate

On 30 November 2019, all Vietnamese Oblates (in Vietnam and abroad), with their friends and associates, were in festive mood. Bishop Joseph Tước of Phú Cường solemnly blessed and inaugurated the new building of the OMI Scholasticate in Lái Thiêu, Vietnam.

This project, carried out with very significant help from the Province of France, was aimed at reducing the "demographic pressure" on the old building next door, due to the abundance of

vocations. The 2011-2012 building, planned for 30 scholastics, currently houses 50! We ask for your prayers that the quality of the formation that is assured for them will correspond to the beauty of the place.

Our friends and associates came in great numbers: the meal that followed the ceremony and the Mass brought together 1050 guests. Thanks for the prayers of many, that the quality of formation may match the beauty of the buildings.

*Fr. Emmanuel Khuong and Fr. Roland Jacques*

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## Latin America

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## HAITI

### Keep us in prayer

*An Oblate serving in Haiti has updated us about the current political situation in the country. Let us be united in prayer with the people of Haiti and our Oblates working there.*

Huge manifestations continue in Port-au-Prince and throughout the country of Haiti. Every day there are violent demonstrations, roadblocks, burning tires, rock and bottle throwing. Cars are set afire along with businesses, and, in some

instances, the police run out of tear gas so they start using live ammunition.

Arguably, the country has not witnessed a situation of political unrest on this scale for a long time. Unless President Jovenel Moise loses the support of the police, we are at an impasse. The president refuses to leave, and the opposition says he has to go, as there is no dialogue or compromise possible. It is already a humanitarian crisis.

Please keep the Haitian people and us Oblates in your prayers.

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**Anniversaries for January 2020**


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**70th Anniversaries of Ordinations**

29/01/1950	07852	Fr. Roy, Louis-Philippe	Lacombe
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**60th Anniversaries of Vows**

25/01/1960	10823	Bro. González, Oscar	Cruz del Sur
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**25th Anniversaries of Vows**

06/01/1995	13679	Fr. Motlaopa, Lefa Clement	Lesotho
06/01/1995	13678	Bro. Sephamola, Thabiso Emmanuel	Lesotho
22/01/1995	13556	Fr. González Gallo, René Miguel	Cruz del Sur

**Suffrages for our Deceased**
**October – November 2019****No. 61-70**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Prov./Del.</b>	<b>Born</b>	<b>Died at</b>	<b>Date</b>
Fr. Hubert Lagacé	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	18/07/1932	Richelieu	10/10/2019
Fr. Gerard C. Francis	India	08/06/1955	Chennai	17/10/2019
Fr. Marc Bilodeau	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	16/12/1924	Richelieu	23/10/2019
Fr. Isidore Mathibeli	Lesotho	08/07/1955	Pitseng	27/10/2019
Fr. Rodrigue Vézina	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	29/02/1932	Richelieu	29/10/2019
Fr. Eugene Clerkin	Anglo-Irish	22/10/1936	Mullinahinch	31/10/2019
Fr. Jacques Léger	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	11/02/1928	Richelieu	06/11/2019
Fr. Hyacinthe Dieng	Senegal	07/08/1984	Dakar	10/11/2019
Fr. Daniel Tailleux	France	03/08/1936	Lyon	17/11/2019
Fr. Lawrence MacLennan	Lacombe	26/03/1929	Ottawa	23/11/2019

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