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Letter of the Superior General for the Solemnity of the Assumption - August 15, 2020

Dear brother Oblates and all who live the Oblate charism,

These months of the coronavirus pandemic have caused uncertainty and anxiety as we see that it is still out of control. It seems that there is less and less talk about life returning to normal and a scary realization that what we are now living is our new normal. The social and economic consequences are crippling and strike at the poor more than anyone else. We read with alarm the spread of COVID-19 in the Amazon region, wreaking havoc on indigenous peoples.

In June in the United States, a white police officer killed a black man by kneeling on his neck for nearly eight minutes as the man lay handcuffed on the ground, triggering worldwide manifestations against racism and all forms of discrimination. Our planet's environment, although having shown some improvement in the quality of air due to the lockdown, has shown continued deterioration and contamination, more rapidly approaching a tipping point beyond which there will be no return. The realities of poverty, famine, war, religious persecution, and climate change are generating millions of people on the move, migrating in search of some quality of life. Other forms of violence, such as that caused by drug cartels and human trafficking, add to the suffering in our world. Governments are embroiled in polarizing conflicts and extravagant corruption, ignoring the plight of the poor.

This world of ours in all its woundedness is our concern, our place of mission. The image Pope Francis uses so often, that of a field hospital in a war, expresses well the Church's mission and our own in this state of emergency.

It was surprising then, that on June 20, it was reported that Pope Francis added three new invocations to the Litany of Loreto! Someone remarked, "Doesn't he have more important things to do?" I am sure he has, but as a man of faith and devoted to the Mother of Jesus, he was sending us a needed message in the face of the present crises which the world is living. Each invocation speaks to the world context and to the mission before us: Mary as Mother of Mercy, Mother of Hope, and Solace of Migrants.

The Church has invoked Mary as Mother of Mercy for centuries. She is the Mother of Jesus, who is mercy incarnate. This title celebrates the God she sings of in her Magnificat: the Almighty remembers the promise of mercy he made to Abraham and Sarah, and comes to lift up the lowly and cast down the powerful and the rich. This invocation also reminds us that God is faithful, mercy is in our midst and journeys with us in the darkness of these days. Like a loving Mother, God consoles us and holds us close to reassure us amid the fears and uncertainties we face. Praying to our Mother of Mercy brings us strength, courage and energy, so that we become ministers of mercy in the field hospital. We have seen and heard many outstanding witnesses of mercy in these months of the pandemic.

Mother of Hope, is another title the Church has used for centuries. Mary's being is centered on her Son, Jesus, who is our sure hope. Even in the face of the pandemic, the violence, and the evil all around us, the Mother of Hope reminds us of the blessed assurance of things unseen, and enables us to see the invisible, the Reign of God that is among us. Our vision,

enabled by hope, gives us eyes capable of recognizing small gestures of love, beauty and fraternity in our broken world.

Our Mother of Hope helps us also to hear that new song, a victorious song, that only those who belong to the Lamb are able to hear. It is a song about the mystery of the Reign of God among us, truly present in the world. Hope is the certainty of things not seen and, even if evil abounds and appears to be gaining ground, hope is the confidence that God's grace is more abundant, stronger and more lasting than evil. This invocation, Mother of Hope, not only calls us to be filled with hope, but also commits us to go to work in the field hospital. It leads us to cooperate in nothing less than the transformation of our society through gestures of love and grace, artisans of peace, promoters of social justice, and earnestly caring for our common home.

Finally, very aware of the reality of world-wide migration, the Holy Father has inserted Solace of Migrants in the Litany. Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph knew what it meant to flee their country and become refugees. The Holy Family provides comfort to migrants and solidarity with the millions of uprooted people on our planet. The invocation, "Solace of Migrants" is not just a prayer to comfort migrants. It is also a commitment to go to the field hospital, becoming a source of concrete support, aid and welcome to migrants.

While visiting an Oblate parish in a locale that has many migrants, a parishioner asked, in a tense tone of voice "What are we supposed to do with all these foreigners coming to

our country?" I replied that is a complicated social, political, and economic problem that requires a long-term solution. But that in the end, Jesus told us what to do: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." I believe that as we pray this title of Mary, Solace of Migrants we are saying that we will act with justice and charity. We have to address the causes, a long-term challenge; and we have to welcome, offer assistance, and show solidarity to those who come among us.

As we contemplate the many invocations of the Litany of Loreto, we are drawn to be doers of the Word, engaged in the mission of Jesus, not just hearers. Pope Francis is profoundly in touch with the brokenness of the world. His additions to the Litany of Loreto call us to renew our life of prayer and our devotion to the Mother of Jesus at this critical period of history. These titles likewise convoke us into the field hospital of suffering humanity and of wounded creation, missionaries of hope, of mercy and of solace.

We recall that the Assumption of Mary is an Oblate feast, for, on this day in 1822, Saint Eugene received a very special grace through Our Lady's intercession. It assured him of the future of the Congregation and the good fruit that it would produce. We continue to be blessed by the smile of Mary Immaculate at present and into the future! A joyful feast day to all of you!

In Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,
Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General
August 15, 2020

CORONAVIRUS AND THE OBLATES

Lockdown Initiatives I Social Media and Communications

This is the first in a series of articles that will be posted on our website, mainly focusing on the creative projects that the Missionary Oblates in various countries launched during this period of worldwide pandemic, COVID-19. These articles are based on the information sent by the Oblate Units, responding to our request to share

such stories with us. We kindly ask Oblates to send us more such interesting stories so that we can consider publishing them on this website.

“Social media is like the new Areopagus of contemporary times. It cries out for the missionary presence of the Church. Among the numerous voices which fill this media..., the Gospel must find its place to propose Jesus Christ.” (Acts of the Chapter 2016, n.71)

That is how the 36th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate reaffirmed the commitment of the Congregation to social media evangelization. It provided the perfect launching pad for many Oblates interested in this field to discover other ways of being close to the people. This enthusiasm took new wings during the coronavirus lockdown. As a result, Oblates made their presence in social media and other digital media even more profound and significant during this trying time.

One common feature found in many Oblate Units across all of the five Oblate regions was to livestream Eucharistic celebrations bringing Jesus to the very homes of the faithful - at least virtually. Many may have initiated this task planning to discontinue it after Holy Week, but the keen interest of the people prompted them to change their plans and continue with such livestreaming services. Facebook and YouTube were the most common platforms used for that task.

However, some Oblates who are active on Twitter, Instagram, and Periscope, made use of their favourite application for social media evangelization. Fr. Salvador GONZALEZ is one such Oblate. He inspired many on Twitter and Instagram with his novel concept called “Got a minute?” – Short one-minute reflections that are capable of nourishing his audience with a quick “spiritual snack” for the day.

Many formation houses, especially the Scholasticates around the world (e.g. Bangladesh, Paraguay, Jaffna, the Philippines, Indonesia, Italy, Cameroon, Brazil, etc.) livestreamed various prayer services and devotions as well. They included Eucharistic Adoration, the Way of the Cross, a Divine Mercy novena, veneration of the cross, the Rosary, etc. Some Oblate Units were able to bring together many of their members - young and old alike – to contribute to a common online media project. The Oblates of the Anglo-Irish Province have been taking turns to conduct morning and night prayer online. The Province of the United States did something similar, getting some of the Oblates and Oblate Associates to share short reflections during Lent.

Many OMI communities working in parishes also became very active on social media during the last two months, so that they could be close to their parishioners, irrespective of the fact that the churches were closed. The OMI community in San Leandro parish in Madrid, Spain, launched an online project called “Una Cuaresma única” during Lent to keep the community close to the Word of God and to one another. A couple of Oblate parishes in the Province of OMI Lacombe (Canada) offered online Bible Study sessions, mainly targeting their parishioners locked down at home. St. Patrick’s Parish in Hamilton, Ontario, dared to launch a new website, solely to provide the faithful services online. One Parish in Haiti divided the community into small prayer groups and provided them with material to pray together ‘virtually’ via a social media platform they agree upon as a group.

Some individual Oblates and some communities have initiated audio podcasts as well in the past two months. A podcast in German (www.rausausdenfedern.de), kicked off on Ash Wednesday, providing short weekday reflections for the entire Lenten season. Although the original plan was to end this project on Easter Sunday, on popular request they have continued it up to this very date. Twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, a new podcast will be aired. The Oblates in Czech Republic (which is part of the Central European Province) also ran a similar programme in the Czech language. Fr. Jean-Baptiste MALENGE, from the Province of Congo, also initiated a podcast to reach out to the faithful. He produces a daily half-an-hour program, and shared it on “SoundCloud”. This programme, titled “Life in the Face of Coronavirus,” aims at educating people in order to help them make sense of their life as they are quarantined at home. The Oblate Units who run radio stations also made use of the occasion to be more creative. Radio Pa’iPuku and Radio Santa Teresita are two of such radio stations that the Province of Cruz del Sur (South America) administers. They not only started to broadcast liturgical celebrations on a daily basis, they also transmitted special awareness programmes to targeted audiences among the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Fr. Charles Tumo MATSOSO, the director of Radio Maria Lesotho, is at the forefront in educating the Basotho on coronavirus. He also invites Oblates

and other experts to deliver messages of hope and to urge people to be in solidarity with the whole world, even though Lesotho has not yet reported a single case of a coronavirus patient. In the mission territory of Aucayacu, in Peru, the Oblates have an educational radio station: Radio Amistad. Apart from broadcasting live Eucharistic celebrations and other devotional programmes, it started to educate its listeners on Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation "Querida Amazonía" ("Dear Amazon"). Some of the Oblate parishes in the Province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap in Canada serve the First Nations. Until Easter Sunday, almost all major religious activities were broadcast through the community radio stations. In the meantime, several Oblates in Haiti too actively participated in some of the country's leading Catholic radio programmes.

If radio is not the preferred tool of the young, the Oblates knew where to look for answers: WhatsApp! New WhatsApp groups began to be created with the intention of sharing the Good News, especially among the youth. In Asuncion, Paraguay, Oblates launched a WhatsApp campaign called "Easter at Home," targeting mainly the youth in remote areas who may not be that interested in watching livestreamed Masses or things of that sort. Oblate Parish Priests in South Africa reported that their parish WhatsApp groups grew with requests from other non-Oblate parish communities as well. With a little support from their shepherds, people themselves formed such virtual groups spontaneously, enthusiastically giving support to those who felt cut off. Among social media, LinkedIn is a platform that mainly targets professionals and business owners. Even though it is not very popular among the clergy and religious, some Oblates made their presence felt on LinkedIn during the lockdown. Fr. Ali NGAMEEKA from the Canadian Province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap is one of them. In order to reach out to the set of people of that caliber, he now shares his expertise and experience about prayer and spiritual life with them.

Online retreats were another innovative act to which some Oblate Units committed themselves during the COVID-19 epidemic. Poland conducted online retreats for adults as well as for youth. Another online retreat was conducted by an Oblate in the Province of Cruz del Sur for six consecutive days. It was called "Camino de Esperanza" (Journey of Hope). Several other Oblate parishes across the world

conducted webinars / online spiritual conferences to parishioners. The Province of Cruz del Sur is looking forward to the week of prayer for Oblate vocations, as they are all set to go online with 9 days of video conferencing via Instagram. In Japan too, the Oblates conducted online Bible Sharing Sessions. In some countries, one main mission of the Oblates is the education of children. As schools are closed down, Indonesian Oblates working in schools organized a common programme to conduct "home-school". Our colleges in countries like Australia and Brazil would do the same.

This article would not be complete if we do not mention other unique and bold media initiatives. At the Shrine of Saint Rochus in Bingen, Germany, Fr. Günther KAMES designed a special 'Coronavirus Way of the Cross'. The Oblate Youth Chaplains of the Central European Province invited young people to a 'virtual walk' titled "Towards Easter". With the help of a Messaging App called 'Discord', they created a platform to meet the Province's Oblate Youth online. Meanwhile the Oblate youth group in the Province of Colombo (Sri Lanka) did short animation videos to conscientize youth as to how productively they could make use of their time at home. The Province of Jaffna (Sri Lanka) dared to 'think out of the box' and pray the Liturgy of the Hours online so that the lay people, especially the Oblate Associates, could join them. A key contribution the Oblates in Ukraine make is to run the EWTN Ukraine Catholic television station. They came out with many new ways to evangelize Catholics, as many turned to the solace of the TV channel due to this unprecedented situation. The community of Oblates in Brussels, Belgium, started a daily vlog named "Courageous" on the very first day of lockdown and now it contains more than 40 episodes. There were also coronavirus songs shared on YouTube! The Indian Oblate, Fr. Joseph Thambi PENUMALA, has composed such an awareness song in the Telugu language. The Scholastics in Indonesia were arguably the first Oblate community of first formation to make their presence in TikTok, a Chinese video-sharing social networking service that is now popular around the world.

Certainly, many other social media initiatives taken by the Oblates are not recorded here. However, the intention was not to record each and every one of them in detail, but to provide encouragement, so that we continue to "leave nothing undared" for the sake of the Gospel.

Lockdown Initiatives II: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat”

Being true to their charism to be close to the poor, many Missionary Oblates in all of the five OMI regions, took a number of initiatives to feed the hungry during the coronavirus lockdown period.

Oblates in Bangladesh reached out to those in dire poverty whose sustenance mostly depended on daily wages. With the imposing of the lockdown, they struggled financially, and as a result, found it difficult to feed their families. The Oblates regularly provided them dry rations and food parcels. “We are grateful especially to Centre Missionnaire Oblat (CMO) in Canada who financially supported our project”, Fr. Ajit COSTA, the Delegation Superior, said. Not only many Oblate Parishes but also the Scholasticate community organized programmes to feed the hungry on a regular basis during this critical period.

The small Oblate community in Luxembourg generously shared their food and other essentials with the poor and the abandoned who rang the doorbell of their house. After a community discernment, they also decided to support a monastery in Staniątki, Poland, where the nuns had been struggling without the necessary means of subsistence.

Saint Blaise’s Oblate Parish in Asunción, Paraguay, organized two dining rooms to feed those who lost their jobs. They fed 570 people per day from Monday to Friday. The community in Santa Fe also doubled the lunch boxes provided for the poor during these difficult times.

Our communities and parishes in Nigeria reached out to the poorest of the poor by providing them yam, beans, rice and condiments. In another innovative move, the Oblates in Indonesia reached out to the university students who were locked down in their boarding rooms. They were away from their homes and some of them found it difficult to sustain themselves. Oblates came to their aid. The Oblate community in José E. Rodó parish in Uruguay, and the Oblate youth residing in our Casa Juvenil, distributed what they call “food baskets” among the less fortunate, with the help of the local authorities.

In Pakistan, too, in almost all the parishes we serve, including the desert mission station in Derekabad, the Oblates were able to help the needy in many ways. At Holy Rosary Parish in Gujrat, the Oblates collaborated with Muslims of the area and distributed food rations to the needy.

The Oblate community at the Sacred Heart parish in Kilburn, London, ran a foodbank from the parish house. On a daily basis, they distributed over 30 hampers of food. Not only parishioners but also the neighbouring Jewish Community and the Church of England Community helped them in this task. Fr. Ray WARREN, is involved with an inter-faith group called ‘Open Table,’ that reaches out to the homeless and rough sleepers in London. “Once a week we prepare wholesome home cooked food and then, at 9pm, we set up a table on the street outside the local rail station. Between 40 and 50 people come along, and we serve them the food in containers that they can take with them, along with tea and coffee. I am particularly inspired by the cooperation and support that has grown between all of us, Muslim, Christian, and other religious & non-religious,” Fr. Ray further stated.

Oblates and lay associates of St. Albert's Oblate parish in Canada invited the community to drop off food items to be distributed among the poor. People responded generously, and the trucks of goods are gratefully received. An Oblate associate commented, "People came forward quickly, as if they had been waiting for something like this. I feel like this call to action was as beneficial for those that donated as for those that needed the food. As we are isolated from each other, a time to see our friends in person, even from a distance, was an unexpected act of charity!"

Colombo and Jaffna, our two Provinces in Sri Lanka, also fed the hungry in many ways. The Fatima Church community in Colombo organized a project of distributing dry-rations to the poor and the affected. Irrespective of their religion, the Oblates provided essential items to 700 families who were in need of help. Among them were Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and of course, Catholics. The “Rajabima” community in Anuradhapura also distributed parcels of dry-rations among the poor and needy. The Province of Jaffna

economically helped various groups: poor families in the Oblate Parishes, patients at the hospitals, minor staff in Oblate houses, Oblate Lay Associates, and families of some of our seminarians whose livelihood has been affected due to COVID – 19.

In South Africa, many OMI parish priests, with enthusiastic support from their parishioners, distributed food parcels and necessary supplies to the poor and those who were cut off from the rest. Unfortunately, established soup kitchens were discontinued in some parishes due to the restrictions on gathering, but alternative means were found to assist people.

After the beginning of the lockdown, OMI Youth in Hong Kong, together with the Oblates, increased the number of food boxes given to the poor on the street. They are now supporting 250 people each day.

The Province of India reached out to the most deserving people (orphans / semi-orphans, widows, uncared elderly, gypsies, tribal families, Dalit Christians, refugees from Sri Lanka, etc.) through their collaborators and MAMI Members. In response to the current situation, the Province created the Oblate Disaster Management Team (ODMT) to plan and to respond to this situation

Lockdown Initiatives III “I was sick, and you looked after me”

The danger of the coronavirus pandemic has not completely receded from us. By May 2020, the United States became the new epicenter of the virus, while Europe showed slim signs of recovery. However, amidst all that, the Oblates around the world remained close to people in many ways. This article discusses how they engaged in the field of health care.

In Haiti, the Oblates collaborated with the local health authorities in the awareness campaign about Covid-19. Also on the South Coast the Curé, of the parish of Notre-Dame de la Immaculate Conception took the responsibility of supervising the production of mufflers, gloves, and antiseptic gels in order to facilitate the hygiene of the people of the area.

in an organized manner. In the first phase itself, they reached out to more than 2250 families, providing them with rations of food essentials. San Leandro Oblate parish in Madrid has, so far, helped 80 families in the neighborhood to cover primary food needs. For this purpose, they launched a campaign to collect donations, and the response was very positive.

In one OMI parish in the Philippines, the Oblates handed over hundreds of seeds and seedlings to households, promoting a backyard garden for a more sustainable food source during the lockdown. In St. Michael's Parish, Saphan Mai, Thailand, our missionaries organized a regular distribution of food packs every first Wednesday of the month, during these months of COVID-19.

How can we also forget Bro. Sebastian JANKOWSKI (Ukraine) and Fr. Vincenzo BORDO (Korea) who have dedicated their life to the service of feeding the hungry long before the coronavirus? This website carried two separate articles on their work in the recent past.

This article may not be sufficient to cover all such projects in detail, but certainly, at the end, we can be humbly proud of ourselves as one Oblate family.

Indonesian Oblates contributed in the project to provide safety clothing for medical teams who are taking care of the Covid-19 victims. The Scholasticate Community, working together with the Indonesia Red Cross, did a blood donation campaign to help hospitals that have been struggling to keep up to the demand for blood during the pandemic.

The Oblate Mission Procure of the Mediterranean Province looked beyond themselves and extended a helping hand to Venezuela, a mission that comes under the Province. During the pandemic, they intensified the collection and shipment of medicine to Venezuela, in a move to help the already struggling health situation in the country. The Oblate community of Pozuelo de Alarcón (Spain) collaborated with the diocesan Caritas organization in a project for the storage and distribution of food among the needy. More than 1000 lunch packets were distributed daily for 45 days.

The Mission of Nigeria considered helping the sick, especially the older ones, as one of their priorities during this difficult period. Due to the loss of their jobs, many poor families could not afford to buy prescribed medicine for their sick family members. Thus, the Oblates became the mediators between them and the donors to facilitate the purchase of medicine.

Also in the Philippines Fr. Ponpon and Fr. Ray went out of their way to visit the sick and do funeral rites when required – of course adhering to all precautionary measures. The Oblates in Paraguay also established a hotline for urgent sick calls so that they could visit and pray over the sick.

The Oblates in Poland became involved in providing personal protection equipment to hospitals and nursing homes. In many places, such as in Koden, they organized projects to sew masks. Two of our houses were turned into quarantine centres for those who were supposed to be in self-isolation but could not do it in their homes due to various unavoidable reasons (Kokotek – for 60 people, Bodzanow – for 10 people). The Oblates would also measure their temperature, serve meals and do the so-called "sample collection" from potentially infected persons to be sent for analysis. Volunteers from the Polish Oblate Youth Ministry "Nineveh" were the first to engage in voluntary assistance in a nursing home that housed Covid-19 patients. In total, six volunteers from "Nineveh" and three Oblates joined this ministry in Lubliniec. In the Oblate Youth Center in Kokotek, an inter-congregational assistance group was formed to serve in social welfare homes in Lubliniec.

Lockdown Initiatives IV **"Close to the People"**

Editor's note: This will be the last of the series of articles about the initiatives of the Oblates during the Covid-19 pandemic. So far, we have published three articles on various aspects of their service: social media & communications, feeding the hungry, and caring for the sick. In this article, we attempt to combine all the other creative endeavours undertaken by Oblates around the world.

Fr. John WOTHERSOON, through "MercyHK", the organization he founded to help the homeless

St. Michael's Parish, Saphan Mai, Thailand, made face masks for the refugees and asylum seekers who were under the care of the Desk for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Catholic Commission for Seafarers (Caritas Bangkok). Some Oblate parish priests in South Africa, too, asked the "needle ladies" to make masks for distribution. Hong Kong Oblates also distributed thousands of masks and disinfection liquids among the poor in the city.

Madagascar Oblates of St. Eugene de Mazenod Church in Toamasina never stopped their services to the sick: anointing and giving the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion; of course, using facemasks and disinfectant gel were obligatory elements of such encounters.

In the meantime, the Oblate Youth China in Guangzhou, unable to gather for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, agreed to use their WeChat (social media) group chat to take turns and pray for 24 hours for those affected by the virus.

Two Nuns who belong to one of our sister congregations, The Missionary Oblate Sisters of Mary Immaculate (Oblatas), in Spain (Sr. Katharina Ramrath and Sr. Victoria Romero) were directly involved in helping the sick as nurses.

Certainly, the list is not complete, as the intention of this article was to take a glimpse at the daring spirit of the Oblates that shines even brighter in times of need. "Oblati, parati!"

in Hong Kong, provided accommodation for 23 homeless people as they were stranded on the streets without a place to go as the country came under lockdown. In South Africa too, some of our Oblate parish priests were brave enough to convert their parish community halls into places of refuge for the homeless.

Fr. Andrew STENDZINA, pastor of St. Augustine's Parish in Vancouver, Canada (OMI Lacombe) started a "telephone ministry" in an attempt to reach out to every family of his parish and maintain personal contact with them. The Oblates and the parishioners of the Sacred Heart parish in Ottawa had a "virtual Easter

Celebration” on Easter Sunday. Via Zoom, around 100 families met together to share their joy with one another. It included prayers, reading the Word of God, Sing-along songs and friendly chats. “It was a great time together, a moment of fraternity that came alive despite the situation of the coronavirus”, Fr. Andrzej JASTRZEBSKI said.

The Australian Province found a modern way to be close to the larger Mazenodian family. They launched a new website called “De Mazenod Family”, which now becomes the online hub for information and resources on Oblate spirituality and St. Eugene’s own spiritual journey.

The Central European Province prepared what they called a “Home Worship Service” based on the Sunday liturgy. These booklets included prayers, bible readings, homilies and catechesis, with pictures to colour (for kids). Fr. Alfred TÖNNIS, pastor for the refugees in Oggelsbeuren, invited the refugees with whom he works to a short inter-religious ‘Social Distance Prayer’ on Facebook and YouTube every evening. Sc. André KULLA, in collaboration with the Oblate Sisters (Oblatas) and the Youth Chaplains at our Oblate School in Burlo, created the hand puppet "Clara" in order to teach Religion to the young students in an attractive manner online.

The small Oblate community in Luxembourg (Benelux Province) also used a hand puppet - sheep Agatka (little Agatha) – in their YouTube series called "Beeeeeeee Ewangelia" where the puppet speaks with Fr. Adam HETMAN about the Sunday Readings. Kids embraced the innovative move with both hands. The Oblates also presented the life of a Saint every week on their social media links. After listening to the story of the Saint, both the parents and their children were invited to compete on an online quiz. Catechism with fun assured!

Benelux Oblates also organized a spiritual help programme via telephone. With pre-registration, those in need of counselling or spiritual guidance could reach them on the phone. Similarly, in many cities in the Province of Poland (Poznan, Warsaw and Krakow), Oblates organized a programme to extend psychological and spiritual support for those in need, over the phone.

In Indonesia, the community at the Provincial House in Kaliori, Central Java. helped some people in the neighbourhood by offering them job opportunities. They recruited some men and women to work in their new animal farm. Over 50 poor families were benefited.

The De Mazenod Scholasticate Community in Jaffna (Sri Lanka) composed some hymns during the time they were housebound. They also turned towards planting and their home garden came alive! Under the guidance of their Superior, Fr. Damian SOOSAI, they were also able to bring to the attention of the authorities thirteen beggars who had no “home” to go to when the island came under total lockdown.

As the schools were closed down, the Kenyan government created a nationwide e-learning platform for students. However, it did little help to those children from poor families who had no access to television, radio or the internet. Therefore, the Oblates in Kenya working in parishes decided to print the online materials sent by the government and distribute them among the students.

Lesotho was not seriously affected by the coronavirus, thanks in part to the Oblates who played a vital role in educating people and collaborating with the government and the local Church in conscientizing people about the gravity of this pandemic. Fr. Charles MATSOSO, the director of Radio Maria Lesotho, was at the forefront, as he used his accessibility to the media to educate people.

Italy and Spain (the Mediterranean Province) are two of the countries most affected by Covid-19. However, that did not deter the Oblates from finding new ways to be close to the people. In Italy, every morning a group of 10 Oblates published, on social media, a 3-minute video with a meditation on the Gospel of the day. The project will continue even in the coming months with the meditations made by six other Oblates, one COMI, and four lay associates from AMMI (MAMI). Every Saturday, the communications office of the Province broadcasts a Facebook Live, where Oblates and lay associates are invited to talk about different aspects of the Oblate charism and their missions abroad. Missioni OMI magazine continues to publish coronavirus-related content to help readers

look at this lived experience through the eyes of faith. The community of Marino and the Oblate Youth Movement *Costruire insieme* was very active during Vocation Week (May 21-29). Their sharing via videoconferencing services and social media on Oblate formation, our charism, and the vocation ministry was well received by the youth.

Madagascar Oblates in mission stations like Mahanoro and Marolambo negotiated with the local authorities to broadcast all Sunday Masses on the local radio. They also exposed the Blessed Sacrament every day in the Churches and the faithful could take turns to come and pray while following the social distance regulations. When people were asked not to gather in public, the Oblates in Befasy Mission sent statues of the Blessed Virgin, Sacred Heart of Jesus, and St. Joseph to each house. The idea was to encourage them to pray at home. Further, during the pandemic, they also somehow completed the construction of a beautiful ‘bush church’ in Misokitsy, systematically getting the community involved in the work with caution. “Here in the

bush, there is no Internet because we are isolated and so we often send letters to be in contact with the Catholics” one Oblate commented.

In places like Paraguay, Brazil, Pakistan, Cameroon and Congo, some Oblates went around their parish blessing people with the Blessed Sacrament and invoking the Divine intervention to protect them from the pandemic. It is also worth noting that several Oblate Units (and some Oblates on their own) organized videoconferences among the Oblates. At times, they were “international conferences”, as missionaries scattered in different parts of the world renewed their friendships during the break the pandemic gave to them.

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***There could be many other ways through which, the Oblates were close to people, especially the poor, during the pandemic. However, this series of articles called “Lockdown Initiatives” should remind us the following sentence from the letter of the Superior General written on the Feast day of the Founder: “We were born for times like this”.

GENERAL ADMISNITRATION

GENERAL SERVICE OF OBLATE STUDIES New Issue of “Oblatio” periodical

Voice of Fr. Ramon Bernabe, OMI

I would like to present to you this latest issue of the *Oblatio*, which is our Oblate publication about the various aspects of Oblate life and mission.

This first issue for this year 2020 is in a way special, because for the first time, it deals with Oblates in dialogue with Islam. The General Chapter of 2016 invited the Congregation to review and support Oblate presence and ministry in Islamic contexts. This is part of our response to that call from the Chapter.

We have in this issue articles from different places of Oblate encounter with Islam--Western Sahara, Senegal, the Philippines, Indonesia, and

Poland. The articles are written by Oblates who are scholars and practitioners of dialogue with Islam at various levels. Particularly interesting is an article by Chicho Rois where he goes back to the experience and insights of our Founder Eugene de Mazenod regarding Islam.

In the documentation section of this issue, we have a talk about inter-religious dialogue given by former Superior General Marcello Zago, and notes from an intervention in a conference about Mary in the Quran and in the Gospels, from a Muslim woman, who is a theologian and professor at the Gregorian University in Rome.

These stories and insights will certainly be of interest to other Oblates and lay people who are searching for understanding and guidance in our encounter with the great religion of Islam.

Happy Reading!

GENERAL POSTULATION**The Holy Oblate is still alive! Certainly, the Holy Oblate is still very much alive!**

Fr. Diego Saez Martín OMI, Postulator General

On May 20, 1939, one of our first Oblates died in Vico (island of Corsica, France): Father Dominic Albini, OMI. Vico's people began to say in the streets "The Saint is dead, the Saint is dead!" In a few hours, everyone in Corsica knew the news, even at the time when there was no Internet or television. Furthermore, the news quickly reached Menton and Nice, the cities of the French Riviera located on the other side of the sea that separates Corsica from southern France, where the Oblate had been born and lived respectively. As soon as the news was known in this part of the continent, the local clergy immediately commissioned local artists for the first two images of Fr. Albini that have been preserved. They were even ahead of Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates, who only a short time later ordered the third original portrait that we have today! Such was his reputation for holiness.

Even today on the island of Corsica Fr Albini is still called «El Santo» (the saint). It was Saint Eugene de Mazenod himself who sent two illustrious Oblates, Fr. Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert OMI (who would later become Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris) and Fr. Stephen Semeria OMI (who would later become Bishop of Jaffna, Sri Lanka) to collect all possible information and documents of Fr Albini. The Founder of the Oblates was convinced that, one day, the Congregation could open his process of beatification and canonization. In fact, this was the first Cause that the Oblates opened.

From July 15 to 20, 2020, Frs. Diego Sáez Martín OMI, Postulator General, and Dino Tessari OMI, member of the Postulation Committee, were able to verify «in situ» that El Santo is still very much alive in the hearts of the people and in our Oblate spiritual heritage. We went to visit the places related to Fr. Albini in the south of France, to check the state of things, to do research and to take photographs for an upcoming book and photo album that Fr. Dino hopes to publish soon.

In Menton, we saw the house where Fr. Albini was born in 1790, the facade and surroundings of which have been well arranged in recent years. It was with great joy that we saw that a copy of a portrait of Fr. Albini was prominently displayed in the Minor Basilica of Saint Michael, and there is a prayer to Venerable Albini next to the painting. The most encouraging thing about our visit to Menton was to see that even today, after many years of oblivion, one of the first three portraits of the Albini that we spoke about earlier, can still be found in the sacristy of the Chapel of the Immaculate, located in the basilica square. A few decades ago, it was known to be still there, but we had no images of it. Fortunately, we were able to photograph it this time around.

In Nice we were able to follow in his footsteps through the major seminary in which he studied, which was none other than the Franciscan Studentate on the outskirts of the city, in Cimiez, located in the Monastery of Our Lady of Cimiez. From the Shrine of the Annunciation located in the mountains bordering Menton, where he used to go with his father as a child and from which he could then see the Island of Corsica, we had the opportunity to see some of the mountain towns where he served as a priest during his early years of ministry.

We were able to visit the Nice Cathedral, the Cathedral of St. Reparata, where in 1814 he was ordained a priest and where he exercised the ministry for a certain time, also being a professor in the new seminary of the diocese. Incidentally, there were no photographs of the seminary either, as it is not a well-known place in Nice, since the building was used only for a very short time as a seminary, before being transferred to another place. After much research, we were able to find the building and managed to photograph it, thus improving the Oblate photographic archive.

A very exciting moment was our visit to the Shrine of Saint Pontius (Saint-Pons). This was where, in 1824, Don Dominic Albini, a diocesan priest, found two missionaries who had come to the aid of the parish priest of the cathedral of Nice. The parish priest attended to a group

of 150 troubled young people with a dubious moral life. To help them find Christ in their lives, he had asked for help from a group of newly founded missionaries: the Missionaries of Provence, who would later be known by our present name: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Don Dominic was to help the parish priest and the two missionaries in preaching to the youth for a whole week. So he lived with those two missionaries during those days and liked everything he saw in them: their missionary zeal, their ardent preaching in simple language to the young people, and, above all, the time spent in common prayer, fraternal charity, good spirit at meals and during recreation... Who were those two Oblates? None other than Saint Eugene de Mazenod and Fr Suzanne. And Don Dominic requested to enter this new congregation, becoming Father Dominic, Missionary of Provence and later Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

Later, in 1834, he would be sent to the island of Corsica (France), where he would be known to all, until today, as a man of God, as 'the Saint'... However, this will be another story that we will be able to tell, God willing, after a new journey of the Postulation in the footsteps of Venerable Dominic Albin OMI on that beautiful island.

GENERAL POSTULATION

Postulation Committee: a new family is born

On July 6, 2020, the new Postulation Committee met at the OMI General House in Rome. This Committee is not a novelty in our Congregation: previous Postulators General had had a Committee as well. However, it had been more than a decade, perhaps about 15 years, since a Postulation Committee met. The appointment of a new full-time Postulator General allows us to expect an exclusive and intense dedication, which has led to the recovery of the reality of the committee. Its functions are defined by the internal regulations of the General Administration:

"The Postulator General is assisted by a committee, appointed by the Superior General, with whom he meets regularly and from which he receives advice on specific questions related to the causes he is dealing with" (General Administration, "Handbook", n° 7.2.2)

We thank the Oblate community in Nice, especially Fr. Alfonso Bartolotta OMI and Br. Mariusz Lorenc OMI, who welcomed us with remarkable fraternal hospitality and who accompanied us to the places at all times, making the visit easier and more pleasant. Incidentally, the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart that they serve is a garden of peace in the middle of the tourist center of the city and they are also making an effort to make the figure of Fr. Albin better known, having placed his image in one of the side chapels.

Fr. Albin today is Venerable, that is, the Church has already said that he truly lived heroically as a Christian, a religious and a priest. The only thing that separates us from the beatification and then the canonization is being able to present a well-documented miracle to the Holy See. Please ask for the intercession of Fr. Albin and communicate the favors received to the Postulation office.

The General Postulation has a Facebook page where you can find these and many other materials on Fr. Albin and on other important Oblates: <https://www.facebook.com/PostulatioOMI/>

Thus, with the Postulator General, Fr. Diego SÁEZ MARTÍN (Spanish, General Administration), the new members of the committee met at the General House in Rome:

- Fr. Antoni BOCHM (Polish, General Administration)
- Fr. Dino TESSARI (Italian, Mediterranean Province, Florence community).
- Fr. David LÓPEZ MORENO (Spanish, Mediterranean Province, Provincial Secretary)
- Fr. Benedicto FRÍAS HERNÁNDEZ (Mexican, International Roman Scholasticate).
- Fr. Ganava BIZAMA (Cameroonian, General Administration).

Putting in common the missionary and personal gifts of each one, we have a group with extraordinary wealth for the entire Congregation. For example, Fr. Dino's 20 years of missionary life in Asia (Indonesia), in addition to his missionary enthusiasm still very

present (he visits all the seminaries in Italy to do missionary animation on behalf of the country's Pontifical Mission Societies), and his many simple and engaging publications on our great Oblates that he has been publishing in recent years. Or the knowledge of the needs of the formation houses around the world provided by Fr. Benedicto and David (who has been a formator of the scholasticate of the Mediterranean Province for many years, and which has been welcoming scholastics from all over the world, especially Europe). The geographical reality is also well represented, with members from three of the five regions of the Congregation. Frs. Dino, Benedicto and Diego have the experience of having lived in the other two regions. We could mention the technical knowledge that Fr. Bizama can bring, as he is doing specialized studies on information technology... And we could also

INITIAL FORMATION

Interculturality in Oblate Formation: Opportunities and Challenges

*Fr. Ross B. Kapunan, OMI
(OMI Scholasticate, Quezon City, Philippines)*

Introduction

The persistent ethnic conflict that we encounter in the world today even in much more pluralistic and multicultural societies reflects among others a failure in intercultural living. As Gittins would say, we can actually live together separately. In other words, we may cross paths everyday but may never have crossed each other's lives. One most current event that exhibits evidently this intercultural struggle is how the black people are perceived and treated in the United States, which gave rise to the "black lives matter" protests. The apparent prejudice based on the color of the skin manifest a deep-seated cultural divide: the white skin over the black, red, yellow or brown. Needless to say, humanity has yet to overcome racial bias based on skin color up to this very day. Among us Oblates, can we also honestly examine ourselves where are we in this regard? The 2016 General Chapter document describes vividly our experience in the congregation saying "The difficult meeting of cultures also affects us as Oblate missionaries.

mention many other aspects that constitute fantastic resources at the service of the Postulation for the good of the Congregation.

Fr. Louis LOUGEN, the Superior General, accompanied us at the beginning and at the end of the day, leading the opening prayer in which he blessed us with the Cross of Saint Eugene, and in closing around the relic of the Founder's heart. Since he will not always be able to accompany us physically, he wanted to leave us a person on the Committee who, as his representative, can make us feel his constant closeness: Fr. Antoni BOCHM, General Councilor for Europe.

In summary, as some of us have said, a small family of Oblates is being born with a common passion, with the desire to make known and love the great and rich spiritual heritage of the Congregation.

Oblates who arrive in a new Unit for mission do not always have a positive experience." Thus, a missionary formation enabled in a multicultural context becomes increasingly more relevant and indispensable today.

The Our Lady of the Assumption Scholasticate of the Philippine Province has become truly international/multicultural in recent years. From three nationalities in the beginning, it grew into eleven during the last four years. Now, we have post-novices coming from Kenya, Cameroon, Lesotho, Congo, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka-Jaffna, South Korea, Hong Kong-China, India and Philippines. The formation team is likewise composed of different nationalities from the Philippines, Sri Lanka-Jaffna and Lesotho. But to become a truly intercultural community still remains a process. In any case, a big step has already been made. Formation to interculturality can only happen between and among members of the community that come from diverse cultural origin.

In line with the theme, what then are some of the opportunities as well as the challenges of doing formation in an international/multicultural context? Allow me to share some thoughts and experiences which do not

in any way claim to capture all the common experiences but hoping that it will offer some points for reflection and further discussion.

Some Opportunities

a. Experience of the internationality of the congregation

Going out of one's own country and experience living in another already brings immense opportunity. Travel is one opportunity that one does not want to miss! We may say that information technology has already made us aware of the internationality of the congregation. However, to experience internationality is a different matter. The opportunity, therefore, is in the experience itself! Experience is essential in the formation to interculturality. It can only happen when people of diverse cultural provenance actually experience living with each other.

b. Experience of diversity of cultures

Living together under one roof with eleven different cultural upbringings is not by all means a comfortable experience. As the saying goes, it is more natural for "birds of the same feathers (to) flock together". For this reason, living with others so different from oneself truly needs an intentional commitment. It can be a very stressful experience when each one behaves and thinks in a different manner. Nonetheless, this experience of diversity can also become an exceptionally exciting experience. It only requires an adventurous spirit and an inquisitive and appreciative mind to turn around the unpleasant experience into a fantastically enriching one. Without noticing it, after some years one can develop a "taste" of the other culture. The once unusual taste becomes familiar; the repulsive becomes delicious as in the case of durian and balut.

c. Learning a new language or two

Obviously, to learn a new language is a great opportunity. Here English is the language of the community but we have also organized Filipino language classes. This will give the post-novices and the formation team a good opportunity to communicate using the language of the common people especially the poor in the areas of apostolate who are not proficient

in the English language. It will likewise be a great advantage to learn the Filipino language as we all know the Filipinos are scattered in all the corners of the world (even in Lesotho!).

d. A broader missionary outlook

On a deeper level, the experience of formation in a culturally diverse context advances a global vision of the congregation and of the mission. The exchange of experiences from diverse missionary contexts enlarges one's vision of the Oblates' missionary work. It considerably opens up the possibility of being sent as a missionary to another country. Psychologically speaking, it prepares future Oblates to be missionaries ad extra.

e. To be stretched and tested

The most difficult one but also the most beneficial of all is the opportunity to be tried and tested. It serves as an occasion to become more mature. The apostolic man must learn to adapt to a new environment. Only those who can persevere in difficult and unfamiliar situations can also persevere wherever they will be sent.

Some Challenges

a. Inadequate psycho-emotional preparedness

Some post-novices come with heavy emotional baggage leaving their family and home province. A case in point: it took one scholastic a semester to come out of loneliness from being separated from his family for the first time. He did not eat nor sleep well. He would often call back home. He was not personally equipped to adapt to a new environment after being uprooted. Nevertheless, it had also become for him an opportunity to grow. In my own analysis, he was not psycho-emotionally prepared before he was sent. This should also be kept in mind before sending a missionary outside of his home province for the first time.

b. Narrow missionary orientation

The lack of expansive missionary orientation also poses a challenge. Post-novices from units that have an inward outlook, which are probably unconsciously encouraged even by their own units, have difficulty entering into the culture of others. They tend to stick together and always think of returning to their home unit after their formation. This orientation can hinder their

full and active effort to learn and appreciate the language and culture of the receiving unit and much more to integrate into their way of life and mission. That we belong to a global congregation needs to be strongly emphasized.

c. Cultural conflicts (especially ecclesial and Oblate culture)

There is inherently in every person a sense of pride of his own culture. He/she treats his/her own as the best of all. When he/she comes to meet another culture his/her tendency is to assert the usual traditions, methods or manners at home. It is normally prefaced with "in our country it is done like this..." Hence, it is naturally anticipated that cultural conflicts arise in a culturally diverse community. However, based on experience the more contentious conflicts are coming rather from the differences in ecclesial and Oblate culture : the way things should be done, behavioral norms, liturgical practices, organization of common life, exercise of authority, etc... In other words, there are tendencies in each one to be culturally rigid. In a survey I conducted, some of these manifestations were articulated as imposing one's culture to others, high demand on others but not from oneself, "half-hearted open mindedness". A good interculturality orientation session is extremely needed in order to address this issue.

d. Movement from ethno-centric to ethno-relative worldview

The movement from ethno-centric to ethno-relative worldview is one of the ultimate challenges to formation in an international/multicultural context. It involves a deeper examination of one's own culture. It requires a movement from denial , polarization and minimization to attitudes of acceptance, adaptation and integration. A good indication of this is when formands learn to appreciate another culture, open to learn new things, acceptance of current realities, seeking to understand, curiosity, etc. Conversely, a negative sign is indicated when there is the tendency towards rigid self-preservation, racial bias, isolation, exclusion, etc...

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gittins reiterates that God created an inclusive community and thus we are called to build a home where all can live and everyone belongs. What interculturality in formation hopes to achieve is to develop respect for the culture of another that shows itself in authentic interpersonal relationships as well as appreciation of the cultural genius itself...

This is apparently the task of interculturality in Oblate formation. How to bring everyone to an intentional commitment and to concretely live it out remains the challenge.

AFRICA-MADAGASCAR

KENYA

Families facing rising hunger caused by the coronavirus pandemic

Fr. Iyan Daquin OMI

The impact of COVID-19 on people within the Irinda-Gachanka community is real, felt, and is demanding that we be ever visible by way of expressing our closeness to our people we serve, people who are affected by the pandemic, especially the poor, the weakest, and the most vulnerable, both individuals and families all together in the community.

While adhering to the Government's strict measures against the spread of the pandemic, we remain close to, and journey with, the people entrusted to our pastoral care. What we physically experience, see, and hear from families around us is the fact that COVID-19 has caused serious livelihood vulnerabilities, and especially food insecurity. Here we share some echoes from two families with a picture for each.

Sarah Gerard Mwimbia and grandchildren

Fr Jean Pierre Faye, OMI, Catechist Frank Mwenda and I (Fr Daquin Iyo Iyan, OMI), visited an 82-year-old woman, Sarah, who is

the guardian of two boys and one little girl: her grandchildren. She lives about one Kilometre from our community. The parents of the little children are deceased. Sarah took them in as their mother. Sarah was full of excitement when she saw us standing in front of her small, simple wooden house. We discovered in the course of our conversation how difficult this pandemic time is for her. She cannot move outside of her home because of the information she has that older people are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. In addition, she has limitations imposed by her age, which reduce her ability to cater to the daily upkeep of her grandchildren, and she becomes engulfed in worries when she cannot control their movements to ensure their safety. Sarah thanked Catechist Mwenda for bringing her visitors, Fr Jean-Pierre and Fr Daquin, who came loaded with filled shopping bags to relieve the suffering caused by COVID-19.

Aged couple - victims of land grabbing

Kathambi and M'Mbijiwe are a couple of an advanced age, members of our Prayer House, Gachanka. They lost their land, which was grabbed by someone else, and the case is still in court awaiting trial. They live in a small wooden house given by a Good Samaritan: their situation is appalling! Both husband and wife are faced with health issues and a lack of food, and are no longer receiving the previous assistance frequently given by their neighbours, because of the challenges now facing them also. Our visit to this older couple, guided by Catechist Mwenda, was a response to their lack of food during this painful time, which has left the poor, the weak and the most abandoned very vulnerable. Kathambi, who was left behind while her husband was taken to hospital for treatment, thanked and blessed us for the food we offered, and wished us well.

ASIA-OCEANIA

AUSTRALIA

Pope appoints new Bishop for Wagga Wagga

Pope Francis has appointed Bishop Mark Stuart Edwards, O.M.I., as Bishop of Wagga Wagga, Australia on May 26, 2020. He has been serving as Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne with the titular see of Garba since December 2014.

Bishop elect Mark Stuart Edwards was born in Balikpapan, Indonesia in 1959. He moved to Australia in 1962. After attending Saint Leonard's Primary School in Glen Waverley and Mazenod College in Mulgrave, he received his Bachelor of Science degree at Monash University in Melbourne. In 1980, he entered the Novitiate of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and completed his ecclesiastical studies at the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne and the Melbourne College of Divinity. He was ordained a priest in 1986. After priestly ordination, he continued his training at Monash University in Melbourne, obtaining a Doctorate in Philosophy and a Baccalaureate in Literature and Education.

He held the following positions in the

Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate:

- Professor at Mazenod College in Mulgrave (1986-1989);
- Vice-Rector of Iona College in Brisbane (1990-1997);
- Master Pre-novice Master at Saint Mary's Seminary in Mulgrave (1998-2004);
- Novice Master at Saint Mary's Seminary in Mulgrave (2004-2007);
- Professor at Catholic Theological College in Melbourne (2005-2010);
- Rector of Iona College in Lindum, Brisbane (since 2010).

In 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2011 he was elected Provincial Councillor of the Oblate Province in Australia. He was appointed by Pope Francis, Bishop of Garba and appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne on 7 November 2014; he was consecrated the following 17 December. He is a Member of the Committee for Catholic Education for the Australian Bishops Conference.

Wagga Wagga is the major city of the Riverina and the largest inland city in New South Wales. Its population is estimated at nearly 56,500, of which over 31 per cent are Catholic.

THE PHILIPPINES

A new Oblate Bishop to guide Jolo

Most Rev. Charlie Malapitan INZON, OMI, became the latest Bishop of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate after he was ordained to the episcopacy at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Cotabato City, Philippines, on May 21, 2020, also the feast day of our Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod. Bp. Inzon was appointed by Pope Francis on April 4 this year as Apostolic Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo in southern Philippines.

Mgr. Angelito Lampon, OMI (Archbishop of Cotabato), Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, OMI (Archbishop Emeritus of Cotabato), and Mgr. Jose Colin Bagaforo, DD (Bishop of the Diocese of Kidapawan) were the consecrators during the solemn Eucharistic Celebration. In keeping with the restrictions of the community quarantine in the city, the liturgy was celebrated with only 10 participants in the Cathedral—the principal consecrators, the Bishop-elect, 2 Oblate priests, 2 diocesan priests, and 2 members of the choir. The rest of the people watched the rite on live streaming.

In his thanksgiving message during his consecration, Bishop Inzon described the occasion as “rare and unprecedented,” but that the simplicity of it all only served to highlight the essential—the Lord who is at the center, and the source and strength of the call to service in the Church. He also narrated how, because of the lockdown, he had been unable to procure his personal episcopal paraphernalia, but that the Spirit led him to the museum of the Oblates where he borrowed the ring and pastoral staff of the martyr-Bishop Benjamin de Jesus, OMI,

AUSTRALIA

“Provence Centre” in honour of Saint Eugene

Iona College, situated in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia, will name its new Gathering Space “Provence Centre”, after the Provence region in France, the birthplace of St Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The name Provence brings with it recognition of St Eugene’s contribution

and the pectoral cross and inner cassock of the late Archbishop Philip Smith, OMI; and from Archbishop Angelito Lampon, he received a miter and chasuble.

Bishop Inzon chose as his motto a verse from the Gospel of John, “VOS AMICI MEI ESTIS,” which translates to “YOU ARE MY FRIENDS”. It recalls for Bishop Inzon his many years of ministry as a missionary in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo, and his return to the local Church of Jolo as its shepherd, called to bring the friendship of Jesus Christ to his flock. The Vicariate of Jolo has been entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate since 1939. The majority-Muslim region covered by the Vicariate has been known for its history of violence. Three Oblates, including the Vicariate’s fourth Bishop, Benjamin de Jesus, along with a number of lay people, have been killed in violent incidents in these southernmost provinces of the Philippines. The most recent of such violent attacks on the Catholics was on January 27, 2019, when the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo was bombed during Mass, killing at least 26 people and injuring 116 other churchgoers.

The five previous Bishops of Jolo, all Oblates, are: Francis Joseph MCSORLEY (1954-72), Philip Francis SMITH (1972-80), George Eli DION (1980-91), Benjamin DE JESUS (1991-97), and Angelito LAMPON (1997-2018).

Mgr. Inzon, now the sixth Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate, previously served there as a scholastic and then as a priest, before being appointed the Provincial of the Philippine Province of the Oblates, on January 12, 2018.

to the Iona culture. The expected project completion date is May 2021.

The College is reputed in the Archdiocese as a school that seeks to provide a dynamic Catholic learning community within the Oblate spirit, so that its members are faith filled, resilient, courageous, well balanced and prepared to make a difference.

The great influx of migrants after the World War II had placed overwhelming pressures on the Catholic Education system and in the mid-1950s the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate received many invitations to open schools in various dioceses throughout Australia.

The Oblates had very little money for a venture into education, however Archbishop Sir James Duhig promised them a gift of land if they would establish a boys' college in his

diocese. Cambridge graduate Fr. Tim LONG had arrived in Australia from, the then, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) where he had been Rector of St Patrick's College, Jaffna. Together with the then Oblate Provincial in Australia, Fr. Edward (Ned) RYAN, he accepted the Archbishop's offer. With his colleague, Fr. Denis MCCARTHY, he got the site and its sparse buildings ready for a school to start on 28 January 1958. Fr Michael TWIGG is the present Rector of the College.

CANADA-UNITED STATES

UNITED STATES

Oblate Creates New Icon - Our Lady of the Pandemic

By Fr. Mark Dean, OMI

During the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I painted an icon...

The work on this icon began on Holy Thursday, April 9, 2020. The last brush stroke was made on the feast day of Catherine of Siena, April 29, 2020.

For the basis of this icon, I used a pattern based upon the icon of The Virgin of the Burning Bush, which shows an icon of Mary & the Christ Child lodged in a tree on an island. The tree has leaves with flame.

I had done this icon several years ago in memory of my youngest brother who died in 1992. I added in at that time a single Iris flower, in honor of my youngest brother. (When asked what his favorite flower was, my brother replied, the iris. The questioner responded that irises are indeed pretty, but unfortunately, they do not last long. My brother, who was in his last weeks of life at the time, retorted, "And that is what they will say of me..." Jim Dean, he didn't last long, but he was pretty while he was here.)

The Icon of the Virgin of the Burning Bush is in reference to the story of Moses and the Burning Bush..., which was on fire, but not

consumed. The early Church saw this as a symbol of Mary and the Virgin Birth... she who gave birth, yet remained a virgin. One of the first changes I made to this pattern was to use as the main Marian image the icon of Our Lady of Tenderness as displayed in the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir, perhaps the most famous example of this style. I also brought into the icon the two angels depicted in the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In the halo of Mary are included twelve abstract stars. Only nine are visible, for three are hidden by Mary and the Christ Child. While stars are not uncommon in icons of Mary, these stars were placed in as reference to Mary, Mother of Divine Mercy.

In the foreground I added a field of irises, for me a symbol of our dearly departed... who, while out of sight, are not out of heart or mind or reach. Finally, in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, I placed a symbol of the Coronavirus on the cross borne by the angel on the right... and later on I added in a bat, in reference to the supposed origin of the virus. The prayer I wrote for this icon is:

Our Lady of Tenderness, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mother of Divine Mercy, intercede for us unto God to bless and aid all who are afflicted and affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic. May all who gaze upon this image know the healing touch of God. Amen.

UNITED STATES**A Powerful Statement from Provincial and U.S. Leadership**

Editor's note: At present, all eyes of the world are on the United States because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating protests following the death of George Floyd. The Provincial leadership of the Oblate Province of the United States, headed by Fr. Louis STRUDER the Provincial, has issued a letter to the Oblate family basing themselves on our Charism.

June 2, 2020

Dear Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Members of the Mazenodian Family,

The United States is currently living through two profound crises that have the potential to shape our society for many years – the Covid-19 pandemic and the nation-wide response to the murder of George Floyd by a police officer. These crises highlight the divide that exists in economic and social realities within American society. The economic divide is clearly evident in the long food lines and the devastatingly disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on communities of color. The peaceful protests highlight the disproportionate effect of policing and the criminal justice system on communities of color. Furthermore, these protests have been corrupted by outside elements that abuse peaceful, protected protest to engage in criminal violence and looting.

Our Oblate charism reminds us:

We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches least.

Wherever we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for

salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring. These are the poor with their many faces; we give them our preference. (Const. 5)

As Oblates, our charism calls us to be messengers of affirming actions that foster an elimination of the injustices that have been clearly identified, and in some cases exacerbated, by the twin crises we currently face. This same charism invites us to be channels of dialogue and understanding that respect the complex roots of these divisions. It demands that we neither turn our faces away from nor take actions that exacerbate these difficulties. Our call is to provide a hopeful path to a just response, and ultimately to resolution. We stand in solidarity with those who engage in the just, peaceful and protected expression of these unacceptable realities. We decry those who take conscious steps to subvert and thwart such expression. At the same time, we support appropriate efforts to prevent those who abuse these assemblies to engage in illegal and counterproductive violence and looting.

As Oblates our charism calls us to stand with those who seek through dialogue and appropriate action to address these underlying differences that should not exist. Correspondingly this same charism invites us to reject those actions that widen the divisions that separate us. Sadly, it appears that there are efforts to taint a serious dialogue that do not serve the common good, which is the core of our gospel. Most sadly there are efforts to hijack religious symbols and sacred spaces in ways that fan the flames of division rather than serving as the sign of hope, compassion, and justice. This must be rejected.

Signed:

Louis Studer, (OMI Provincial)

James Brobst, OMI (Vicar Provincial)

James Chambers, (OMI Treasurer)

Séamus Finn, OMI (Director, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office)

BOLIVIA**Oblates facing the pandemic, with faith and courage.**

Brother Edgard FRANCKEN, OMI, is of Belgian nationality, but he has been serving in Bolivia since December, 1976. When he joined the Oblates he was already a medical doctor. Here he shares with us the challenge that the Oblates and the people of Bolivia are going through in these times of great difficulty, caused by the covid-19 pandemic.

At the moment, there is little hopeful news to tell. The messages read on the television channels were worrying. One newspaper carried a headline: "Even the wealthy can't find a place in hospitals." These days, infections are mainly concentrated in Cochabamba, after Santa Cruz and Beni. Hospitals are overcrowded and there is a lack of equipment, drugs, testing equipment, protective gear and oxygen. The prices are often exorbitant for those trying to procure medication or a (good) facemask. Many medical workers tested positive or are sick. The funeral directors do not know how to keep up with the number of deceased or where to bury them. In El Alto (La Paz), where normally around eight people were buried each day, there are now about 40 burials. These are scenes that we have also seen in Ecuador, Peru and Brazil.

Bro. Pascual JIMÉNEZ, who is also a nurse, has already lost a brother and a sister. Calixto MAMANI, our Provincial, has lost his brother-in-law... The tragedies therefore touch us very closely. In Huachacalla, a small village on the border with Chile where the Oblates (including me) worked years ago and whose inhabitants we still know very well, 24 people died in a few

PARAGUAY**The other side of social distancing**

This year marks 35 years since my first visit to the Nivaêles indigenous community in Fischat, where I now live. I remember that on my first visit - in fact, almost every year I used to spend a little time in this oldest mission of ours (of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate - going for 100 years!) - I did not know what I

weeks out of a population of a few hundred. Yesterday, the Bishop of El Alto, Bishop Eugène Scarpellini (66), died of coronavirus. We have been living in quarantine for more than three months now, but the fate of 70% of the population depends on their daily income. Many are therefore forced to ignore or even combat health measures.

In addition, after last year's presumably fraudulent elections, Bolivia is experiencing an atmosphere of political instability, with roadblocks and protests dramatically increasing the risk of infection.

In the midst of all these difficulties, we try to do what we can. Our Oblates try to support people as much as the situation allows, through prayer, internet communications and Eucharistic celebrations. I myself left Oruro for Cochabamba to help the community of elderly Oblates who are currently in need of help, as they do not receive any other form of assistance. In the meantime, I am trying to help an institutional care center, where three very courageous nuns look after some fifty handicapped young people. The center also suffers from lack of moral and personnel support. Fortunately, two young Jesuits came to live with them temporarily, in quarantine. Six workers also come to help every day, but one infection would be enough to rekindle the fire. Let us hope and pray that this does not happen. A strong testimony today is that all Oblates, young and old, have stayed at work with their fellow brothers in their mission territories.

P.S.- Translation of a letter intended for publication in AKKOORD, the newsletter of the Oblate Province of Belgium & Holland.

must do when visiting people in their cottages. However, gradually it came very naturally to me with each family I visited: "lhnam" (come on in), with this greeting you are already integrated into the circle and you can sit down. More concise than the Paraguayan greeting, especially that of the peasants. Shaking hands - an exception granted to the "white" world, but it is already widespread because of so many years of contact. As is the custom of drinking tereré

(a typical, popular drink in Paraguay). When it happened without including me, the next time I asked them to pass me the guampa (the typical cup that is used to drink tereré). The response I got was, “We are not used to white people sharing it with us.”

It has been a year and a half since I started living in Fischat this time. I tried to continue the good habit of my predecessor “José’i” (Fr. José FRISCH), who for 3 decades visited them house to house. Now this pandemic has arrived and with it the quarantine.

During this period, we already had six deaths. No! None due to COVID-19, thank goodness! But each death causes pain and sadness. And the Nivaçle show it very openly, especially at the time of burial, while they are usually more reserved in expressing their emotions.

Furthermore, each death evokes gestures of solidarity. They usually bury their dead pretty soon. Everyone quickly knows what to do:

- Wrap the body with his/her bedsheet and bulge it with the mattress. Coffins are not normally used.
- Gather his/her assets. Above all, the clothing of the deceased is buried with the body.
- Dig the pit. They are often the youngest, who are rewarded with cigarettes.
- Do the prayers. Each neighborhood has its coordinator.
- Call the "ele" (priest). A relative informs the scheduled time for the funeral.

It is usually inevitable that the Nivaçle get together; even more so at burials, which take place, as soon as young people have finished digging the grave.

I would try to explain that no more than 10 people should gather. Only once, I managed to

do that. Ten of them arrived with the body in the van; but soon more people joined. Should I send them home? I don't have the heart to do it. I am wearing my facemask. Only once did I get five others to bring it along with them. Most seem to still consider it as a new whim, a fashion, a business... Maintain social distance? But how?

In moments of mourning, the Nivaçle show their compassion with hugs. And that's how I used to do it as well. Now I refrain from shaking hands, let alone patting or hugging the closest relatives. But it hurts me. And the worst thing is I sense how people feel: “That's how white people are: they reject us; they're disgusted with us!” Or am I just imagining it?

It's almost 100 years of our missionary presence here. There were very different times. Looking back, we speak of “paternalism” - the missionaries felt responsible for “their children”. Or of “developmentalism”: a lot of effort given to material work, and to obtain “progress”. Today, the paradigms are rather about self-management and indigenous church.

We learn to know and appreciate language, culture and traditions; respect their own authorities; and share responsibilities. Always fighting to show our closeness, our love... And now – “social distance”! As much as possible avoid home visits; no shaking hands, no showing of compassion with physical gestures; sharing the tereré - don't even think about it!

I feel so sad! How can we lose in a few weeks what we have built up in years? I feel very uncomfortable, in the face of this social distancing. I know I must do it for protection - not mine, but of the people themselves. But what if they do not understand it, or do not interpret it that way?

“The Lord looks down from the heavens, and sees all the human beings; He shapes the hearts of each; He considers all their works.” (Psalm 33:13, 15)

BOLIVIA**In the midst of the catastrophic pandemic and political crisis.**

Fr. Guillermo Siles Paz, OMI

It has been several months since the country has come to a standstill. This atmosphere has revealed many realities and problems of economic, social and political natures.

Bolivia had already experienced several problems at the end of last year when the fraudulent elections were annulled. By October, 2019, the country had come to a standstill, generating many economic losses. In fact, at the end of 2019, the public external debt was US\$11,267.6 million, the highest in history, representing 27.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a percentage that is still among the lowest in the region according to the Central Bank of Bolivia (BCB). Now with the pandemic, it brought a total paralysis of economic life.

The most worrying thing is that, in Bolivia, the formal employee represents only 20% of the population and, therefore, the rest live from the informal market, that is to say, they live on daily wages. The young professionals take at least a year to get a decent job. As a consequence of this reality, thousands of families found themselves in a very precarious situation, without having anything to live on. The urban unemployment rate in Bolivia rose from 5.71 percent to 7.34 percent according to the latest report from the National Institute of Statistics (INE).

Many called for a break in the quarantine, with the intention of generating income and reactivating the economy. The government tried to alleviate the situation by issuing three types of bonds, which benefited the most vulnerable families. The bonds are estimated to be worth between 3 and 3.5 billion Boliviano (US\$ 431 to 500 million), which went directly to the homes, to the families, and that did something to alleviate the issue of the economy in the country.

The pandemic entered Bolivia in February and settled down slowly and steadily. The latest

report, dated August 15, 2020, puts the number of deaths at 4,000 (3,939) and the number of people recovered at 35,000 (34,723). Most of those infected are treated at home. The main victims were the doctors, nurses and hospital staff, who had to face the evil with minimal protection.

The transitional government, headed by President Jeanine Añez, managed to stabilize the country after the sad days of October 2019, but parliament is trying to corner it because an opposition, led by the previous government was reactivated. Using various strategies, they are in a mood to attempt a blatant sedition.

Normally, the national elections should have been held on May 3, but, due to the pandemic, they were postponed until September 6. Lately this date was changed because the growth of the curve is alarming and Bolivia has not yet reached its peak, so the date was postponed again to October 18.

In this context, education has become the most pressing issue, since the ministry passed a law to provide virtual and distance classes. The only thing it has revealed is the great difference or the gap that exists among the people of the country. While the urban areas enjoy easy access to the internet, the rural areas often have no access to internet nor mobile phones. The central government announced the closure of the 2020 school year at the end of July in the country, due to the pandemic, and also due to the lack of facilities to provide virtual education to the entire nation.

Faced with all this reality, the Church also had to come up with changes, since all the churches were kept under closed doors. Web pages and online networks were opened to allow the faithful to participate in Masses, celebrations and prayers.

As missionary Oblates, we also used different methods to interact with our parish communities. In all the marginal sectors, the missionaries joined hands with their respective communities to help families with food, soup kitchens and health care, in order to assist many of the people affected by this pandemic.

EUROPE

MEDITERRANEAN PROVINCE**“Missioni OMI” magazine: the centenary is approaching**

Pasquale Castrilli OMI

Missioni OMI is a missionary magazine published by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Italy. Founded in Naples in 1921, it is going to celebrate 100 years of proud existence in 2021. This year, the magazine will carry many special segments in view of its centenary celebrations.

It hosts a column written by Bishop Wilhelm STECKLING, Bishop of Ciudad del Este in Para-guay and the former Superior General (1998-2010). As 2020 also marks the sixtieth year of the disappearance of the Blessed Italian Oblate Mario Borzaga in Laos, the magazine carries a series of interviews done by Paolo Damosso (author of the most recent biography on Blessed Borzaga) with those who were closely associated Blessed Borzaga. Meanwhile, Fr. Bruno FAVERO, missionary in Senegal, writes his comments on some unique photographs in the column *Una foto per pensare*. Angelica Ciccone, who is in-charge of the publication of the digital version of the magazine, presents some significant contents in the history of the magazine with her column “MissioniOMI-100”. In view of the centenary, a book with the history of the magazine and an index of its contents is also being worked on.

Although it is called Missioni OMI today, at its foundation it bore the name *La Voce di Maria* (Voice of Mary). Since then, its name has been changed twice more: *Fino al Polo* (To the Pole) (1955-1958) and, of course, *Missioni OMI* (since 1959). There have been ten Oblate editors altogether, and, most recently, Benito FRAMARIN (1992-1997), Nino BUCCA (1998-2003), Fabio CIARDI (2003-2011) and Pasquale CASTRILLI (2011-).

Missioni OMI has nine issues each year, and each issue currently contains 44 pages. The editorial staff is also composed of Fr. Gianluca RIZZARO, Fr. Maurizio VELLA and Mariasara Castaldo.

In recent years, the magazine concentrated more on the Oblate missionary activities undertaken by the Mediterranean Province. Among them were numerous articles on youth activities and the mission with young people. Pages were reserved in each issue for the *Costruire Youth Movement* (MGC), and the pastoral ministry of vocations with interviews with all the young Oblates of the province who had been ordained priests. Other such themes are the pastoral care of migrants and the unification of the Oblate provinces of Spain and Italy. It also carries articles on various topics that interest the congregation: the OMI General Chapters, the bicentenary of the Oblate congregation, and the year of prayer for vocations. There is also no lack of articles in the magazine on the life of the Church and Society.

In addition to recounting missionary current affairs, Missioni OMI is an extraordinary tool for documenting the Oblate commitment to evangelization in Italy and in the nations that are traditionally linked to Italian Oblate history: Laos, Indonesia, Senegal, Uruguay, Romania, Guinea Bissau, as well as the United States, Canada, South Korea, Thailand, China, Venezuela, etc.

The current editor, Fr. Pasquale CASTRILLI, wrote in the editorial of the January-February 2020 issue:

“We the Italian Oblates do not have a great tradition in communications, but this magazine (and for about ten years the website *omimed.eu* and social media profiles) are our only business cards, the only presence in the world of communications where we often express

ourselves quickly and superficially. Our footprint in Italian society is really small, our readers are only a few thousand, but we can continue to search, intercept, meet, give space, evangelize". Missioni OMI reaches a worldwide audience

BELARUS **Being close to the people when it is most needed**

Reported by an Oblate in Belarus

During those terrible days, I was in the Grodno region together with my family. It was there I went for voting. On the election day evening, I went to Grodno city and all I saw was a massive crowd of protesters in the city center. In about a dozen or so minutes, the "OMON" appeared (Special Purpose Mobile Unit of the military). Soon they would form a "wall of shields". People suddenly began to withdraw. I was caught totally unawares, and suddenly I found myself left alone in the square. And "the wall" was getting closer and closer... I walked away slowly and sat down on a nearby bench. Otherwise, they would have certainly knocked me out. They searched for those with a white-red-white flag (flag of independent Belarus). A drone flew overhead, so they knew who was escaping and where. I did not stay there too long. While returning home, I saw how the buses and special transport cars were jam-packed with innocent people trying to escape an imminent life threat.

However, people reorganized themselves again the next day and I could not resist taking part in the protests. This time the militia blocked the access to the city center. However, all the city residents began blowing their car horns and flashed the signal lights, as a sign of protest and in support of protesters. Literally everyone... of course me too.

The next day, I drove to the city again with another companion. My intention was solely to be in solidarity with the mass rally of people who were back in the streets protesting peacefully against the disputed election. They drove around, sounding their horns everywhere. They shouted "Long Live Belarus!" It was an amazing atmosphere to witness.

who read Italian. For some years now, it has been possible to also receive the magazine by subscription in its digital version. The site www.missioniomi.it contains information on the contents of the magazine and how to subscribe.

At some point people started to diverge. I did not see anyone hostile immediately, but somehow I automatically nodded to my companion and we ran to the car. We sat inside the car and I locked it. Two buses with OMON has arrived. One of them stopped right beside our car. The OMON -men jumped out of bus and started running literally like dogs broken off a chain, just to catch someone. First, they did not notice us, but when they finally surrounded us (there were about 10 men of them), I realized that something had to be done. They beat the car with trun-cheons on all sides. They shouted, "Come out." On my side, one of them tried to smash the car-window with his fist or elbow, and on the other side other they hit the window with a club... and as soon as the glass was broken, the militiaman grabbed my companion by his chest. In that split second, I started driving with a screech of tires. I turned back, and my companion has somehow managed to jump over to the back seat! How he did it, I do not know. With Angels' help, we were saved. Otherwise, we would have shared the same fate of many who were tortured and beaten.

Now I am back in our mission station in Shumilino and I have already taken part in the protests here. When the hour comes, we need to be ready to take life risks, for the sake of our people. Let me also add that I engage in these peaceful protests with permission and blessing of the bishop. We organized additional prayers in our oblate parishes. And support all protesters by spiritual guidance, if they come to talk about this situation. For this moment, all oblates are safe and serve on their places as it was before.

I ask my Oblate brothers to pray for Belarus and for us Oblates living here in particular. Our people and country need your spiritual support very much. May we understand God's Holy Will amidst this entire calamity!

FRANCE

My Dear Children

My dear children,

I, a man of the 19th century, want, by this letter, to reach you in your times of the 21st where, you are going through a global health crisis. With my life experience, I would like to share this with you:

As a young priest in 1814 in Aix-en-Provence, my heart is bleeding today with you in front of so many anguished “poor people with many faces”, so many isolated or carefree young people, so many rebellious prisoners. On this subject, do not forget that I contracted typhus from Austrian prisoners of war and that, I owe healing thanks to the incessant prayer of young people in front of the Statue of our Lady of Grace.

As Superior General of a missionary Congregation, my heart is bleeding today with you before this pandemic, which affects all continents: after Asia, now Europe, and already Latin America and Africa.

As Bishop, my heart is bleeding today with you in front of the disarray of the People of God who cannot come together and celebrate. However, in 1848 – in quite a different circumstance certainly – remember that I had exempted the Christians of Marseilles from Easter Mass to allow them to go to vote! You? You are lucky to have the Internet! So, including praying and celebrat-ing, I repeat: “For new needs, Charity invents new means”!

As a Pastor too, I had to face the cholera epidemic of 1837 which ravaged our dear city of Marseilles. Being in the countryside at the time of

the arrival of the plague, I immediately returned to the diocese to live these dark hours with the people of Marseilles, Les Marseillais. I remember a newspaper headline saying, “The future is in our hands.” Certainly, this is true. For you today, it is in the hands of experienced health professionals, researchers, cashiers, police, authorities ... But the future is primarily in the hands of God. So, my turn to tell you, “don’t be afraid”; and with another message dear to my Oblate sons: “But pray my dear children, God will hear you in no time”; our Lord Jesus Christ, full of tenderness and mercy, lets himself be touched. He will not abandon you.

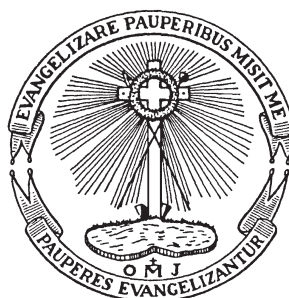
I share with you the grief and mourning of all those who have already lost a loved one, victim of this scourge. Myself, I was very hard hit by the death of my most faithful servant at the bishop’s house during the cholera. Again, this loss made my heart bleed. At the end of the epidemic, I celebrated a solemn service at the cathedral for all the victims.

One more piece of advice: invent the means to take care, to show interest and to have concern for the families hit by this terrible epidemic, for families and isolated people, confined on their own. It is important that no one is forgotten.

Finally, remember that at the beginning of the epidemic of 1837, my first gesture was to go up to Our Lady at Notre Dame de la Garde, to celebrate Holy Mass there and to ask Our Good Mother to intercede for us with her divine Son. So, my dear children, today also turn to her, with the same confidence.

Charles Joseph Eugène +

Written by Fr. Bernard Dullier, OMI



POLAND**Centenary Anniversary of the Polish Province of the Missionary Oblates**

The Oblates in Poland held their main celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Oblate presence on their soil, Saturday, June 6, 2020, in Poznań. The first place of the Oblates' ministry in Poland was the Marian shrine in Piekary Śląskie, but they did not have a monastery at that time, and the missionaries themselves were officially part of the German Province. Hence, the first house of the Polish Province is considered to be the foundation in Krotoszyn, Wielkopolska, and, since then, we can speak about the constitution of a new Province.

Since the Provincial House is located in Poznań, the Poznan Cathedral was chosen as the place for the main ceremony. The Solemn Holy Mass was presided over by the Metropolitan of Poznań and the President of the Polish Episcopate, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki. Also present were two other bishops: Jan Kopiec (bishop of Gliwice) and Szymon Stułkowski (auxiliary bishop of Poznań). The Eucharist was attended by many Oblates headed by the Provincial, Fr. Paweł ZAJĄC, invited guests, and friends of the Oblates, including the representation by the Knights of John Paul II.

In his homily, Archbishop Gądecki recalled the most important moments in the history of Polish Oblates, concluding that “without Oblates, the Church in Poland and around the world would be much poorer”. On behalf of the entire Polish episcopate, he expressed gratitude for the service of Oblate missionaries, particularly emphasizing the above-average pastoral involvement in the Archdiocese of Poznań.

The celebration continued with the dedication of the so-called "Mission House", where the office of the Mission Procurator, the publishing house of "Misyjne Drogi" (Oblate magazine) and the website misyjne.pl will find their place of service. The building is also intended to help non-Oblate entities, including the Redemptoris Missio Foundation which provides medical and humanitarian assistance in many countries.

During the celebration in Poznań, Fr. Provincial presented commemorative medals to the participants.

The Polish Province has been preparing for the 100th anniversary for the past three years. In 2017, the Year of the Holy Cross, these began, during which the reliquary with parts of the Holy Cross (which is located in the oldest Polish National Shrine under the care of the Oblate Missionaries) was taken in pilgrimage to Oblate communities and parishes. The pilgrimage was preceded by a solemn act of entrusting the Polish Province to Our Lady of Jasna Góra - the Queen of Poland.

The preparations continued with the Year of Our Lady of Kodeń, also combined with a pilgrimage, this time a copy of the image of Queen Podlasie from Kodnia, a Shrine on the border with Belarus, where Oblate Missionaries have been present since 1927. Annually, several hundred thousand Poles make pilgrimages here. The current jubilee year is lived out as the Year of Mission in which we want to stimulate our missionary awareness further and direct our steps with courage to the most abandoned and those who, for various reasons, have the least contact with the Church.



ANNIVERSARIES FOR SEPTEMBER 2020

75th Anniversaries of Vows

29/09/1945	08048	Fr. Brendan O'Sullivan	Anglo-Irish
08/09/1950	08901	Fr. Charles Beausoleil	United States
08/09/1950	08895	Fr. Arthur Craig	United States
08/09/1950	08913	Fr. Yves Desmet	Belgique et Pays Bas
08/09/1950	08924	Fr. Leonard Glowacki	Pologne
08/09/1950	08918	Fr. Alfred Hubenig	Lacombe
08/09/1950	08877	Fr. Guy Jalbert	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
08/09/1950	08916	Fr. Christie Joachimpillai	Lacombe
08/09/1950	08911	Fr. John Mazur	Assumption
15/09/1950	09212	Fr. Marcel Rouyer	France
29/09/1950	08940	Fr. Mario Andreotti	Mediterranea
29/09/1950	08938	Fr. Edward Carolan	Anglo-Irish

65th Anniversaries of Vows

08/09/1955	10297	Fr. Marian Biernat	Pologne
08/09/1955	10041	Fr. Jean-Marie Collière	France
08/09/1955	10008	Fr. André Durand	France
08/09/1955	10033	Fr. Jerzy Kalinowski	Cameroun
08/09/1955	10009	Msgr. Louis Mbwôl-Mpasi	Congo
08/09/1955	10296	Fr. Jean Nieruchalski	Pologne
08/09/1955	10025	Fr. Rudolph Nowakowski	Assumption
08/09/1955	10092	Fr. Angelo Pelis	Mediterranea
08/09/1955	10028	Fr. Guilherme Reinhard	Brazil
08/09/1955	10029	Fr. Wendelin Rolheiser	Lacombe
08/09/1955	10139	Fr. Wilfried Rossel	Belgique et Pays Bas
08/09/1955	10035	Fr. Mauricio Schroeder	Lacombe
08/09/1955	10030	Fr. Ronald Zimmer	Lacombe
26/09/1955	10661	Bro. Jerome Blackburn	Lacombe
29/09/1955	10064	Fr. Francis McGreal	Southern Africa

65th Anniversaries of ordinations

08/09/1955	08639	Fr. James Foelker	United States
11/09/1955	09091	Fr. Arthur Massé	Lacombe
24/09/1955	08911	Fr. John Mazur	Assumption

60th Anniversaries of Vows

08/09/1960	10957	Fr. Lucas Casaert	Bolivie
08/09/1960	10952	Fr. Gerard Delbeke	Congo
08/09/1960	11339	Fr. Paul Emaer	France
08/09/1960	11429	Bro. Mono-Viara Constantin Etshime	Congo
08/09/1960	11712	Fr. Jean-Pierre Hours	France
08/09/1960	10944	Fr. John Iwo	Colombo
08/09/1960	10958	Fr. George Knab	United States
08/09/1960	10953	Fr. Roberto Mayer	Brazil
08/09/1960	11091	Fr. Raymond Prybis	United States
08/09/1960	11271	Fr. Philippe Thierry	France
08/09/1960	11092	Fr. Gerardo Van de Walle	Belgique et Pays Bas
15/09/1960	10768	Fr. Palmiro Delalio	Mediterranea
15/09/1960	11018	Fr. Paolo Pesenti	Mediterranea

15/09/1960	10968	Fr. Giovanni Santopietro	Mediterranea
15/09/1960	10967	Fr. Giancarlo Todesco	Mediterranea
29/09/1960	10977	Fr. Edward Quinn	Anglo-Irish

60th Anniversaries of Ordinations

15/09/1960	09982	Fr. Roberto Durette	Bolivie
15/09/1960	09980	Fr. Donald Lozier	United States
17/09/1960	10151	Fr. Laval Tremblay	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
21/09/1960	10025	Fr. Rudolph Nowakowski	Assumption
21/09/1960	10030	Fr. Ronald Zimmer	Lacombe
24/09/1960	10041	Fr. Jean-Marie Collière	France
24/09/1960	09973	Fr. Maurice Lesage	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
25/09/1960	09824	Fr. Edward Barrett	Anglo-Irish

50th Anniversaries of Vows

01/09/1970	12081	Msgr. Sylvain Lavoie	Lacombe
05/09/1970	12154	Fr. Paul Robbrecht	Belgique et Pays Bas
08/09/1970	12107	Fr. Mieczyslaw Halaszko	Pologne
08/09/1970	12157	Fr. Jerzy Kaszyca	Pologne
08/09/1970	12148	Fr. Andrzej Madej	Pologne
08/09/1970	12104	Fr. Janusz Milanowski	Pologne
08/09/1970	12101	Fr. Norbert Sojka	Pologne
08/09/1970	12220	Fr. Ryszard Szmydki	General Administration
20/09/1970	12174	Fr. Hans-Joachim Lüning	Central European
20/09/1970	12176	Fr. Rudolf Welscher	Central European
29/09/1970	12069	Fr. Fabio Ciardi	General Administration
29/09/1970	12067	Fr. Celso Corbioli	Mediterranea
29/09/1970	12066	Fr. Giuseppe Palumbo	Cruz del Sur

50th Anniversaries of Ordinations

05/09/1970	11655	Fr. James Deegan	United States
05/09/1970	11767	Fr. William Morell	United States
05/09/1970	11768	Fr. William Zapalac	United States
08/09/1970	11674	Fr. Ramiro Cortez	United States
19/09/1970	11559	Fr. Harry te Plate	Belgique et Pays Bas

25th Anniversaries of Vows

08/09/1995	13659	Fr. Jeyabalan Balasingam	Jaffna
08/09/1995	13648	Fr. Cyprian Czop	Pologne
08/09/1995	13649	Fr. Bernard Felczykowski	Pologne
08/09/1995	13731	Fr. Réginal Gabriel	Haiti
08/09/1995	13787	Fr. Claude Gilbert	Haiti
08/09/1995	13761	Fr. Mungela Robert Guzaba	Congo
08/09/1995	13645	Fr. Pawel Janusz Kubiak	Pologne
08/09/1995	13729	Fr. Kennedy Leon	Haiti
08/09/1995	13644	Fr. Bartosz Madejski	Pologne
08/09/1995	13855	Fr. Kalonga Alexandre Manyanga	Congo
08/09/1995	13609	Fr. Paul Jeyanthan Pachchek	Pologne
08/09/1995	13856	Fr. Kinemo Egide Palata	Congo
08/09/1995	13723	Fr. Dilan Niroshan Perera	Colombo
08/09/1995	13820	Fr. Bejoy Gabriel Rebeiro	Colombo
08/09/1995	13724	Fr. Don Gerard Reginald Jayamaha	Colombo
08/09/1995	13621	Fr. Martin Sedlon	Central European

08/09/1995	13736	Fr. Christy Joseph Silva	Colombo
08/09/1995	13715	Fr. Rafal Strzyzewski	Pologne
08/09/1995	13730	Fr. Gimsly Valbrun	Haiti
08/09/1995	13672	Fr. Pawel Zajac	Pologne
30/09/1995	13741	Fr. Giancarlo Iollo	Mediterranea

25th Anniversaries of Ordinations

08/09/1995	13274	Fr. John Staak	United States
23/09/1995	13337	Fr. Jaime del Rosario	Philippines
23/09/1995	13170	Fr. Oscar Lucas	Philippines
30/09/1995	13147	Fr. Benjamin Moreboli Lepeli	Lesotho

Suffrages for our Deceased

NAME	PROV/DEL	AGE	DEATH	DIED AT
Fr. Allard, Serge	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	89	04/07/2020	Richelieu
Fr. Haslam, Richard	Anglo-Irish	93	05/07/2020	Inchicore
Fr. Risse, Max	Central European	94	07/07/2020	Hünfeld
Fr. O'Reilly, Eamonn	Anglo-Irish	87	12/07/2020	Cavan
Fr. Lockyer, Christopher	OMI Southern Africa	78	14/07/2020	Durban
Fr. O'Brien, David	Brazil	87	14/07/2020	São Paulo
Fr. Albers, Bernhard	OMI Southern Africa	89	15/07/2020	Pretoria
Bro. Kruk, Adam	Poland	80	17/07/2020	Lubliniec
Fr. Levy, Michael	U.S.A.	89	17/07/2020	San Antonio
Fr. Côme, Luc	France	77	20/07/2020	Aix-en-Provence
Fr. Hughes, Donald	Australia	87	20/07/2020	Perth
Msgr. Mohlalisi, Bernard	Lesotho	87	24/07/2020	Mazenod
P. Deac. Lamonde, Marcel	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	88	04/08/2020	Richelieu
Fr. Gormley, Francis	Anglo-Irish	77	05/08/2020	Dublin
Fr. McCarthy, Daniel	Brazil	75	06/08/2020	São Paulo
Fr. Mader, Martin	Central European	83	12/08/2020	Fulda
Fr. Mackey, Lorne	Lacombe	91	14/08/2020	Vancouver
Fr. Madigan, Donal	Australia	83	14/08/2020	Melbourne
Fr. Matton, André	Belgium & Netherlands	96	28/08/2020	Kortrijk

“They are before God, bearing the sign, the kind of character proper to our Institute, the vows common to all its members, the firm habit of the same virtues. We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our main residence. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them.”

(Letter of Founder to Fr. Courtès, 22 July 1828)

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