



MY VOCATION IS TO BE A HAPPY MAN

Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2024



2 Opening words



Arun William Rozario, omi

The Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community is delighted to publish its first digital newsletter. We believe through this newsletter we can share our lives with other Oblate Formation Houses in the Oblate World and be connected with different Oblate units and Oblate Associates. The Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community, located in San Antonio, Texas, is the post-novitiate community under the United States Province. The house in its current location was dedicated on May 2, 2018. In these six years, this Formation House has become more international with scholastics coming from different parts of the Oblate world. There are thirteen scholastics and three Formators in the community. They represent eleven nationalities. We are going to have five new members this August. Scholastics do their theological studies at the Oblate School of Theology, just across the street.



Fr. Juan Gaspar is the Superior of the community. He is assisted by Fr. Ron LaFramboise and Fr. Arun Rozario.

Let us remind ourselves the words of St. Eugene de Mazenod. For him, the foundation stone of all formation is the love of Jesus Christ. He clearly stated that rooted in this solid base, young Oblates are able to: detach themselves from all that which is not Jesus Christ; give themselves totally to God through the vows; give themselves for life; and therefore, to prepare themselves seriously for this; live their gift of self with generosity; love their brothers in community, love the Congregation and value their vocation, love the Church and the Virgin Mary.

Let these values lead us to become Apostolic men as desired by our beloved founder St. Eugene de Mazenod.





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Grace of renewal

Alexander Raul Robles Alfaro, omi

By the grace of God, on January 19, 2024 I renewed my vows for the first time at the Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community. Father Raymond Cook, the provincial superior, and Father Antonio Ponce, the provincial vicar, were present, along with my confreres.

Thus far, my time in the United States has been exceptional and distinct as I have gradually become acquainted with the people, traditions, and language of this nation. Similarly, the cultural diversity of my new community of the Blessed Mario Borzaga. It is an ongoing educational experience. I have learnt to collaborate with coworkers from various units and to use the unique experiences that each one offers to enhance our missionary lives.

Before renewing my vows, Marco Antonio and I had an opportunity to have a weeklong retreat at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois. Fathers Chava and Victor helped us prepare well for the renewal of vows. I enjoyed my experience in Belleville with them.

I can only express my gratitude to God for all of the favors he bestows upon me each day, as well as to the Province of the US that provides housing for me while studying and essential education to all of us living at the Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community.

Alexander is from Peru under the General Delegation of BOLPER. He made his First Profession in 2023. He has completed his first year of studies being at Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community.



To serve the Lord

Jacques-Marie Liba, omi

Obviously, the day I made a definitive commitment to serve the Lord in the congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is significant in my Christian life. Being able to commit myself to a consecrated life is a realization of my dream and my deepest inspirations. It is another step in the journey of my Christian faith and my vocation to serve the Lord as a consecrated person. Because it is said that religious life is the extension of the baptismal faith, the perpetual vow I made on December 8th is an act of faith, clearly in a public way. This is the reason why this day I was filled with immense joy. It was expressed in many ways by my smile and my attitude. This joy is not due simply to the fact that I have taken a further step in my life of faith but also to the fact that a new worker has been added to the vineyard of the Lord in the congregation of Oblate missionaries.

Since my childhood, my greatest desire has been to serve the Lord. Until today, I continue to experience this joy. However, I am aware that making a definitive commitment to the Church through a religious family is not an attraction requiring eternal rest. However, it begins a new life in Christ, the congregation, and society. This, therefore, becomes a heavy responsibility to correspond effectively with the charism and mission of the congregation. In other words, it is to live the charism in a concrete way, which is what I am committed to. It is in this dynamic that I continue to live this religious commitment. I feel confident after this commitment and faced with my religious responsibilities. I therefore take this opportunity to express my gratitude to God, who called me to serve him in the Church despite my failings. I would also like to thank my formators from the pre-novitiate stage for their trust. I entrust my oblation to the most holy and sweet Virgin so that it may bear fruit in the Church, my community, and my future ministry.

Liba is from Chad. He made his Perpetual Profession in December 2023. He was ordained a deacon in April 2024, and is beginning his fourth year.

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Profound joy in service

Raphael Banda, omi

As I reflect on my pastoral year at Immaculate Conception Church in Houston, the journey has been nothing short of transformative. This sacred mission has allowed me to grow spiritually, pastorally, and personally, deepening my connection with God and the vibrant community I am honored to serve.

Immersing myself in the spiritual fabric of Immaculate Conception Church has been a profound experience. The rich tapestry of liturgical traditions, prayerful gatherings, and communal worship has been a source of immense spiritual nourishment. Through regular participation in Mass, prayer groups, and spiritual retreats, I have witnessed a blossoming of my faith, a deepening understanding of God's grace, and a more profound connection to the divine.

Engaging with the pastoral aspects of my role has been both challenging and immensely rewarding. Walking alongside the parishioners in their joys and struggles has shaped my pastoral instincts. The pastoral year has afforded me the opportunity to develop a compassionate ear, to listen intently, and to respond with empathy. Participating in pastoral care activities and community outreach initiatives has provided practical insights into many diverse pastoral needs.

On a personal level, the pastoral year has been a crucible for growth. The challenges faced and the victories celebrated have molded my character. Embracing the diverse perspectives within the community has broadened my worldview and fostered a deep appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual. The relationships formed have become threads in the tapestry of my own personal and spiritual development.

Amidst the responsibilities and challenges, I have discovered profound joy in this mission. Serving the



people of God at Immaculate Conception has become a calling that resonates with the core of my Oblate Charism. Witnessing the impact of collective efforts in fostering a vibrant faith community has been a source of inspiration and fulfillment. The joy found in selfless service and the shared moments of faith and fellowship have become the heartbeat of this pastoral journey.

Raphael is from the Delegation of Zambia. He made his First Profession in 2020. He is beginning his fourth year and enjoys soccer and cooking.



Seeing God in CPE

Henry Zayamoe, omi

In the summer 2023, I did my Clinical Pastoral Education at Christus Spohn Hospital. That experience still stands in my mind because it was unique. There were three core objectives that I was able to work on: pastoral formation, pastoral competence, and pastoral reflection.

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Thus, I learned to work collaboratively with my mentor, peers, chaplains, and the hospital staff.

Indeed, my pastoral competence increased during the CPE training. I was able to reflect on how my religious formation with the Missionary Oblates shapes me as a minister. As I was doing the pastoral reflection, I grew in communicating with the patients on their emotional and spiritual levels. I felt more confident and comfortable asking open-ended questions and getting deeper into their feelings and the reality of the patients and the family. Therefore, whole CPE process was a mixture of joy and pain because I could identify myself with the people I have visited in sharing their joys and pains. Above all, I was able to see in each person, the staff, the sick, and myself, the image and the likeness of God. Today, I am able to attend to the emotional, and spiritual needs of the patients and to collaborate with my coworkers in different setting more professionally.

Overall, it was a blessing to be part of that CPE experience. I was pleased to learn and grow my passion for serving the poor and especially the sick in the hospital setting at Christus Spohn Hospital. I highly encourage it to those interested in hospital ministry.

Henry was born in Burma and moved to the US with his family as a teenager. He made his First Profession in 2020. He is beginning his fourth year in the Borzaga Community and enjoys soccer and playing the guitar.



Sweetness of tradition

Pablo Henning Manrique, omi

Much of my life has essentially involved trailblazing — as an immigrant and the oldest child, I was the first to do many of the things in my family. And in the greater context of my extended family, joining religious life is probably the craziest trailblazing yet!

So one of the most interesting aspects of my Oblate formation so far, and specifically with my ministry in the San Juan de Los Lagos Parish, is the fact that I am not trailblazing, but rather following a long line of previous Oblates before me. It is one of the sweetest feelings of tradition, that of not being alone but being part of something greater.

And this is precisely the fundamental journey of the people in the RCIA process, that of joining the family of the Church and God and being part of something much greater than each of us. So there is a dual journey here — in serving in the ministry of welcoming people into the Church, I am also being further welcomed and formed into the professed Oblate and Mazenodian family. Our supervisors are longstanding and dedicated Oblate Associates who have seen many of the Oblates pass through as students as well as pastors for the parish. The feeling is that of working with a distant aunt and uncle that I am now getting to know better!

At the time of writing, we are still in the middle of Lent, so the big Easter moment has yet to arrive. Needless to say, I am very excited to share that with the people in the RCIA process and be part of their welcoming into the family as I am myself being welcomed into the Mazenodian family of San Juan de Los Lagos.

Pablo was born in Venezuela and moved to the US with his family as a child. He made his First Profession in 2022. He completed his second year of theological studies this May.

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Libraries of wisdom

Maximilien Kenfack-Meizang, omi

In Africa, people say, "When an elderly person dies, it is a library that burns." In other words, when an elderly person passes away, he/she takes with him/her all the empirical wisdom that cannot be found in any book. At Our Lady of the Lake University, I realized that many young adults are wise people who do not have enough space to express what they know. These wise young people will not tell you anything if you do not ask them. But when you go and give them a chance to express themselves, they open the doors of their library and help you see the world differently. Indeed, some of them have great stories that they just do not value, and it sometimes causes them frustration.

Every Tuesday afternoon, I was at the university's Center for Women in Church and Society. My ministry was essentially to listen to the young adult women, empower them, help them adapt to the university environment, and talk about their faith if they wished. Two out of ten students identified themselves as devout Christians. Some identified themselves as Christians, but no longer practicing. Others were simply atheists or part of other religions, and for still others, it was the first time someone had asked them how they lived their faith. But what struck me most was that all these young students, Christian and non-Christian alike, believe in the law of Love. Although they are not Christians, they are convinced that self-esteem and love of neighbor are values that must guide their actions.

During my meetings with them, many were sincere and very open. I could see that some were just waiting for an opportunity to be listened to and validated. Some were just curious about the Church and my vocational journey because they had never had a chance to talk about religion with someone.

It was sometimes difficult for me to remain silent when a student shared his or her concerns, was going through

adjustment crises, or appreciated the world differently. I was sometimes tempted to use my experience to suggest solutions. However, silence, humility, and compassion were always the best options because by remaining silent and humble, I was learning, and by showing compassion, they were more confident. Therefore, what I learned from this ministry is that if you want to minister to young adults, you must listen to them first and be creative in the way you talk about Jesus, always with an open mind.

Maximilien is from Cameroon. He made his Perpetual Profession in December 2023. He was ordained a deacon in April 2024, and is starting his fourth year.



Life in Borzaga

Laudato Yes

Pablo Henning Manrique, omi

One of my favorite phrases that I've recently come across, though I don't remember exactly where, is "Laudato No." It was used to describe a particular something that is just so blatantly against the calls of Pope Francis' Laudato Si', that it is like a big "no" to all of what that entails. Simple yet very telling!

Unfortunately, the reality is that the default lifestyle in the US is a Laudato No. For many varying reasons, we end up producing large amounts of waste and wasting many resources along the way. And part of challenging

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the default is that it requires more effort to go against it — we have to really go out of our way at times. This is evident in all of the plastic packaging, transportation habits, thermostat expectations, eating practices, etc. Going against these requires considerable education, discipline, and resources, including money and time.

And this is the reality we face in the Borzaga house. We are embedded in the US context, and as a community, live in part with the greater US lifestyle. However, that doesn't mean we have given up or do not try our best to swim against the current.

Our biggest efforts lie in properly managing our waste, distributing along the three avenues provided by the city of San Antonio — general waste, recycling, and organic waste. The organic waste is something particular that the city processes, in which they take organic waste (such as food scraps, food-soiled cardboard or paper, and grass clippings) to a composting plant. We are also keen on identifying all recyclable materials, including plastics, glass, and cardboard. In terms of general waste, we focus on using reusable bags, including specific ones for vegetables, and avoiding overly packaged food items.

One rather awesome experience has been that of a community garden that some brothers have successfully cultivated. They managed to grow several different types of vegetables that we would eat at the house, which is in line of cultivating that closer relationship with the rest of our created world.

As we continue learning and collaborating with ecospirituality efforts at Oblate School of Theology, we will continue to find more opportunities to really say yes to the calls of Laudato Si'.



A real atmosphere

Etienne Kabemba Lukusa, omi

Since their founding, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have always emphasized community life and interculturality. It is in this context that the Borzaga House of Formation receives a dozen scholastics from various countries and cultural backgrounds. We live and share common experiences at all levels as our way of life demands us.

It is in this community climate that our interculturality is also lived, which puts us in a particular dynamic and offers us a unique platform to promote mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance between the various cultures within our community. We learn from each other, broadening our horizons and enriching our understanding of faith through this cultural diversity. Even our community activities are tinged with this interculturality. Just like our masses which are a mix of songs in French, Spanish, Lingala, English, Bemba, etc.! Even our prayers for meals are, at times, said in different languages spoken at the scholasticate. Some confreres learn the languages of others. A real atmosphere with lots of laughs!

This fosters a more inclusive spirituality, where cultural differences are not only accepted but also celebrated. A real asset for us.

Our community life is also the place where we share common experiences of faith and work together for academic, pastoral, community works, or sports. Activities that help us to discover and get to know each other, thus promoting peace and mutual understanding.

However, it is important to recognize that our community and intercultural life in Borzaga also presents challenges, misunderstandings related to some cultural shocks. But, since Jesus is at the center of our lives, we learn to see Him in each of our confreres and even in our misunderstandings. We always find a waiting ground for the good of the community. This is how we all journey in search of God. This, in a nutshell, is our life in Borzaga!

Etienne was born in the Congo and moved to Canada as an adult. He made his First Profession in 2021. He is beginning his third year in the Borzaga Community and enjoys soccer and traveling.





Four wonderful years

David Peter Lombe Chisha, omi

I joined the Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community in San Antonio, Texas on August 2nd, 2019, a day after my first oblation in Godfrey, Illinois. I was very excited because the Novitiate year was characterized by quietness and solitude most of the time. In addition, it was more exciting for me since I knew I was to join a larger community in which I would have an opportunity to play soccer, which I missed a lot when I was in the Novitiate. After two weeks of arriving in the Borzaga community I started as a first-year student at Oblate School of Theology, just across the road.

The golden experience and gifts I have attained from the Borzaga community is that of a multicultural experience. When I joined, the community consisted of brothers and priests representing different countries, including Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, United States of America, Nigeria, Mexico, and Haiti. The following year other brothers from India, Kenya, Cameroon, Burma, and Chad joined the community and added even more to multiculturality of the community. This multicultural richness has helped me to have a wider view of both the Oblate world and the world at large.

My highlight moments have been during communal prayer time and Sunday meals. I especially appreciated praying the holy rosary, as we were encouraged to pray the first part of the prayers in our native languages and the second part together in English. Hearing these different languages felt like the realization of the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus started speaking in different tongues upon receiving the Holy Spirit.

On Sundays, two community members were scheduled to cook for the community, and as a result, almost every Sunday we had a different cultural dish. One interesting moment is when I found one of my brothers eating small



fried dry frogs. I had never seen anyone eating frogs, and he invited me to taste one. With doubt I got one and threw it in my mouth, asking myself what I am doing, but I realized the frog actually had the taste of dry fish. Eating meals from different countries of the community has given me an opportunity to get to know other cultures, and in that, has opened my Oblate missionary perspective.

Oblate School of Theology is another institute that gave me an opportunity not only in an academic nourishment, but also in pastoral nourishment. Our theological studies during the first three years there go hand in hand with pastoral ministry experience. Through these assigned ministries the school gave me an opportunity to have an exposure to the cultural diversity of the USA, specifically that of Texas. My first ministry assignment was at the shelter serving homeless people where I experienced the power of listening in ministry. Many of the people we served were sharing with me their life experience and they appreciated my presence and listening. My second ministry was campus ministry to students, and this was another opportunity for me to learn more about ministering to teens and youths. The last ministry, accompanying the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), helped me to realize the need of simplifying theological insights to the faithful without losing their theological meaning. All of these ministries were also accompanied with a theological reflection and discussion with peers about various experiences encountered in ministry. Reflecting on these experiences greatly helped me grow in self-awareness.

In a nutshell, my four years in San Antonio with studies at Oblate School of Theology and formation at Blessed Mario Borzaga community enriched me in numerous ways. I have many gained necessary tools for my next step in my Christian and vocational journey.

David is from the Delegation of Zambia. He made his Perpetual Profession in December 2023. He was ordained a deacon in April 2024. Having completed his theological studies, David is back in Zambia.



A time of grace

Marco Antonio Cruz Baldivieso, omi

I would like to share my experience in brief at the Mexican American Catholic College known as MACC. The Mexican American Catholic College is an independent, Catholic institution of higher learning. It was founded in 1972 by the Archdiocese of San Antonio and the Texas Catholic Conference as the Mexican American Cultural Center for Pastoral Formation and Language Study.

I am originally from Bolivia and belong to the General Delegation of BOLPER. Since I arrived in San Antonio in May 2023, I have been taking several courses at MACC. I began the intensive English courses that MACC offers to Hispanic foreign students. In the summer we had classes from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. To be honest, it was



the period I enjoyed the most at MACC. I considered it a time of grace, joy, and integration of knowledge. In that program some people were learning Spanish, which facilitated our mutual learning, especially during break times. We used to bring a little card with our name on it that said "Speak to me in English," and they had written "Háblame en español." My teachers and classmates were very helpful and friendly. Thus, I was able to learn to speak English with them.

Last fall I also took some courses on Liturgy and Sacred Music, and Intercultural Competencies for Pastoral Ministry, which helped me learn more about liturgical participation in this pilgrim Church in San Antonio. This also helped me in the process of adaptation, understanding, and appreciation of living in an international and intercultural community.

I am currently in my last semester at MACC, continuing with English and taking some pastoral courses such as Catholic Spiritual Traditions: The Prayed Faith and Children's Spirituality and Caring Practices. Both provide many elements that we must put into practice not just in our daily lives, but also with greater emphasis in the pastoral ministry assigned to us. I found MACC a place for academic preparation to continue my studies at Oblate School of Theology. I am grateful to God and the staff and teachers at MACC and my Oblate formators and scholastics who accompanied me and shared their wisdom with me.

Marco is from Bolivia under the General Delegation of BOLPER. He made his First Profession in 2023. He has completed his first year of studies being at Blessed Mario Borzaga Formation Community.



Letter from Rome

Mateusz Garstecki, omi

Three years ago, I was a member of the Mario Borzaga formation community in San Antonio, preparing to travel to Rome, to continue my formation in the International Roman Scholasticate (IRS). Now, the contrary is true, as I am finishing up my studies, have made my perpetual vows, and getting ready to come back to the USA, where I will continue my formation

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with a pastoral internship year! So, how to summarize the past three years?

First of all, when I arrived to the IRS, I was glad to find the formation community to be a very dynamic, welcoming, and lively place. There were twenty-two brothers at that time, and presently we are seventeen, with four formators. Most of us are from different countries, and each of our formators is from a different region. Our superior, Fr. Gregory, is from India, and the other three are from Italy, Guatemala, and Nigeria. Our community offers a variety of opportunities to help us in our formation. Beyond weekly ministry assignments, we have opportunities to participate in parish missions of the Mediterranean province in various parts of Italy. It usually involves a full week of activities in a parish, visiting schools, visiting people in their homes, talking to people on the street, and so on. The missionary group includes both Oblates, other religious, and laypeople. I participated in one mission in my first year and soon will participate in a second one in Naples. The brothers who have participated return quite inspired and motivated, as it is a powerful experience of sharing faith with others.

Apart from this, I was fortunate in my first summer to go with three brothers to Spain, where we lived in the Oblate community in Pozuelo for two months, and we went daily for Spanish classes. The house in Pozuelo is the same one that the Oblate martyrs lived in. In my second summer, we went to Aix for three weeks, and then those of us who are candidates for perpetual vows participated in the month-long Ignatian retreat near Milan. It was a powerful experience of discernment and prayer! This past Christmas, I went to Sardinia where we have an Oblate community in a rather rough part of town. The Oblates there are doing a great job! They are seeking to build up the sense of community in the parish and to build up the youth outreach.

And, of course, a fair amount of our time is spent in the Gregorian University. Our class has a bit more than a hundred students. Each semester we choose a seminar which generally is made of 15-20 students. This course includes much more interaction in terms of reading, assignments, and a final paper. We also write our final paper for Theology through the seminar, which I have begun and need to finish this semester. My work has three parts. In the first section, I wrote about the New Perspective on Paul found in N.T. Wright and J.D.G. Dunn, who seek to give a renewed interpretation to passages in Romans and Galatians on justification, with more consideration for Paul's context in relationship to Second Temple Judaism. My second chapter will focus on this historical interpretation of justification in St. Augustine, Luther, and the Council of Trent. My third chapter will focus on ecumenism since Vatican II and the Joint Declaration on Justification (1997).



Mateusz grew up in a practicing Catholic family outside of Chicago. In the fifth grade his family moved to San Antonio, Texas. He made his First Profession in 2020. After a year of studies at Oblate School of Theology, he was sent to the International Roman Scholasticate. He made his Perpetual Profession in May 2024.



