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Front Cover:
A reflection from a stained glass window frames the Oblate Cross in the chapel at the Oblates’ first house in Aix-en-Provence, France.

Back Cover:
Pockets of poverty exist in Aix-en-Provence, France.

The Missionary Oblates thank the following for contributing information and/or photographs to this issue of Oblate World:

A Pastor for the Curious – Olga Ivanidi

Oblates Shrine Our Lady’s Light – notredamedelumieres.com

A Missionary Journey Begins – Irma Noyola

I want to be with my family, in peace – David Rizo and Rich Reader

Available in Spanish at oblatesusa.org/oblates

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Please send change of address, comments or questions to:
Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate
9480 N. De Mazenod Drive
Belleville, IL  62223

E-mail: bundertajlo@oblatesusa.org

OBLATE WORLD magazine is a publication of the United States Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Washington, D.C.

OBLATE WORLD magazine seeks to inform our readers about the mission to the poor in which Oblates engage around the globe; to educate our readers about the teachings of the Catholic faith and the Missionary Oblates; and to inspire our readers so that they may enhance their own spirituality.

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 1
Dear Friend,

When I recently visited our Native American ministries, I kept thinking of the phrase, “keep it simple.” That is exactly what three Oblates are doing at six parishes on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota, and they are having great results with that simple philosophy.

The Oblates have been ministering on the reservation for almost 40 years. Despite hardships caused by weather, isolation and few resources available for ministry, the Oblates provide a welcome and much-needed outreach in an area of the country where there are few priests and religious. The Oblate presence provides hope and promise to people who have often been neglected or forgotten by both the Church and society.

Our Native American ministries include traditional ministries such as the celebration of the Sacraments, faith-formation classes, sacramental preparation and some counseling. Educational and social-outreach programs are mostly provided through government assistance, but the Oblates are often the first point of contact for these requests.

The Oblates do not limit their work to the Catholic population on the reservation. They connect with many people who do not go to Church by fulfilling requests for a funeral ceremony, helping people when their food supply runs low or giving advice when dealing with a crisis such as a suicide or other tragedy. These moments are often “the door” through which Oblates are invited to minister to people no matter their faith or even lack of faith.

Our work among Native Americans is not financially self-sustainable. It is only with the help of friends like you that we can keep these simple ministries alive. Thank you for your generosity and please know that you are being remembered at Mass and in the prayers of the Oblates and our Native American friends.

Fr. Louis Studer, O.M.I.
Provincial, United States Province
He is often referred to as My Lord, Your Excellency and other impressive titles. But those accolades for Bp. Valentine Kalumba, O.M.I. don’t bring any financial reward. In fact, he lives on just $480 a month as the leader of the Diocese of Livingstone in Zambia.

Bishop Valentine, who cringes when people refer to him in more glorious terms, receives just $80 a month from the diocese for living expenses. With such a paltry salary, Bp. Valentine had to turn to his brother Missionary Oblates for help. The Oblates now give him an additional $400 a month, primarily from donations made by benefactors in the United States.

“I survive by just purchasing the necessities that I need like food and gasoline,” said Bp. Valentine. “That is all I need, and I am happy.”

Bishop Valentine has no desire to experience the trappings of success. He joined the Missionary Oblates because he wanted to serve the poor, and become one of them.

Born in 1967 in Mufulira in the Copperbelt Province, Bp. Valentine joined the Zambian Air Force after high school and later earned an accounting diploma. He worked for three years as a bank cashier before deciding his true calling was to religious life.

Bishop Valentine joined the national seminary program with plans to become a diocesan priest. He spent seven years in the formation program before having second thoughts, not about becoming a priest, but what type of priest he wanted to be.

“If I had stayed with the diocese I would have likely ended up at one of the richer parishes,” said Bishop Valentine. “To me, the face of Jesus Christ is more visible in the poor, so I didn’t want to go to a rich parish, I wanted to go to a poor parish and be a poor priest.”

Bishop Valentine joined the Oblates because they were the priests and brothers in Zambia who were in the poorest parts of the country, places where nobody else wanted to serve.

Joining the Oblates put Bp. Valentine on the very slow track to the priesthood. Despite having seven years of training in the diocesan formation program, Bp. Valentine basically had to start his formation all over to become a missionary priest. He became a pre-novice, then novice and eventually an Oblate.
seminarian. Between the diocesan and Oblate formation programs, it took 13 years of training before Bp. Valentine was ordained a priest in 2005.

With his first assignment, Bp. Valentine got his wish of becoming a poor priest. He was assigned to minister at St. Michael’s Parish in Kalabo.

“At St. Michael’s you could not just be a priest who does the Sacraments. I had to be a driver, social worker, teacher and doctor,” said Bp. Valentine. “Every morning I would wake up and there would be people waiting to see me because they were hungry and wanted food or they needed someone to drive them to the hospital. You can’t say no to these people, because otherwise they would have absolutely nothing.”

Transportation was a major issue for Bp. Valentine in Kalabo. Roads to outstations were little more than ruts, and it could take six hours to get to a chapel in a remote village. And on the way home, Bp. Valentine’s truck would usually be filled with passengers who hitched a ride to avoid a three-day walk to Kalabo.

As a missionary priest, Bp. Valentine had found Christ in the poor, and he was bringing to life the words of Jesus: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me… Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Bishop Valentine would later serve as a poor priest at a few other Oblate parishes and also spent three years as Director of the Oblates’ Radio Liseli, which broadcasts the Word of God to the poorest and most isolated parts of western Zambia. In 2014, he accepted
an assignment to minister at Blessed Mary Theresa Parish in Kabwe, which had additional challenges.

Kabwe is considered an environmental disaster caused by lead and zinc mining. It is one of the ten most polluted places in the world, and Bp. Valentine admitted he was nervous about going there.

In order to remove toxins that were building up in his body, Bp. Valentine had to drink lots of milk. He also had to avoid coming into contact with contaminated soil. Fresh soil would sometimes be trucked into the city and Fr. Valentine used some of it to build a small community garden.

After a few years ministering in Kabwe, Bp. Valentine got the shock of his life. The Papal Nuncio contacted him saying that Pope Francis had named him a bishop.

“I had never wanted to be a bishop so I asked if I could think about it,” said Bp. Valentine. “The Papal Nuncio gave me one hour to make my decision, and was back in 20 minutes. I had to say yes, how do you say no to the Pope?”

So in 2016 Bp. Valentine became Bishop of the Diocese of Livingstone at the age of 49. The diocese includes about 100,000 Catholics with 36 priests in 19 parishes. The Oblates run the two most difficult parishes.

Bishop Valentine has always been uncomfortable with the formality of being a bishop. Most of his day is very businesslike with people looking to him for leadership and advice. Bishop Valentine prefers a less formal structure, one where he gets to meet people on a more personal and human level.

Bishop Valentine is currently working on several projects that will bring more humanity to the people of Livingstone. He has revived efforts started by his predecessor for a youth center to provide...
vocational training for young people. Most of the teens living in the diocese struggle to find work, which many times leads boys to drugs and gangs and girls to prostitution.

“We need to get them off the streets and give them direction in their lives,” said Bp. Valentine. “They are our future, and helping them is a very Oblate thing to do.”

Bishop Valentine also wants to dig a well for St. Mary’s School, where about 750 girls attend classes with no running water. Many of the girls spend a good portion of their day just carrying water to the school.

Bishop Valentine also wants to create a new lay pastoral training program so that lay people can meet many of the spiritual needs of people living in the most remote villages, places where a priest may not get to for up to six months.

During the month of August, Bp. Valentine was in the United States fulfilling another role of being the Bishop of Livingstone — fundraiser. He visited several Oblate parishes and institutions to do mission appeals on behalf of the poor in his diocese.

“If people see you reaching out to the poor they want to join you and make a difference,” said Bp. Valentine. “And everywhere I go, people keep telling me how they like the way the Oblates are doing their ministries. They are the priests for the poor.”

A priest for the poor — the one title Bp. Valentine cherishes the most.
When Fr. Emmanuel Mulenga, O.M.I., was a boy, he loved to read. If he hadn’t found joy in books, he may never have become a Missionary Oblate.

Father Emmanuel grew up in a non-Oblate parish in Lusaka, Zambia. But he knew the Oblates because they had ministries in the area, including a small library. The Oblates allowed young Emmanuel to check out books to take home and read.

One day Emmanuel checked out a book that was part of the Oblate Heritage series, a group of publications with stories about Oblate missionary life. He loved the book, and checked out all of the others in the series. Emmanuel read about missions in faraway places like Laos, the Philippines, Spain, Mexico and even the United States. His Oblate journey had begun.

The man who gave Emmanuel permission to use the library was Fr. Ron Walker, O.M.I., the Oblate Vocation Director in Zambia. Father Ron became a mentor to Emmanuel, and the young man became involved in several Oblate activities. He even was an altar server at the ordination of the first Zambian Oblate.
“The more I read about and interacted with the Oblates the more I liked them,” said Fr. Emmanuel. “After about four years of informally being with them I decided in the 11th grade to make an official inquiry about joining the Oblates.”

Father Emmanuel entered the Oblate pre-novitiate program in 2003. He was then selected to attend the Oblate Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois. He later attended Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio and was ordained in 2012. Father Emmanuel’s first assignment was back in Zambia as an Assistant Pastor at St. Leopold Parish in Shang’ombo.

“It was a rather remote place right on the border with Angola,” said Fr. Emmanuel. “I was there with two other priests who had more experience. I was the ‘baby priest.’”

The “baby priest” spent two years at St. Leopold before he had to grow up fast. He was assigned to work in New Orleans, Louisiana as Pastor of St. Augustine Parish, a place that was struggling.

“My first response was to tell the Provincial I was not ready,” said Fr. Emmanuel. “I thought I needed another couple of years of experience before taking on this type of assignment. But he had an answer for every excuse that I could come up with, so eventually I gave in.”

St. Augustine Parish is one of the most historic and colorful churches in the United States. In the 1840s, the “War of the Pews” began at the church when free black people began buying pews for themselves and slaves. White people then began buying pews.

Left: Father Emmanuel stands outside St. Augustine Church at the Tomb of the Unknown Slave, a monument made of grave crosses, chains and shackles. Below: Visitors come to St. Augustine Parish to take part in numerous cultural events throughout the year.
The mix of pews resulted in the most integrated congregation in the country.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans. Even though the neighborhood didn’t flood, it suffered a lot of wind damage. Many people moved away. The archdiocese looked at closing the parish. In 2014 the Archbishop turned to the Oblates for help, and Fr. Emmanuel, at age 33, was put in charge.

Father Emmanuel began serving about 300 families in the parish. He also ministered to people who were “passing through,” tourists who come to St. Augustine to primarily experience the “Jazz Mass” with its unique New Orleans sound.

“On a typical Sunday about half of the people at Mass are from the parish and the other half are visitors,” said Fr. Emmanuel.

There is one Mass on Sundays beginning at 10:00 a.m. The liturgy can go a couple of hours. “We are on God’s time,” said Fr. Emmanuel.

The parish is also active in numerous cultural festivals held in the neighborhood. In August the parish community takes part in the Satchmo Summerfest, honoring Louis Armstrong.

Father Emmanuel says he is honored to be part of St. Augustine Parish, because it is a place for the curious. People come because they are curious about the parish’s unique history. They come because they are curious about a different style of worship.

For Fr. Emmanuel, St. Augustine reminds him of that Oblate library of his childhood. At the library, he was a curious boy discovering his path in life. Today, at St. Augustine, he is the Pastor of the curious, helping others discover new aspects of their faith. †
Healing Ministry Touches Many Lives

For over four decades, Fr. Richard McAlear, O.M.I. has been involved in the healing ministry, traveling the world teaching, preaching and praying for healing.

The fruit of these years – insights, lessons, experience, wisdom – has been gathered together by Fr. McAlear in his book *Power of Healing Prayer*. Published by *Our Sunday Visitor*, the book has sold more than 10,000 copies and has been translated into Polish.

*Power of Healing Prayer*, along with other books, CDs and DVDs from Fr. McAlear’s healing ministry, can be obtained at his website, frmac.org.

Formation Houses Filled With Seminarians

The Missionary Oblates’ four formation houses for the United States Province are packed with men at various stages on their journey to religious life.

The U.S. Province has two pre-novitiate programs (Buffalo, NY and Tijuana, B.C., Mexico) for men discerning their calling. There are currently 16 pre-novices studying for the U.S. Province.

At the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois, there are nine novices who are spending a year away to examine their calling before taking first vows. Four of the current novices are from the U.S. Province with the others coming from Zambia, India, Canada and Kenya.

At the Borzaga Formation Community in San Antonio, Texas 14 scholastics are studying to become Oblate priests or brothers. Seven of those scholastics are from the U.S. Province with the others coming from Zambia, Canada, Lesotho and Cameroon.

Preserving the Legacy of Pope John Paul II

In September, Fr. Leo Perez, O.M.I. participated in the panel *The Truth Will Set You Free: John Paul II and Modern Ideologies* at the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington, D.C.

Co-sponsored by the Polish Embassy, this event was part of a series exploring the Pope’s legacy and response to pivotal questions of our time. Father Perez’s paper was on *Freedom and Pope John Paul II’s Writings on the Preferential Option for the Poor*.

Since May 2019, Fr. Leo has been the Director of the Collection for the Church in Latin America for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. On weekends, he assists with the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.
In 1852, St. Eugene De Mazenod sent his first missionaries to southern Africa. Those Missionary Oblates left from the port of Marseille, France never to return to their homeland again.

Today, more than 160 years later, Fr. Bonga Majola, O.M.I. occasionally goes down to the port in Marseille. As he looks out at the ocean, he says a prayer of gratitude for those early Oblate missionaries. A native of South Africa, Fr. Majola is the fruit of their labor. He now helps people discover the wisdom of St. Eugene at the birthplace of the congregation.

“I am truly blessed to be working in this ministry, and grateful for the Oblates before me who paved the way,” said Fr. Majola.

Father Majola is part of the Oblate team ministering at the Eugene De Mazenod International Center in Aix-en-Provence, just a short drive from the port in Marseille. His ministry includes leading the De Mazenod Experience, an opportunity for participants to discover the Oblate charism in their everyday life of mission and ministry.

Father Majola never expected to be working at the most revered place in the Oblate world, especially so early in his priestly ministry. He was assigned to the Aix community just two years after his ordination.

Born in South Africa in 1981, Fr. Majola knew very little about the Oblates growing up. He met the Oblates in college and was drawn to their passion for serving the poorest of the poor. He entered the novitiate in 2005 and was ordained in 2011 after completing his theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome.

Father Majola’s first assignment was as an assistant parish priest at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Victory Park, Johannesburg. He was mainly
responsible for the youth ministry at the parish, and also did vocation ministry in South Africa.

Father Majola then got the shock of his life when he was asked by the Superior General to minister at the Eugene De Mazenod International Center. Father Majola thought the assignment might have been a mistake. He didn’t speak a word of French, and admits that he didn’t know much about St. Eugene De Mazenod.

“I always thought of myself as not an ideal Oblate according to St. Eugene’s standards, that if he had been around he would have kicked me out a long time ago,” said Fr. Majola.

Despite his early trepidation, Fr. Majola quickly embraced ministering in Aix. As a young Oblate, he brings a fresh perspective to the retreats he leads. Most of the participants are veteran missionaries, and Fr. Majola says he finds much joy when they leave the retreats full of life, hope and recommitted to serving Jesus and His Church.

Father Majola also said that working in Aix has given him a much deeper respect for St. Eugene De Mazenod and the founder’s total commitment to bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the most forgotten.

“Saint Eugene’s passionate love for Jesus Christ and the Church inspires me to work hard in deepening my personal relationship with Christ,” said Fr. Majola. “The way St. Eugene embraced the cross, in its different forms, allowing himself to be formed by it, gives me courage to faithfully carry mine. Saint Eugene’s thirst for holiness and to do all things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls has given me a new purpose in my life.”

In recent years, Fr. Majola has become the unofficial tour guide of the community, showing visitors the Oblate sites in Aix, St. Eugene’s hometown, and Marseille, where St. Eugene served as Bishop. In Marseille, Fr. Majola likes to bring visitors to the Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde, located at the highest point in the city.

With its panoramic views, visitors can see for miles across the Mediterranean Sea. It is a view that was experienced by St. Eugene De Mazenod when he sent his missionaries out to evangelize the world. And it is the same view experienced today by Fr. Majola, a disciple of St. Eugene, who is evangelizing missionaries from around the world. †

Father Majola often leads pilgrimages to Oblate sights in Marseille.
The Missionary Oblates are caretakers of a shrine in France where inspiration and healing have taken place since the Middle Ages. The Shrine of Notre Dame De Lumières (Our Lady of Lights) is about 50 miles north of Aix-en-Provence, the birthplace of the Missionary Oblates. In 1819, the Oblates arrived at the shrine and have welcomed millions of pilgrims over the years to one of southern France’s most popular devotional sites.

The shrine is located in the village of Goult and Christian devotion there dates back to the fourth century when a chapel was dedicated to Our Lady. The Cassian hermits who had their hermitages in the surrounding valleys used to assemble in the chapel to pray.

The chapel was abandoned and almost entirely destroyed as a result of the wars on religion in the 16th century. In August of 1661, a miracle took place at the site which brought numerous pilgrims to Goult. Antoine de Nantes, a 63-year-old farmer, had been a hardworking stonemason until he suffered a large hernia and was forced to wear a heavy iron corset. He could barely walk but one day dragged himself to the vicinity of the venerated ruins.

Suddenly, he saw a great light and in the midst of that light the most beautiful child one could imagine. Antoine reached out his arms but the vision disappeared. At that very moment, he was cured of his hernia. As a sign of appreciation toward the Blessed Virgin, the Christian people rebuilt the ancient chapel from its ruins.

Pilgrims came in crowds and many people reported healings after
praying at the church. During the French Revolution, the Carmelites who were responsible for the church were forced to leave, and the property was sold to the Lord of Goult. Eventually the church was restored to a place of worship and in 1837 the Oblates purchased the property.

After a few years of making repairs to the run-down property, the Oblates reignited devotion to Notre Dame de Lumiéres by ministering to the faithful who came to the holy place from all parts of southern France and beyond.

The annual number of pilgrims generally hovered around 50,000 with most coming in groups from parishes and schools. A few thousand came every year for feasts of the Blessed Virgin celebrated August 15 and September 8. More than 20,000 pilgrims were present at the feast of the crowning of the Virgin on July 30, 1864.

A special characteristic of these pilgrimages was that the main events took place at night, recalling the lights which were the original attraction for the flood of pilgrims. There were torch-light processions, sermons, confession, open-air Masses, etc.

Notre Dame de Lumiéres also became an Oblate house of formation. Known as the “second cradle” of the Oblates, thousands of seminarians would call the place home over the years and would eventually become missionaries throughout France and around the world.

With the number of men discerning a call to religious life on the decline, the seminarian program was closed around 1960. The Oblates then focused their attention on receiving retreatants, helping children prepare for their confirmation, and hosting events like the 30-day De Mazenod Experience so Oblates and their lay collaborators can have a better understanding of the Oblate charism.

Today about 15 Oblate priests and brothers are assigned to Notre Dame de Lumiéres. Some are retired while others continue to minister to pilgrims and help out at 16 nearby parishes.

And through their ministries, the Oblates at Notre Dame de Lumiéres continue to shine the light of Our Lady in order to brighten the lives of people in need. †
A Missionary Journey Begins

Aix-en-Provence and Marseille, France

Clockwise, from left: The tomb of St. Eugene De Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates; the cathedral in Marseille, France; the Foundation Room at the Oblate House in Aix-en-Provence, France; Fr. David Uribe, O.M.I. prepares for Mass in the Foundation Room; St. Eugene slept in a hallway at the Oblate House; a piece of St. Eugene’s heart is encased in a reliquary at the Oblate House.
Aix-en-Provence, France is the birthplace of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The Oblate founder, St. Eugene De Mazenod, was born in the city and it is where he began the congregation. Later, St. Eugene became Bishop of the nearby city of Marseille. Today Missionary Oblates and members of the Oblate family from around the world travel to Aix and Marseille to take part in programs to reach a deeper understanding of their Oblate identity.
“I want to be with my family, in peace.”

My name is Ernesto, and I am 25 years old. I am from El Salvador and currently living in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico. I love to play soccer, exercise and work. I try to become knowledgeable about places, ideas and people that inspire good in others, so that I can become a better person. I have spent the last several months attending the Catholic Church that is a mission of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

My family lives in El Salvador, including my mother, and a younger brother and sister. My mother has been everything to me and I love her very much. A year ago I left my country and journeyed to Mexico. The reason I did this was to escape the gangs (Maras Salvatruchas (MS)) and terrorism. I have never belonged to such a group, but they were putting pressure on me to join them, because they thought I might be good at extortion, kidnapping, drug trafficking and weapon use. For my and for my family’s safety, I made the sacrifice of leaving my family. However, my greatest desire is to be with them again.

I used to smoke and drink, but since coming to Mexico and encountering the Oblates, I am changing. For example, I have helped distribute food to the poor, helped people with disabilities and attended Mass. I also took part in a youth retreat and now plan to serve at the next retreat for adults. I believe these things are bringing me closer to God.

My purpose in Mexico now is to continue to attend church, work and support my family from here. Maybe I can even
The Missionary Oblates are shifting their ministries in Tijuana to better serve people who are most in need.

Over the past 23 years, the Oblates’ La Morita mission expanded greatly to include a main parish, 14 mission chapels, health clinic and numerous youth and community-outreach programs. The Oblates have turned over the more established parts of this mission to the local diocese in order to concentrate their work in areas that remain the most abandoned.

There are very few religious or community service programs in the Oblates’ new mission land. The new parish, Mary Immaculate, already has several mission chapels attached to it with more expected in the near future. Plans are for the new parish to include a health clinic, youth center, special education facility and other outreach programs to people in the community.

The Oblates in Tijuana extend prayers and gratitude to all who have supported the mission in the past and who are today helping to form and operate the new mission.

By God’s grace,

Ernesto †

Oblates Start New Tijuana Ministry

The Missionary Oblates are shifting their ministries in Tijuana to better serve people who are most in need.

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Hikers along the Appalachian Trail have a special place of rest and relaxation thanks to a Missionary Oblate priest.

In 1970, Fr. Charles Beausoleil, O.M.I. was named Pastor at Holy Family Church in Pearisburg, West Virginia. The parish sits along the Appalachian Trail which stretches from Georgia to Maine and attracts hikers who spend days, weeks and even months trekking the trail.

At Holy Family, Fr. Charles began a ministry to the Appalachian Trail hikers, encouraging them to use the parish hall overnight. With the increase of hikers in the mid-'70s, the hall became overcrowded, so Fr. Charles began to look for other options to house the guests.

In the summer of 1977, a barn that had been used to dry and store corn was hauled to the church property and converted into the Holy Family Hostel. Parishioners and volunteers created a loft for sleeping, a kitchen, porch and a shower, which is often a difficult facility to find along the trail.

Father Charles said parishioners were committed to the hostel since the very beginning, even though the parish had very limited finances. In fact, while he was Pastor at Holy Family, Fr. Charles also worked as a Math instructor at the local community college in order to improve the parish’s finances. The community college was small. Father Charles was the entire Math department.

For more than 40 years, thousands of hikers have stayed at the hostel on their trek along the trail. Parishioners take great pride in maintaining the hostel and knowing that they are likely the only Catholic parish in the country providing such a ministry.

Today, Fr. Charles lives at the Oblate Residence in Tewksbury, Massachusetts for elder and infirmed Oblates. His home is about 100 miles away from the Appalachian Trail, where hikers who had stayed at his hostel are making their journey north. †
Oblates Honor First Responders

The Missionary Oblates ministering at St. Joseph the Worker Shrine in Lowell, Massachusetts recently installed and dedicated a wall of remembrance and prayer area for first responders. Representatives from city government as well as from the various agencies charged with first responding to situations of tragedy were present for the dedication ceremony.

A plaque on the wall reads: the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in grateful appreciation to all first responders of the City of Lowell, dedicate this plaque to permanently remember every good service and encourage shrine visitors to pray for your efforts and protection always. The Oblates extend their gratitude for your unwavering dedication to the community. In God’s name, we petition Our Lady to bestow her protection and saving grace on all of you always. Amen.

Father Snipes Featured In PBS Video

Father Roy Snipes, O.M.I. is Pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Mission, Texas a small border town on the banks of the Rio Grande River. He also oversees the historic La Lomita Chapel, founded and built by the Oblates around 1865 as a stopover for itinerant Oblate preachers who traversed the Rio Grande Valley ministering to people living and working on remote ranches and farms.

The La Lomita Chapel is located on the banks of the Rio Grande River. The proposed border wall between Mexico and the United States would put the chapel into a type of “no man’s land” between the river and the wall. The Missionary Oblates, along with the local diocese, have registered their opposition to this plan.

In a ten-minute film entitled, “The Country Priest,” filmmaker Carlos Estrada profiles Fr. Snipes who reflects on the La Lomita Chapel and its relevance today in the border wall debate. The film is part of the PBS Online Film Festival and can be viewed on the PBS website.
I am originally from Seminole, Texas which is a small town of about 6,000 people in the western part of the state. My father worked many years in the oil fields. I am the middle child, with one older sister and one younger sister. Inside the home we spoke Spanish and outside of the home we spoke English. At about the age of eight I became an altar server and that was when the seed was planted in me that the priesthood might be something that would become a part of my life.

At the age of 13 I met my first Missionary Oblate, Fr. James Delaney, O.M.I. He was the priest that had married my parents 22 years earlier. He was an elderly Irish man who had come to the United States immediately after his ordination and settled in Texas. Upon being introduced to him he asked me what would I like to be when I grow up? I told him I didn’t know, and I wanted to end the sentence there. But something from inside told me to share with him that my mother and grandmother wanted me to be a priest. From that moment, Fr. Delaney took me under his wings.

Father Delaney showed me his Oblate Cross and put it in my hands. He told me that if I wanted to be a priest, and if I wanted to become a Missionary Oblate, then maybe one day this cross would be mine. As I looked at his Oblate Cross I fell in love with its simplicity and the powerful image of the Crucified Christ.

Father Delaney told me many stories about the Missionary Oblates and their missions. Eight months later I was on my way to the Oblates’ St. Anthony Minor Seminary in San Antonio. I said good-bye to my family at the
age of 14 and traveled 300 miles away from home and became a high school student of the Oblates.

I thoroughly enjoyed my four years there, in particular hearing the stories from the visiting Oblates who came by the school. It was powerful. I graduated from the minor seminary and went into formation for the priesthood. I was there two years and then realized I really didn’t know what God was calling me to do, and I didn’t really know who I was. So at the age of 21 I exited formation and closed the door to the Oblates and my faith.

I went through college and began a career in higher education. I was successful, but living aimlessly. Nine years later, I thought maybe I needed a career change, so I looked at entering politics. While considering that change I received an invitation to attend Mass from Fr. Richard Hall, O.M.I. the new vicar at the Oblate parish in town. It was exactly what I needed at that time.

I composed myself until the Gospel. Of all the Sundays I could have gone back to Mass, the Gospel that day was about the Prodigal Son. I knew that I was that Prodigal Son that had left for years and was now returning. God was embracing me, and I probably wept the rest of the Mass.

My conversion had begun, and I applied to join the Oblates again. Seven years of formation led me to the day of my perpetual vows as a Missionary Oblate. I was ordained in May of 2014. The Oblate tradition is to receive an Oblate Cross that had belonged to a previous Oblate. When I was asked whose cross I wanted, it was a no-brainer. I wanted the Oblate Cross of Fr. Delaney — my friend, mentor and hero.

Father Delaney had passed away in 2007 at the age of 97, after 70 years as a priest. Today, as I hold our Oblate Cross, I think back to him handing it to me when I was a boy, and his prophetic words that one day his cross might be mine. Through that cross, he is still with me every day. †
The first person to welcome Brett Jerrolds into the Catholic Church was a renowned Missionary Oblate — Fr. Charlie Prass, O.M.I.

Brett was baptized by Fr. Charlie when he was five years old. The priest had just arrived at his new assignment in Tennessee after more than 30 years of ministering among the poorest of the poor in the Philippines.

After Brett’s baptism, Fr. Charlie and members of the Jerrolds’ family became good friends. The priest helped family members deepen their faith. He even predicted that one day one of the three brothers would become a priest.

Brett was not a likely candidate to become that priest. As a teenager and in his early 20s, he stopped going to Mass and his prayer life was nonexistent. He got a job at a retail store. Brett was unhappy and felt his life had little meaning. He had relationship problems and gained weight, eventually weighing over 400 pounds.

“I reached a point where I told myself that I had to get it together, not just my physical health but my spiritual health,” said Brett. “That’s when I turned to Fr. Charlie for help.”

Father Charlie had passed away in 2011, so Brett began to pray that Fr. Charlie would intercede in his life. Brett realized he needed to return to the Church. He started attending Mass daily and went to confession for the first time in ten years.

Through prayer, Brett’s life began to calm down and his future came into focus. He discovered the importance
of silence in front of the Tabernacle and Blessed Sacrament, a silence which continues to be an important part of his prayer life today.

Brett started to exercise and lost more than 100 pounds. His spiritual life also calmed down and he began considering religious life, remembering Fr. Charlie’s prediction many years earlier that one of the three Jerrold’s brothers would become a priest.

Brett at first went to his parish priest to discuss a possible vocation and considered the idea of becoming a diocesan priest. But then he began to remember the stories that Fr. Charlie told him about missionary work, and how it was the happiest time of his life.

Father Charlie spent 31 years in the Philippines. He taught in schools, headed retreat programs and had several administrative assignments. But the work that was dearest to him was ministering for 20 years as the Chaplain at the National Mental Hospital and at the San Lazaro Hospital for Communicable Diseases.

Conditions in the hospitals were appalling. The patients were afflicted with various types of skin diseases brought about by poor sanitation and hygiene. Bedbugs, body lice, cockroaches, flies, mosquitoes and rats were prevalent throughout the buildings. Father Charlie founded a program that raised funds to greatly improve sanitary conditions in the hospitals.

“I may not have had a natural attraction to a mental health patient or to a ragged, derelict man groveling for help,” said Fr. Charlie. “But that person is a friend of Christ. If Christ is my friend also, then we have a mutual friend.”

Reflecting on Fr. Charlie’s wisdom, Brett decided to inquire about joining the Missionary Oblates. He contacted an Oblate Vocation Director and over a period of discernment decided that his calling fit more into a missionary life than in a diocesan setting. Brett joined the Oblates’ pre-novitiate community in Buffalo, New York where today he is learning more about the Oblate charism and spirituality.

Every morning Brett spends time in prayer, seeking the Lord’s guidance as he begins his Oblate journey. And he also says a prayer of gratitude — for Fr. Charlie. †
Although Harry Yosten never became an official Missionary Oblate, he has been part of the Oblate family for nearly 60 years.

“They welcomed me as a young man and I have been blessed ever since,” said Yosten.

In 1963, the Oblates welcomed a teenage Yosten to St. Anthony Prep Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. At the high school, Yosten was taught by dozens of Oblates and learned about their missionary work among the poor in the United States and around the world.

After high school, Yosten decided to discern if he was being called to religious life as a Missionary Oblate. He attended the Oblate novitiate and then studied philosophy at the college level, including two years at Creighton University.

At Creighton, one of Yosten’s professors also became a good friend, Fr. Francis George, O.M.I. Father George would eventually climb the Church hierarchy and became Cardinal Francis George of Chicago.

Yosten and Cardinal George kept in touch for decades, with the Oblate even presiding at Yosten and his wife’s Marsha wedding. Yosten talked with Cardinal George shortly before he passed away in 2015.

Yosten left Oblate formation in 1972 but stayed at Creighton, eventually...
earning a Doctorate of Law with a focus on Estate Planning. He enjoyed a successful career in banking including managing Bank Trust Departments in Nebraska and Colorado where he is retired today.

Over the years he continued to stay in contact with the Oblates, visiting retired Oblates at the Madonna House in San Antonio. A graduate of St. Anthony’s in 1967, Yosten notes that his class has had many reunions, a testament to the strong brotherly bonds formed at St. Anthony’s.

At one of those class reunions, Yosten was approached by Fr. William Morell, O.M.I. with a request. Father Morell was leading the Oblates’ fundraising efforts at the time and asked Yosten if he would consider serving on the Board of Directors of the Oblate Missionary Society Inc. (OMSI).

After becoming a member of the Board, he started a club for former St. Anthony seminarians called the YellowJacket Club. The Club publishes periodic updates on the lives of the Oblates who taught at St. Anthony’s over the decades. The Club has raised funds for the new seminarian residences at Oblate School of Theology, a way for former seminarians to “pay it forward.” Yosten also offered to lend his expertise to OMSI’s Charitable and Planned Giving Office which helps benefactors remember the Oblates in their estate planning.

Today, Yosten reviews the wills and trusts and IRA designations that name the Oblates as a beneficiary to make sure the benefactor’s wishes are being met. He uses his expertise to review the many documents to keep everything in order so that no complications arise.

Yosten said helping out with the Charitable and Planned Giving Office is just a small way that he can give back to the Oblates for the blessings he has received from them over many decades.

“Everybody is always thanking me for doing this, but it should be the other way around,” said Yosten. “I am the one who is thankful, because the Oblates have given me the chance to use my experience to be of service to others.”

“They welcomed me as a young man and I have been blessed ever since.”
Looking at the photographs, Fr. Bill says he is amazed by how many people have been touched by his ministries as an Oblate priest for more than 60 years. The 88-year-old priest has a simple philosophy for his current work — “I may be old, but I’m still a pro.”

Father Bill has been a pro ever since his ordination in 1957. His ministries have taken him around the world, with about half of his work as an educator and the other half as a parish priest. But early on there were some doubts that the priesthood was his correct calling.

“My dad joked that to be a priest you had to be holy and smart and his son was neither one of those,” said Fr. Bill. “But I always tried to hang around smart people so maybe it rubbed off on me a little.”

Father Bill’s pastor was more optimistic. He told the teenager that if the Holy Spirit wanted him to become a priest, then he would become a priest. So Fr. Bill entered the Oblates’ St. Anthony High School in San Antonio, Texas. He wasn’t the smartest or holiest student, but he was fascinated by the Oblates’ Hispanic ministries.
and determined to one day be part of that work. So he bought a 30-cent Spanish-English dictionary, which he still has today.

After his ordination, Fr. Bill got a lot of use out of that dictionary. His first assignment was teaching at a high school run by the Oblates in Mexico City for two years. To make his language situation even more complicated, he taught Latin.

After Mexico City, Fr. Bill returned to St. Anthony High School where he taught for ten years. He was also asked to coach the school’s football team.

“I had no idea what to do, so I bought a book to learn how to coach football,” said Fr. Bill, who turned the football program into a regular state championship contender.

After teaching high school, Fr. Bill would have other educational assignments at Creighton University, Our Lady of the Lake University and for two years as a professor at De Mazenod House teaching Oblate seminarians in Lusaka, Zambia. Then his missionary endeavors began to drift away from the classroom and into parish life. He would spend most of the second half of his priestly ministry as a parish pastor.

“If someone was looking for God, then I would pat them on the back and welcome them in,” said Fr. Bill about his simple approach to being a pastor.

He got the job because nobody else wanted it.... “It was perfect.” “It was the best job I ever had because I am not afraid of work.”

Father Bill first ministered as Pastor of St. Alfonso Parish in San Antonio, a poor church located in the barrio. It was there that he found his voice as a social activist and would take part in programs and marches to improve the lives of his parishioners and neighbors.

Father Bill also served as Pastor of St. Mary’s Parish in San Antonio for 9 years and at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Houston for 12 years. He continued his advocacy work on behalf of the poor, including starting a homeless shelter. He was also active in ecumenical programs with Protestants. “Why not, they read the same Bible I do,” said Fr. Bill.

In 2007 Fr. Bill was in a car accident and spent time recovering at a retirement home. Some of his friends
suggested that he retire, but after a while Fr. Bill bluntly told his superior, “I need a job.” So he was given the most difficult and rewarding assignment of his life.

Father Bill was assigned to St. Francis Xavier Parish in Laredo, Texas. He got the job because nobody else wanted it. The parish is extremely poor, with primarily elderly and immigrant parishioners.

“It was perfect,” said Fr. Bill. “It was the best job I ever had because I am not afraid of work.”

Father Bill’s dedication and Spanish-language skills immediately started bringing families into the church. He had to add Masses on the weekends to accommodate the increase in worshipers. He started new programs for young people to discover their faith. And for adults, he began “Bring ’em Home,” a 12-week course that covers a variety of Catholic topics.

Father Bill’s advocacy on behalf of the poor continued, and he expanded his advocacy to environmental causes. He was active in an effort to get plastic bags banned in Laredo which had been littering the community and causing significant problems for the city’s creeks and storm drains.

In 2014 Fr. Bill formed “The Samaritans,” a group of parishioners who lend a hand to anyone who needs it — the elderly, disabled, sick, lonely and grieving. The good works of The Samaritans began to draw attention beyond the parish and was a reason why Fr. Bill was nominated for a national award, the Lumen Christi Award from Catholic Extension.

“These volunteers were doing all the work and I get nominated for an award. Go figure,” said Fr. Bill. “I went from being one of the least known Oblates to having my face all over the place.”

Father Bill ministered at St. Francis Xavier for nine years before declining health forced him to move into Madonna House in San Antonio for elder and infirmed Oblates. In recent years, he has shifted his missionary ministry to focus more on prayer and friendship. He recites the rosary every morning and then reads his Bible. Oftentimes friends will stop by to visit and recollect about the old days and ask for advice. Father Bill also enjoys visiting with pilgrims at the Oblates’ Lourdes Grotto and Guadalupe Tepeyac devotional sites located a short walk from Madonna House.

“When you’re old and getting forgetful, you need a little help to stay close to God,” said Fr. Bill. “I get that help now from my brother Oblates and my friends, and through them I remain very close to God.” †
Charitable Gift Annuities with the Oblate Annuity Trust

When you establish a charitable gift annuity with the Oblate Annuity Trust (minimum $5,000), you will receive annual fixed payments for the rest of your life (minimum age 59 ½). The annuity rate is based on the donor’s age at the time the charitable gift annuity is established.

You will also receive a one-time charitable deduction for the year the gift is made. Upon your death, the amount remaining in your annuity account will strengthen the Oblates’ many ministries, creating a lasting legacy in your memory.

A charitable gift annuity can also be funded with securities such as appreciated stock. With this type of gift you can partially bypass capital gains tax.

To receive more information about a charitable gift annuity with the Oblates, contact Dawn at 1-877-398-7687 or email dsmith@oblatesusa.org

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*Based on your age at the time of the gift.

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February 2020
Look through the tatters that cover you, there is an immortal soul within.

St. Eugene De Mazenod

This photo was taken near St. Eugene’s home in Aix-en-Provence, France.