



# *Oblate*WORLD

MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE



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# Inside

- 4 – 6 **A Ministry That Grew Out Of The Mud**  
7 **Oblate Crossings**
- 8 – 10 **The Faith Blooms In The Desert**  
11 **Oblate Crossings**
- 12 – 13 **Oblate Co-Missionaries –  
Lisa Scaglione and Paul Thacker**
- 14 – 17 **Thanks be to God – I Am Here**
- 18 – 19 **Carrying The Cross**
- 20 – 21 **My Brother's Keeper**
- 22 – 23 **My Vocation Story –  
Fr. Bill O'Donnell, O.M.I.**
- 24 – 25 **"Praise Be Jesus Christ  
and Mary Immaculate!"**
- 26 – 27 **Changing Lives In Tijuana**
- 28 – 30 **Growing The Faith – A Family Tradition**  
31 **Your Gift Made Easy**

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## Front Cover:

Father Louis Studer, O.M.I. distributes Communion during a visit to the Oblate mission in Turkmenistan.

## Back Cover:

Bishop Michael Pfeifer, O.M.I. prays with Oblate seminarians at San Juan de los Lagos Parish in San Antonio, Texas.

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*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.

## OBLATE WORLD

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MISSIONARY  
OBLATES  
OF  
MARY IMMACULATE

# From the *Provincial* Fr. Louis Studer, O. M. I.



*Dear Friend,*

“Humble presence.” Those were the words Fr. Andrzej Madej, O.M.I., Superior of the Oblate mission in Turkmenistan, used to describe the Oblates’ ministries there. I was blessed to spend a week last year with Fr. Andrzej and the two other Oblate priests assigned to the country.



Throughout my stay, I witnessed the Oblates’ “humble presence” on many occasions. One of the most inspiring moments was when we gathered to celebrate Mass at the ruins of Merv. The Mass was celebrated on top of an ancient church, Haraba Koshk, where no Mass had been celebrated for the past 1,500 years.

Our Mass was very humble. The altar was a small wooden table. Father Andrzej had gathered some tumbleweed and made a modest arrangement. We had a chalice, small container of wine and a bottle of water.

I have been blessed to concelebrate Masses at some of the grandest churches in the world. But standing at Merv and celebrating one of the simplest liturgies possible was just as impressive. It truly reminded me that as missionaries we can accomplish the extraordinary through humble acts of faith.

As I celebrated that special Mass, I offered a prayer of thanksgiving for friends like you. The Oblates’ Turkmenistan mission is funded largely through the U.S. Province. Your humble gifts of prayer and financial support are truly making a difference in bringing the Catholic faith to life in the Turkmenistan desert.

I hope the articles and photos in this magazine give you a better understanding of our co-work in Turkmenistan. Thank you for your “humble presence” in our work among the poor and needy there and around the world.

In Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

*Fr. Louis Studer, omi.*

Fr. Louis Studer, O.M.I.  
Provincial, United States Province

# A Ministry That Grew Out Of The Mud

The Missionary Oblate journey of Fr. Paul Hughes, O.M.I. began in the mud. And for nearly 50 years he has been willing to trudge through the mud to bring the Good News to some of the poorest and desperate people in the world.

Father Paul grew up in Winthrop, Massachusetts near the runway to Boston's Logan Airport. When he was about 12 years old, a plane hit a flock of birds and crashed into the mud flats. When young Paul arrived at the crash site, he saw Missionary Oblates for the first time.

"They were in their bright white cassocks and were climbing through the mud to get to the people to give them last rites," said Fr. Paul. "They were filthy, covered with mud, but determined to be with the victims."

That first observance of the Missionary Oblates made a lasting impact on Fr. Paul. When he felt called to religious life, he inquired about the Oblates and was drawn to their missionary spirit.

He was eventually ordained an Oblate priest in 1973.

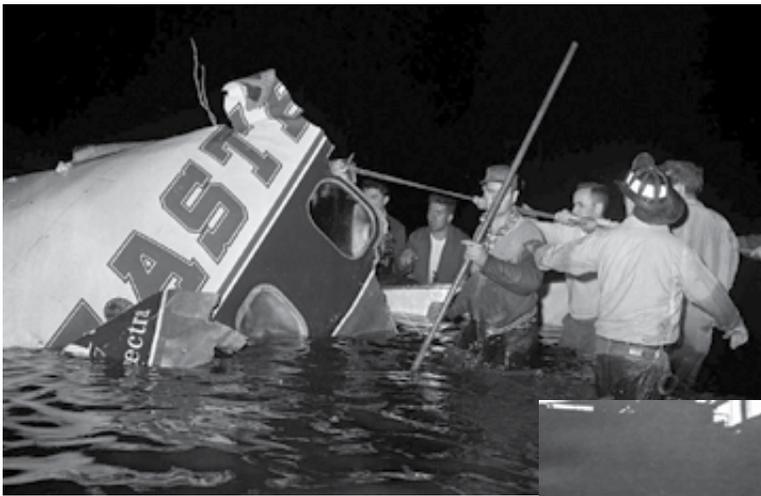
After two years of ministering in Florida, Fr. Paul jumped at the opportunity to become one of the first Oblates to minister in Puerto Rico, and to get his feet dirty. He spent five years in the country, ministering at parishes and mission chapels that served the poorest of the poor. He was also introduced to the problems caused by drug lords and cartels, something that would complicate his work for decades.

After Puerto Rico, Fr. Paul spent six years ministering in one of the most infamous drug cities in the world, Cartagena, Colombia. He arrived to take over a parish of 80,000 people squeezed into a space of just three square miles.

The area was commonly referred to as "the swamp" because it was usually flooded, and mud was everywhere. It contained virtually no churches or schools and few



**"If you walk with the people, you really get to know them, and know about their struggles."**



community amenities. Father Paul's predecessor had been shot and killed.

"The area was largely without hope and this is precisely the type of vacuum in which gang culture begins to take control," said Fr. Paul. "One of the first tasks was to build a spirit of community among the people."

In order to build that spirit of community, Fr. Paul decided that he couldn't be isolated from his parishioners, he needed to experience their poverty firsthand. In 2000, he gave up his car, and began walking.

"It was liberating to do things in a much simpler way," said Fr. Paul. "If you walk with the people, you really get to know them, and know about their struggles."

A big priority for Fr. Paul and the Oblates was working with young people who were often the victims of crime and violence. They provided educational services and set up a scholarship program. The Oblate churches were not just places for

worship but also somewhere children could study. Living conditions slowly improved and "the swamp" started to become a home. But there was still a lot of mud.

After six years in the swamp, Fr. Paul spent a year assisting the Oblates in China before accepting an assignment in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico. He was part of a team of Oblates at the massive La Morita mission which provided for the spiritual and physical needs of about 180,000 people living in the mission's boundaries.

In 2012, Fr. Paul took on a new challenge of ministering in the mountains of Guatemala. His parish was connected to more than 70 chapels located in some of the most isolated and impoverished parts of the country.

*Continued on page 6*



To get to these chapels, Fr. Paul was constantly hiking or riding a horse in order to bring the Sacraments to people living on the fringe of society. Often he traveled with a mule carrying his Sacramental items and a few personal belongings. And there was plenty of mud to cross.

The seven years Fr. Paul spent in Guatemala were very tense because of violence caused by gangs and drug trafficking. A few years before Fr. Paul arrived in Guatemala, Fr. Larry Rosebaugh, O.M.I. was murdered and other Oblates were injured during a robbery by armed gunmen.

In 2019, Fr. Paul decided to return to the United States to begin a new ministry. Health issues caused by decades of living in deplorable conditions had begun to take their toll. Father Paul is currently the Associate Pastor at Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Brownsville, Texas where the Oblates have ministered since 1849.

Father Paul admits that it has taken some time to adjust to the comforts of life in the United States. He still prefers to keep things simple. There may not be much mud in Brownsville, but there are still plenty of opportunities for Fr. Paul to help people make their lives better.

Father Paul continues to fulfill the words of Scripture:  
*“He lifted me out of the mud. He set my feet on a rock,  
and gave me a firm place to stand.” Psalm 40:2*

# Oblate Crossings



## Oblate General House Goes Green

Recently the Oblates' General House in Rome installed solar panels as part of a seven-year project to make the congregation's headquarters more green. A total of 332 photovoltaic panels have been fixed on the rooftop and are expected to generate over 90 kilowatts per day.

Father Marc Dessureault, O.M.I., the Treasurer General, expects the solar panels to result in energy savings that will allow the Oblates to get their investment back in six or seven years.

"The electricity produced by the solar panels will be solely for the usage of the General House, and we are now seeing its advantage with the reduction of our electricity bills," Fr. Marc said.

During the summer there is an added advantage. The three heat pumps, which produce the air conditioning, will be sending the heat they produce to the boilers, and they in turn will help produce hot water for the house. In that sense, it will be a double recycling of electricity.

## Eugene De Mazenod 101

An online course has been created at Oblate School of Theology for people to better understand the life and teachings of St. Eugene De Mazenod, the founder of the Missionary Oblates.

The course is divided into 20 sessions with each session including a video lecture of around 20 minutes. The course is presented in English and Spanish. It is a non-academic enrichment course for those seeking to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the life, charisma, spirituality and mission of St. Eugene.

To learn more about the on-line course, visit [ost.edu/eugene101](http://ost.edu/eugene101).



# The Faith Blooms In The Desert



Pope Pius XI gave the Missionary Oblates the title of “specialists in the most difficult missions.” And there may be no greater example of that difficult mission than the Oblate mission in Turkmenistan.

For generations, no Catholic priest was allowed to work in the country while it was part of the Soviet Union. When Communism collapsed,

a small group of Catholics wrote to Pope John Paul II asking him to send priests to Turkmenistan to administer the Sacraments.

The Vatican began to ask religious congregations if they were interested in starting a mission in Turkmenistan. They asked 38 communities for volunteers, and got rejected by all 38. On the 39th try, the Vatican finally

got a positive response, from the Missionary Oblates.

“When I arrived 23 years ago there were only a handful of Catholic faithful. Over time I saw a community rise before my eyes,” said Fr. Andrzej Madej, O.M.I. “Being a witness of this birth was a great grace of God, because it means having participated in a birth that was troubled

but full of hope. We live the experience of the Apostolic Church, which starts from

“Over time I saw a community rise before my eyes”

scratch and is based on the power of the Word of God.”

The Turkmenistan mission is entrusted to the Oblates’ Polish Province which provides priests who can speak Russian. The United States Province collaborates with the mission primarily by providing financial support.

**Left to Right:**

Fr. Jerzy Kotowski,  
Fr. Rafal Chilimoniuk,  
Fr. Pawel Zajac,  
Fr. Andrzej Madej



Father Andrzej and two other Oblates are the only Catholic priests working in Turkmenistan, a country of over five million people. When the Oblates celebrate Mass at their Chapel of the Lord's Transfiguration in Ashgabat, there is no other Catholic celebration within a thousand miles in all directions – truly an oasis of faith in the desert.

The population of Turkmenistan is about 90-percent Muslim along with members of the Orthodox Church and some Protestant denominations. The

government watches these religious institutions closely. Though there are no outright bans on these groups, the government does nothing to encourage them either. New churches or buildings are almost never approved for construction and even the importation of Bibles and other religious material is strictly regulated.

Father Andrzej, along with Frs. Rafal Chilimoniuk and Jerzy Kotowski, are officially Vatican diplomats who maintain a ministry of pastoral and missionary activity in a “low profile” style which is limited to their home and chapel.

“We have a Catholic community of about 150 persons. They attend Mass in Russian and also in English,” said Fr. Andrzej. “Our community worships in a rented house. In spite of the lack of space our community maintains its enthusiasm, as the number of people coming continues to grow.”



*Continued on page 10*



Every day the Oblates in Turkmenistan dedicate a few hours to prayer, both privately and with members of the Catholic community. They celebrate the Eucharist daily. The Oblates also try to visit with families in the area, both Catholics and non-Catholics.

The fruits of the Oblates' labor is beginning to pay off. Six people were recently baptized into the community. In 2016, the Oblates celebrated the ordination of Fr. Anton Litvinov, O.M.I. who grew up attending Mass at the Oblate chapel. Father Anton is believed to be the first person ever from Turkmenistan to be ordained a priest.



Seeds of faith have been planted in the Turkmenistan desert, thanks to the Oblates. And those seeds are today beginning to bloom, bringing the Good News to an entire country. **T**

# Oblate Crossings



## Fr. Bob Wright Named Missiology Chairholder



Father Bob Wright, O.M.I., who has taught at Oblate School of Theology since 1984, has been chosen as the first holder of the school's newest endowed chair, the *Elena S. Kenedy Chair in Missiology*.

For about 30 years Fr. Wright has taught an introductory course on missiology as well as the interaction of faith and culture. He has also taught the history of Hispanic Christianity, first in the Southwest and more recently throughout the United States. He hopes to publish a textbook on Hispanic Christianity in the near future.

Father Wright has participated in mission gatherings in Guatemala and Mexico. He has also been invited to speak in Rome and the Philippines about the Church's mission today.

## First Oblate from Guinea Bissau

In December Bro. Aful Sanha, O.M.I. became the first Oblate from Guinea Bissau when he made his perpetual profession. Originally from the Oblates' Farim mission, Bro. Aful did his formation studies in Cameroon and also has professional training in building construction.

Currently there are 11 Oblates working in Guinea Bissau. The mission was opened in 2003 by Oblates from Senegal. The mission began in Farim and then expanded into the suburbs of Bissau. In 2014 the Oblates opened a mission in Calcine in the Diocese of Bafata in the southeast.

For the past three years a formation house has been open in Bissau for a first contact with young people who are interested in religious life as Oblate priests and brothers.





## Oblate Co-Missionaries *Lisa Scaglione and Paul Thacker*

Last year Lisa Scaglione and her husband, Paul Thacker, visited the Missionary Oblates' missions in Turkmenistan. For the couple it was like taking a trip back in time nearly 2,000 years.

"When we saw the Oblates ministering in Turkmenistan we felt we were looking back to the earliest days of the Church," said Lisa. "We were seeing the face of Christ being shown to people for the very first time."

Lisa and Paul have been benefactors of the Oblates' work in Turkmenistan since 2016. They became

co-missionaries with the Oblates by accident.

Lisa was surfing the internet looking for information about Catholic missions in the former Soviet Union. Lisa lived in the region for a few years after earning a B.A. in Russian Language and Literature and an M.A. in Russian and Eastern European Studies. When she came across a story about the three Oblate priests working in Turkmenistan, Lisa knew that she and her husband had to get involved with that mission.

Lisa said she was particularly struck by a portion of the article that talked about a Muslim woman who converted

**Left to Right:**

Paul Thacker, Lisa Scaglione,

Fr. Rafal Chilimoniuk,

Fr. Andrzej Madej, Fr. Pawel Zajac,

Fr. Louis Studer, Fr. James Chambers,

Fr. Jim Brobst.



to Christianity and was baptized by the Oblates. The woman said she never knew that there was a loving God before she met the Oblates.

Lisa and Paul, who own an equestrian facility and a photography studio outside of Portland, Oregon began supporting the Turkmenistan mission after reading the article. When they learned members of the Oblates' U.S. leadership team were traveling to Turkmenistan, they jumped at the opportunity to see firsthand the mission that had become so close to their hearts.

Both Lisa and Paul said their trip to Turkmenistan strengthened their faith and confirmed for them the value of the Oblate mission which is bringing the Word of God to some of the most spiritually-neglected people in the world.

“The Church is a missionary church and Pope Francis promotes that the Church must go out to the peripheries,” said Lisa. “And you can really see that happening with the Oblates and their work in Turkmenistan.”

For Paul, spending time in Turkmenistan was an eye-opening experience of what life is like on the periphery of society. He could see and experience the struggles of living on the edge, and discover how faith can have a profound impact on the lives of the poor and needy.



“The faith of the Oblate priests is what impressed me most of all. It is not just theoretical, but a very real faith that is alive in bringing the Gospel message in all its fullness to each person that they meet,” said Paul. “In Turkmenistan I discovered the unfiltered love of God.”

# Thanks be to God I AM HERE

Father Eleazar Manuel López, O.M.I. describes his life as one of transitions. On January 11, 2020 he made the biggest transition yet when he was ordained the newest Missionary Oblate for the United States Province.

“It has been quite a journey, but thanks be to God I am here,” said Fr. Eleazar on his ordination day.

Father Eleazar was born and raised in Mexico in a family with three sisters and two brothers. As a young man, his life lacked focus, and he wasn’t sure what path he would eventually take.

“As a teenager I was distant from God,” said Fr. Eleazar. “I would go to church sporadically but I was never committed to my faith. I felt lost.”

At the age of 20 Fr. Eleazar thought the military might be a good place for him to gain focus in his life. He joined the Mexican Army and served for four years. He was part of a Special

Forces operation focused on curtailing drug trafficking.

“Ironically, in the Army I was trained to kill people, but eventually I found my true calling in saving people through Christ,” said Fr. Eleazar.



After moving to the United States, Fr. Eleazar’s life changed dramatically when he stumbled across the Oblates’ Santa Rosa Parish in San Fernando, California. He got involved with the youth ministry program at the parish. Two other young men in the youth group, Jesse Esqueda and Lucio Castillo, would also become Oblate priests.

“The people at Santa Rosa welcomed me to their community in a powerful way,” said Fr. Eleazar. “I truly am a vocation created by lay people.”

Through Santa Rosa Parish, Fr. Eleazar first encountered the Missionary Oblates. He particularly felt drawn to the Oblate founder,



St. Eugene De Mazenod, because of the founder's focus to treat people as humans first and then to meet their spiritual needs.

When Fr. Eleazar told his family that he was interested in becoming a priest, they were at first unsupportive. He had almost no contact with them for four years. But eventually they warmed up to the idea, and began supporting his decision to serve God as a Missionary Oblate priest.

Father Eleazar entered the Oblates' pre-novitiate in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico in 2008. He spent four years there coming to a deeper understanding of his faith and the charism of the Missionary Oblates.

In 2012 Fr. Eleazar spent a year at the Oblate novitiate in Guatemala. The novitiate year is time away from family and friends to seriously consider if a person is being called to religious life.

"In Guatemala I really got to experience missionary work. I had no cell phone and in the silence I was able to really grow in my relationship with God," said Fr. Eleazar.

After a year at the novitiate, Fr. Eleazar made First Vows and became a student at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He joined an Oblate seminarian community with students from around the world.

Father Eleazar's long journey to the priesthood concluded when he was ordained in January at the Oblates' Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos Parish in San Antonio. Presiding at the ordination was a brother Oblate, Most Rev. Michael D. Pfeifer, O.M.I., Bishop Emeritus of San Angelo, Texas. Father Louis Studer, O.M.I., Provincial of the United States Province, gave Fr. Eleazar his first obedience, to the Shrine of St. Joseph the Worker in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Father Eleazar said he is excited about working at the shrine because he can enrich the lives of many people on their faith journey in countless ways. Just like so many people have enriched his life on his journey to the priesthood in countless ways. 🙏

# Mass of Priestly Ordination

Rev. Eleazar Manuel López, O.M.I.

Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos Parish,  
San Antonio, Texas

January 11, 2020





# Carrying the Cross

What does a young Oblate brother from Zambia and a legendary American scripture scholar have in common? Everything.

In February Bro. Eugene Mwape Mule, O.M.I. made his perpetual vows in San Antonio, Texas. During the ceremony he received the Oblate Cross of Fr. Frank Montalbano, O.M.I. who spent more than 50 years teaching seminarians before passing away at the age of 97 in December.

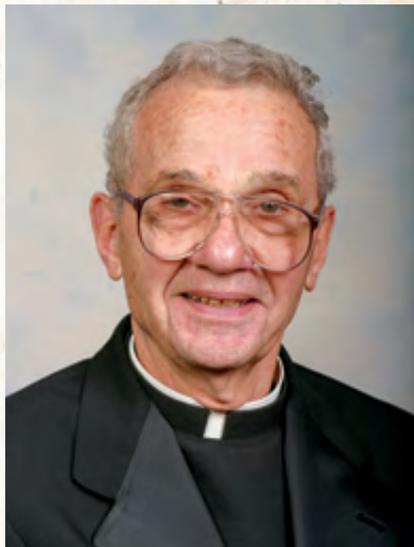
“I met Fr. Frank after he moved into the Madonna Residence where our elderly Oblates live in San Antonio,” said Bro. Eugene. “Father Frank became my friend and an inspiration. One day I would like to also become a teacher of Scripture, and that is why I chose to receive his Oblate Cross.”

Brother Eugene is scheduled to be ordained later this year. He will carry his cross to a yet-to-be-determined mission. He is already used to being a missionary, having been away from his native Zambia for the past eight years. As a seminarian, he has already studied and ministered in Cameroon, the United States and Canada.

Father Frank wasn't quite the world traveler, but he helped to shape Oblate priests and brothers who have ministered in every corner of the world.

“It has been a special gift from God to enable me to bring His Word to seminarians for so many years,” said Fr. Frank shortly before he retired in 2005.

After moving into the Madonna Residence, Fr. Frank continued to assist and give advice to seminarians studying next door



*Father Frank Montalbano, O.M.I.*



*Brother Eugene Mwape Mule, O.M.I.*

at Oblate School of Theology. That's where he met Bro. Eugene, and now he will be forever linked with the Zambian Oblate.

Although Fr. Frank was an accomplished scholar, his life prayer was very simple. It is a prayer that is now being passed on to the next Missionary Oblate priest.

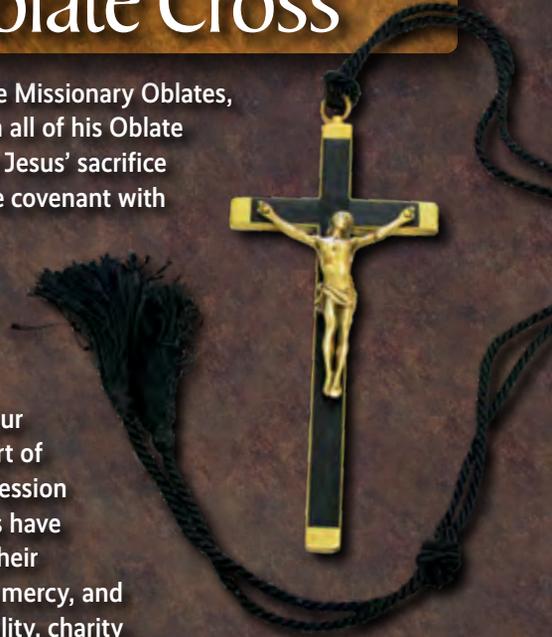
*“My prayer is that all priests be gentle, ardent and courageous ministers of the Sacred, men of joy in priestly service like Christ, the Eternal High Priest, and that we be men of joy when celebrating the Eucharist – not performers on stage – but serving God at two tables – the table of the word and sacrament.”* †

## History of the Oblate Cross

Saint Eugene De Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates, had a passion for the cross that he instilled in all of his Oblate brothers. He felt that the cross was a sign of Jesus' sacrifice which redeems sinners and re-establishes the covenant with God. Furthermore, it was a sign of love and reconciliation.

The founder wished each of his missionary sons to wear a missionary cross as a distinctive sign of conversion. He wanted the cross to be “a sacred sign of our apostolic mission” as well as “an essential part of our religious habit... given on the day of profession as a distinctive sign of our ministry.” Oblates have since always carried their Oblate Crosses to their missions around the world as a sign of God's mercy, and as a constant reminder of the virtues of humility, charity and modesty.

By 1830, the passing on of the missionary crosses from deceased Oblates to new Oblates was already part of the Oblate tradition. Each new Oblate received the cross of one of his deceased brothers so that he could be inspired by and further the legacy of his predecessor. This tradition of passing on the Oblate Cross is still an important part of Oblate perpetual vows ceremonies. The passing on of the Oblate Cross is not just a continuance of the legacy of St. Eugene De Mazenod but it is also a symbol of Oblate brotherhood in Christ.



# My Brother's Keeper

When Roger Cyr was a boy, he didn't want to spend a lot of time with his older brother, Myles. Roger wanted to do his own thing and have his own friends.

More than 70 years later, Fr. Roger and Fr. Myles were inseparable, living on the same floor of the Oblate Residence in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. And every day Fr. Roger said a prayer of gratitude that his big brother was just down the hall.

"We lived together as kids and then we started living together again in our 80s," said Fr. Roger. "When I was young I didn't want to do what my brother did, but eventually he influenced me to follow his example, and I have been grateful ever since."

On April 9, Fr. Roger passed away peacefully in his room. His brother Myles was there by his side, a brother's keeper to the very end.

Father Myles was ordained a Missionary Oblate on June 17, 1954. He never pressured his young brother to follow in his footsteps, but was filled with pride when Fr. Roger was ordained on August 15, 1959.

"Sixty years ago I was called and stepped forward to begin a special relationship with Christ and His Church," said Fr. Roger. "I took what little gifts I had and assimilated them to Christ, so that I could become each day that which Christ called me to be."

Ironically, the Cyr brothers never ministered together as Oblate priests. They worked at parishes and other Oblate ministries throughout New England.

"I went my way after ordination and he went his way after ordination," said Fr. Myles. "We ministered at some of the same places, but never at the same time."

One place where both Fr. Cys left a lasting impact was the Shrine of St. Joseph the Worker, in Lowell, Massachusetts. The Shrine serves workers in downtown Lowell and allows people to drop in to take a few minutes for spiritual nourishment.

"The Shrine's ministry really is centered around the Sacrament of Reconciliation," said Fr. Myles. "I never heard so many confessions in my life."

Wherever the Cyr brothers ministered, they always had a common purpose.



They always wanted everyone to be reminded that someone loves them, and that they don't have to be perfect to follow Christ.

"Christ saved the world with 12 imperfect guys," said Fr. Roger. "A saint is a sinner who gets up and keeps walking when they fall."

In 2015, Fr. Myles said "I love you," to his younger brother when Fr. Roger needed to move into the Oblate infirmary. Father Myles decided he too needed to move into the infirmary in order to be there for his younger brother.

"I told Roger that if God was ending this chapter of his ministry then he was ending my chapter too," said Fr. Myles.

At the infirmary Fr. Roger had limited mobility and spent most of his time in his room. He focused his final missionary time on ministering through the power of prayer. He had one piece of technology, a tablet to read the Bible and help him recite his prayers.

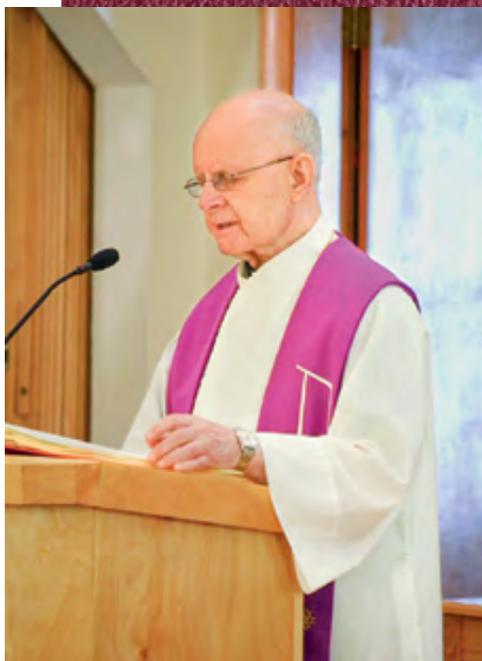
Father Roger said he had everything he needed in his room. He had two important items around his neck, an Oblate cross and an emergency button. He had a television but didn't turn it on for more than four years. Father Roger said he wanted to avoid too much noise in his room because in the silence is where he could hear Christ.

Three times a day, the quiet in Fr. Roger's room was interrupted when his older brother came to visit. The visits were a way for Fr. Myles to minister to his brother, and to remind him that he was not alone. In the evening, the two brothers recited the rosary before going to bed.

It was their daily ministry, and a simple act of brotherly love. †



*Father Roger Cyr, O.M.I.*



*Father Myles Cyr, O.M.I.*



# *My Vocation Story*

Fr. Bill O'Donnell, O.M.I.



It's almost as if I was destined to be an Oblate from the very beginning. My mother's family lived in Holy Angels Parish in Buffalo, New York which is the oldest continuous Oblate foundation in the U.S., since the 1890s. I was just one in a long line baptized there and raised with Oblate priests all around me. I don't think I ever met a priest who wasn't an Oblate until well into my high school years.

As a child the life and liturgy connected with priests was attractive. Like many boys in the 1950s I played as a priest with my younger siblings serving as the congregation.

High school years saw me at Bishop Fallon High School, once again under the tutelage of the Oblates. Here 22 mostly young Oblates taught 500 boys, primarily from the West Side of Buffalo. The students came from families like mine, that were by no means rich, and to whom the \$50 a year tuition was a struggle if not a hardship.

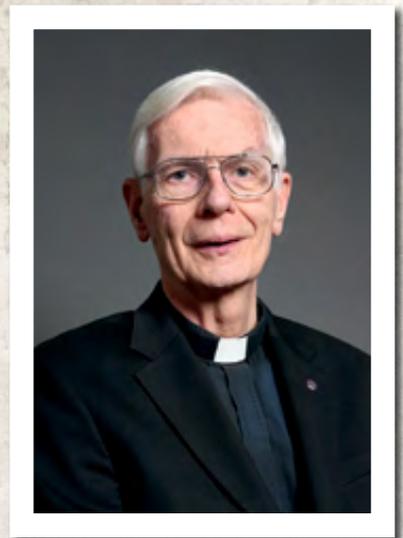
The atmosphere among the faculty was inspiring to us. They got along well and their spirit was transferred to us, along with a real concern for the underdog. We were the underdog school, small, in the middle of the city without much of a campus, and this fit in well with the Oblate charism.

As a track team member, I always had coaches who were Oblates. The long drive home from practice brought me into closer contact with my Oblate coach. What was seen in general from the faculty, that care and good spirit, was more clearly revealed in the daily drive home.

As high school drew to a close it was time to move on. Like most of the seniors I was brought into the Vocation Director's office and questioned about becoming an Oblate. I was not interested, and wanted to get on with my life, meet the right girl and settle down.

God, however, had a different plan and He didn't take too long in revealing it. In my first semester of college, while waiting for Mass to begin one day, I suddenly felt that God really wanted me to be an Oblate. It wasn't a vision or a voice, just the solid certainty that I should be moving in that direction.

And so I did. The Oblates urged me to finish college while I kept in touch through regular visits by the Vocation Director. I went on to Novitiate and the seminary, and was ordained in 1970. What seemed to be my destiny had come true. I took a short detour but ultimately God's call broke through, and like Samuel, "here I am." †



# “Praise Be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate!”

## Prenovice Luis Ramirez

I am from a family of seven in Mexico City and have four sisters. I grew up in a very conservative and religious family, and have had the blessing of my family’s full support of my vocation.

I have felt the call to the priesthood since I was five years old, and began discerning the priesthood when I was in the eighth grade. I met the Oblates when I was six years old in San Antonio as I would go to Mass at their Lourdes Grotto and Guadalupe Tepeyac.

Despite my strong Catholic upbringing, I struggled a lot with my faith throughout high school. I was bullied for being Catholic. The trauma from the hatred I received, as well as loneliness, left me somewhat resentful towards my Catholic identity.

I began to pull away from my faith a bit, and upon entering college sought a life I thought was “normal” and took part in the traditional college life, even though in my heart I knew it was wrong to do. My last girlfriend even disliked

the Catholic Church and this caused a lot of conflict with my family and me.

All the internal conflict I had with seeking happiness in college life and in vices left me feeling this great

emptiness and longing to seek out the Church. I changed my ways and began to go to Mass every day and pray the rosary daily. One day I began to feel that call to the priesthood again.

When I felt this overwhelming desire to enter the seminary I reached out to Fr. Ray Cook, O.M.I. who I had known for five years and has been my Spiritual Director. I realized that I had spent all

of high school and the start of college trying to be someone that was not me, and that the reason I felt empty was because I sought happiness in things that were no match for the love of God.

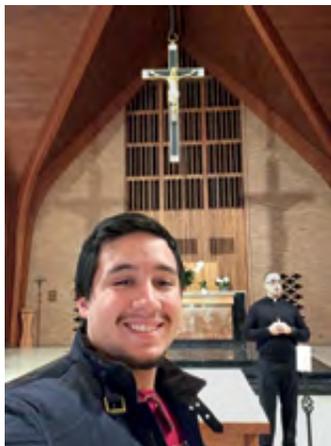
Upon reading the *Oblate Rules and Constitution*, I found myself moved to tears by the charisma, which was the perfect match to what I wanted to do



with my life – to serve and evangelize the poor and abandoned.

In 2018 I attended a *Come and See* vocation weekend with the Oblates. There I met Fr. Jesse Esqueda, O.M.I. who invited me to visit the Oblates mission in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico. After that weeklong mission trip I decided to take a semester off from college and do three months of missionary work in Tijuana.

I honestly could not be any happier with my life right now. If I were to see the people that hurt me in the past, I would hug them because had they not broken me I would not have found God in that silence and solitude, nor would I be where I am today, a Missionary Oblate seminarian. Praise be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate! 🙏



# Changing Lives

## In Tijuana

Thanks to the Missionary Oblates and a network of partners and benefactors, the lives of thousands of people are changing for the better every year. Two members of the Oblates' mission team in Tijuana, B.C., Mexico, Rich Reader and David Rizo, highlight just a few of the people who are being served by the Oblates.

We often visit a family with 11 children. We have been helping the family of Señor Mauro for about a year, but two months after we met them, the mother died of breast cancer.

Several of our youth donated blood when she was sick. She did a good job preparing her family, explaining things to children ranging in age from a few months to 17 years old. She told the youngest that they need to be good and they will be with her in Heaven;

to the older ones that she is going to a better place and will not be in pain anymore. Some of us attended her funeral where all eleven children dressed in white, at her request, to honor her life in Heaven. Recently we delivered bunk beds to them, thanks to a donation from the Tijuana ministry. The kids were so excited they were all jumping on the bed. We expect several of the littler ones will have fun bunking together the first night. The father led all the children in a prayer of thanks.



Sara is 37 years old and has movement disability because she was a victim of medical negligence at a young age. She is not able to walk, talk, feed or dress herself. Her two adult sisters have taken care of her all her life. One sister, Josefina, does not work in order to take care of her sister. The second sister, Nereida, is married with four children. She babysits her grandchildren and also helps with Sara, so she is not able to work either. So we help out with food and supplies for Sara and her family.



Josefina has been involved in social ministry with the church for ten years and has introduced us to people in need. She also occasionally accompanies us to clean and visit. Nereida has been giving Catechism classes for 15 years. What a beautiful example of giving unselfishly these sisters are to us all.



This is Anuel and his mother Jazmin. Anuel is 2 years old and has leukemia. The family discovered it when he was 7 months old. He receives chemotherapy. He also has a condition called microtia, which is a deformity of the ear that can affect one's ability to hear. It is sometimes possible to correct this with surgery. We have been helping the family for about six months with food, diapers and medicines. There are ten people living in the house and the only breadwinner is the father, Pedro. When we first visited the family,

Pedro had gotten injured in a work-related accident when a refrigerator fell on his hands, rendering him temporarily unable to work. Pedro is now back at work repairing refrigeration units for local convenience stores.

This is Oscar, who is studying to be a dentist thanks to his generous benefactors. To be a dentist you should have a good smile. He'll make a good dentist. Oscar plays and teaches guitar and helps with the choir. "Helping people has made me see things differently. I am willing to stay up late and sacrifice to obtain my degree. I have gone through a lot to get to this point in my life. It has not been easy, but thank God, I have my church family." He hopes to change a culture that doesn't pay enough attention to dentistry.





# *Growing The Faith* A Family Tradition

Catholic vocation directors love the Mariasoosai family.

That is because the Mariasoosai family has produced an astonishing 76 people who became Catholic priests, brothers or sisters. This bounty of vocations includes Fr. Lawrence Mariasoosai, O.M.I. who is one of 31 priests on the family tree.

“I come from a very special family,” said Fr. Lawrence. “My relatives joined many different congregations and dioceses, but I am the only one who became a Missionary Oblate.”

Father Lawrence was destined for the priesthood as a child growing up in the Tamil Nadu area of India. His father was the housekeeper and sacristan for a prominent French missionary priest, and Fr. Lawrence literally grew up in the Church. As a youngster, he would get up before 6:00 a.m. to serve Mass.

When Fr. Lawrence formally accepted the call to religious life, he

took a different path than his relatives. He knew about the work of the Oblates among the poor in India and throughout the world, and he felt drawn to becoming a missionary priest.

Father Lawrence was ordained in 1997 and his first assignment was as an associate pastor at a parish in the megacity of Bangalore. After a year there, he returned to Tamil Nadu where he was the first Pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish. He also started a school for young people in the community.

In 2003, Fr. Lawrence received a new assignment that would take him halfway around the world, to southern Illinois. He spent a few months as the Chaplain at Meredith Home, a retirement community in Belleville, Illinois. After adjusting to life in the United States, he was assigned as Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Sparta, Illinois.



Sparta, a town of about 4,000 people in rural Illinois, may seem like an odd place to assign a priest from India. But Fr. Lawrence said he felt right at home during his eight years at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

“It was definitely a different location, but the ministry was still the same in Illinois as India, to help people deepen their faith,” said Fr. Lawrence.



Father Lawrence’s next assignment involved another cultural shift – Texas. He spent a year at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Midland and then in 2013 he became Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Eagle Pass, Texas where he currently ministers.

Sacred Heart is located just a few blocks from the Mexico border. Parishioners are about 90-percent Hispanic so Fr. Lawrence had to learn Spanish. All of the Masses at



Sacred Heart are in Spanish except for one English Mass on Sunday.

Being so close to the border, Eagle Pass has seen an increase in the number of migrants coming to the area to escape violence in their homelands.

Father Lawrence and his parishioners provide shelter, food and other necessities to

some of the migrants. They follow the commandment of the founder of the Oblates, St. Eugene De Mazenod, to “treat people as human beings, first of all.”

During the past several years, Fr. Lawrence has been active in promoting the Oblate Associates program in his parish. Oblate Associates are lay people who share their gifts and special talents for the benefit of others, guided by the charism of the Missionary Oblates. Recently 40 new Oblate Associates made a one-year commitment at Sacred Heart Parish.

“Oblate Associates is not just another group to join, it is a way of life,” said Fr. Lawrence. “They are a blessing to me and to the parish.”

Today, Fr. Lawrence takes great pride in being able to plant seeds of faith to allow the Good News to bloom in the lives of his parishioners. He is proud to be growing the Oblate family in southern Texas. And he is also proud of continuing a family legacy of growing the Catholic Church, by helping others discover their religious life. **T**





## Your Gift Made Easy

**D**id you know that if you are age 70½ or older you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to the Missionary Oblates that is advantageous for both you and the Oblates?

A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA that can be made in support of Oblate ministries. Individuals can make up to \$100,000 in qualifying distributions per tax year.

Additionally, if you do not itemize your charitable deductions on your federal tax return, you can still receive a federal tax benefit with a QCD because it does not count as taxable income (unlike regular withdrawals from a pre-tax IRA). When you keep your taxable income lower you may also reduce your taxes on your Social Security and Medicare income as well.

Please refer to the SECURE Act passed on December 20, 2019 or contact your IRA administrator to advise you about making a QCD to the Missionary Oblates.

*To learn more about how you can take advantage of a QCD, check with your IRA administrator, or contact the Office of Charitable and Planned Giving at 1-800-233-6264 or [charitablegifts@oblatesusa.org](mailto:charitablegifts@oblatesusa.org).*

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Tax ID: 26-0634043**



*“We are the ministers of Christ’s mercy.  
Let us always have the heart of a father.”*

St. Eugene De Mazenod,  
Missionary Oblate Founder

Bishop Michael Pfeifer, O.M.I. prays with Oblate seminarians  
and their formation director prior to the ordination of  
Fr. Eleazar Manuel López, O.M.I.