

OblateWORLD

MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE



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Front Cover: Father Nick Harding, O.M.I. visits with young parishioners at his parish in Peru.

Back Cover: A boy in Nigeria takes part in a special celebration at an Oblate parish.

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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.

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NATIONAL CATHOLIC
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MISSIONARY
OBLATES
OF
MARY IMMACULATE

Serving the world's poor

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



Dear Oblate Friends,

In January I was blessed to travel to Zambia to experience the missionary work of the Oblates. It was a wonderful trip, but with one complication – I had trouble sleeping. My problem was due to receiving an email from Rome a few days prior to my trip. It said that Bp. Eugeniusz Juretzko, O.M.I. of Cameroon had died. I had previously met Bp. Juretzko in Poland and he shared a story I will never forget.



Bishop Juretzko was the “Apostle of the Pygmies.” A native of Poland, he spent decades living in pygmy villages where he established churches, built schools and even dug wells. Prior to returning to Poland for a short vacation, Bp. Juretzko had given some of the pygmies plastic rosaries. Every night they would pray the rosary. One night, the pygmies had eaten a meal with onions. When they recited the rosary, onion particles got on the beads. The pygmies put their rosaries on their beds that night and when they awoke all the beads were gone – rats had eaten the rosaries, thinking they were onions!

When Bp. Juretzko told me that story, he asked if I had some extra rosaries for his pygmies. Fortunately I had brought a box of rosaries to give to the Polish Oblates as a thank-you for their hospitality. The Polish Oblates never got those rosaries, the pygmies did instead.

During my Zambia trip, most of those early nights I kept tossing and turning in bed. I couldn’t get those rosary eating rats out of my mind. Fortunately, I never saw any rats. But I did find Oblates working with Zambians just as needy as Bp. Juretzko’s pygmies – people with limited food supplies, lack of clean water, inadequate housing and no sanitation systems.

My gift of the rosaries was not really a gift from me. It was a gift from friends like you, because it is your generosity that allows the Missionary Oblates to give the gift of hope to the poor in places like Cameroon and Zambia. When you go to bed tonight, say a prayer for our Oblates and the people they serve in these countries. And thank God that you don’t have to worry about a rat eating your rosary while you sleep.

Fr. Louis Studer

Fr. Louis Studer, O.M.I.

Provincial, United States Province

Missionary Oblates Recognized During Papal Visits

During two of Pope Francis' recent overseas travels, the Holy Father visited with the Missionary Oblates who minister to the poor in Bangladesh and Chile. Pope Francis has often praised the work of the Oblates as examples of how the Church must have preference for people on the margins of society.



“It was a great gift to be consecrated by the Holy Father, it brought endless peace to my heart,”

Fr. Costa

In a letter to the Missionary Oblates, Pope Francis wrote that he has a particular affection for the congregation because of their dedication to be in places where people are without a pastor.

“The scope of your mission today seems to expand every day, embracing new poor people – men and women with the face of Christ who plead for help, consolation and hope in the most desperate situations of life. Therefore, you are needed; your missionary daring and your availability to bring to all the Good News.”



Pope Ordains New Oblate in Bangladesh

When an Oblate is ordained to the priesthood, he is usually surrounded by family, friends and fellow Oblates. When Fr. Pinto Louis Costa, O.M.I. was ordained, there was a special guest in attendance – Pope Francis.

Father Costa was ordained on December 1 as part of a visit by Pope Francis to Bangladesh. Father Costa was one of 16 Deacons from the Holy Spirit Major Seminary that Pope Francis ordained during a special Mass at Suharawardy Udyan Park in the capital Dhaka.

“It was a great gift to be consecrated by the Holy Father, it brought endless peace to my heart,” said Fr. Costa. “I thank the ecclesiastical authorities of Bangladesh for this opportunity. I also thank my parents and my whole family for encouraging me to become a priest.”

During the ordination ceremony, Pope Francis instructed Fr. Costa to be of service to others. “Carry out the ministry of Christ the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but to those of Jesus Christ,” said Pope Francis.

Father Costa, age 35, ministers primarily to the indigenous people of Bangladesh who are among the poorest and most abandoned people in the country.

“I am grateful to be with the people who nobody cares about every day,” said Fr. Costa.

The new priest also said he hopes that Pope Francis’ visit to Bangladesh will strengthen interreligious dialogue between the Muslim majority and other religious communities.

“We Christians are a minority in Bangladesh, but we have a big influence on society because we are very active and we do a lot,” Fr. Costa told reporters covering his ordination. “We are present especially in the healthcare system and in education.”

In a country where less than one percent of the population is Catholic, the Oblates have a significant presence in the Church. There are currently 26 Oblate priests working in the country including one bishop.

Bishop Bejoy D’Cruze, O.M.I. leads the diocese of Sylhet. With a population of ten million, there are only 18,000 Catholics in his diocese. The diocese has seven parishes and 11 mission centers. Four of the parishes are the responsibility of the Oblates.

The Oblates have focused much of their attention in Bangladesh on education. They have opened dozens of grade schools in rural villages that serve children of all faiths. About 700 young people also live in youth hostels run by the Oblates that allow the

young people to attend nearby high schools.

The church in Bangladesh is not financially self-sufficient. Joining Pope Francis on his trip there was another Oblate priest, Fr. Andrew Small, O.M.I. Father Small is Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States which raises funds for Catholic ministries around the world. Last year the societies provided more than \$1.15 million in aid to the Church in Bangladesh.

“We are a poor Church with poor priests and a poor bishop,” said Bp. D’Cruze. “So it is a great help for us when we receive donations from people in the United States who want to help us continue our mission.”



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Pope Francis Visits With Oblates In Chile

In the city of Iquique Chile, the Missionary Oblates are responsible for a small shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. On January 18, their small shrine became the focal point of the entire Catholic world.

Pope Francis chose to make a stop at the shrine and to visit with the Oblates during his trip to Chile and Peru. After receiving a tour of the shrine from the Oblates, he spent some time in prayer there and blessed a few sick people. Pope Francis then had lunch with the Oblates at their St. Eugene De Mazenod Retreat House next door where he also rested before traveling to the airport for his flight to Peru.

“Many people have asked me why our small sanctuary,” said Fr. Sergio Serrano, O.M.I., administrator of the shrine.

The Missionary Oblates are celebrating their 70th Anniversary of ministry in Chile. They arrived in 1948 to primarily serve the spiritual needs of nearly 35,000 miners working in Iquique. Today, most of the mines are closed, and much of the Oblates’ work involves parish ministries in economically depressed parts of the country. †



“Carry out the ministry of Christ the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but to those of Jesus Christ,” Pope Francis.

FATHER NICK HARDING, O.M.I.

A FULFILLING AND FASCINATING MINISTRY IN PERU



Father Nick Harding, O.M.I. is an American Missionary Oblate currently working in Peru. Here he writes about the complications of ministering in the poorest country in South America.

Recently I began my third year in the mountains of Bolivia. We face many difficulties and challenges here. When we are faced with these challenges, that is the time when the message of hope we find in Christ rescues us from despair.

The parish where I am pastor in rural Peru is so huge that it threatens to be overwhelming. The most daunting aspect of the parish is trying to reach our towns in the high sierra (over 4,000 meters) on dangerous, winding dirt roads at distances that can sometimes take more than eight hours. We are only two priests that must

visit about 50 communities.

Also, we have to deal with the needs of the recent invasions of squatters, who have built thousands of shacks that have no water or drainage systems. There are no paved roads in these communities and almost no schools or medical clinics. It is surreal, and humanly speaking almost impossible to evangelize.

There is a great deal of popular piety among the people, both Afro-Peruvian and Indian. In one community last Christmas they made a Christmas tree from tires painted green. In the more developed portion of the parish, secularism has affected and infected the young people.

Also, there is widespread abuse of drugs and alcohol. There are a number of HIV infected people, along with victims of

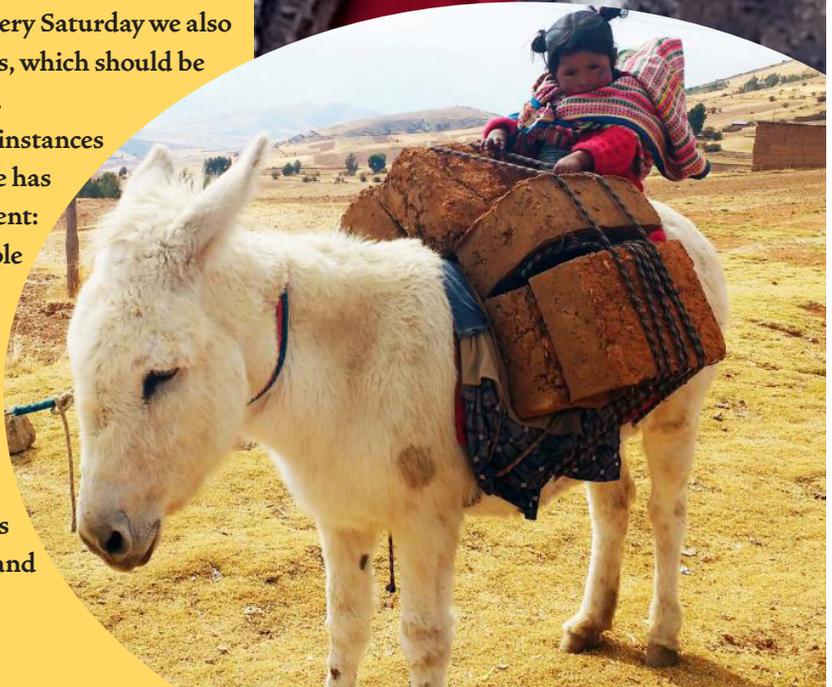
tuberculosis and the Zika virus. I recently had a funeral for a baby that died of Zika. I have also had many funerals for people who have been murdered, but it is not as violent here as my previous mission in Tijuana, Mexico.

Most people in our parish work in the agricultural fields (citric fruits, grapes, asparagus). There are also vast chicken farms. The mountains have a huge variety of potato farms. We have some factories that produce t-shirts. There are also several mines in the parish area: gold, silver, lead and copper that severely pollute the community.

By United States standards the wages earned by our parishioners are very low. Hard to believe but the wages in the t-shirt factory are about \$60 for a 60-hour work week.

Our parish continues to grow. Recently Bp. Hector Vera came and confirmed over 300 young people. We are currently celebrating First Communion which will perhaps total 1,000. Every Saturday we also perform infant baptisms, which should be another 1,000 this year.

I have had numerous instances where divine providence has been exceptionally evident: protection, helpful people sent to me, inspirations for solutions and delightful moments to keep a sense of humor. The people sustain me, and I am very grateful to them and God for this exceptionally fulfilling and fascinating ministry. †



Oblate Spotlight:

Fr. Andy Knop, O.M.I.



Father Andy Knop, O.M.I. is the new Oblate Director at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois. His previous ministries and experience make

him a perfect fit for such a role.

Father Andy grew up in Katowice, Poland as a member of the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish. It was there that he first became acquainted with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. "I was an altar boy since I was seven years old. The Oblate community at Sacred Heart of Jesus was a large one, with about 20 Oblates," said Fr. Andy. "We had missionaries come to the parish talking about missions and showing movies or sharing stories. As I remember, they were very hospitable and encouraging. I was involved in a vocation discernment group run by one of the Oblates. I even participated in summer retreats for altar boys at the Oblate seminary in Obra where the seminarians help with the program."

It was in his 5th grade year that he noticed a vocation poster in the sacristy. It read, "And you can become a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate." Father Andy recalls, "It was a black and white photo with

power lines hanging from posts. I guess leading to the ends of the world?" That poster prompted the young boy to consider spending his life serving others.

Father Andy's family was very supportive of his decision to become an Oblate priest. "My father told me after I was ordained that he prayed for me all that time to become a priest," he said. "He also did not have an easy time at his job during communism, when they learned that his son was in the seminary. No promotions or anything like that."

After ordination in 1989 Fr. Andy began perhaps his most memorable ministry: helping children grow in their faith. "I went to a large parish in Poland as a parochial vicar for two years. My ministry was to lead children's Masses every Sunday, as well as the children's choir," said Fr. Andy. "I also taught religious education classes in the public school for one year."

But in 1991 Fr. Andy was called to serve in a mission far from the comforts of home: the United States. His work in the U.S. has been diverse and has kept him on his toes, always learning new things and moving to new places.

"In the U.S. I started in Chicago, Illinois by learning the English language and then went to Saint Paul, Minnesota to work at St. Casimir's parish for two years," explained Fr. Andy. "After that I spent seven years in Duluth, Minnesota where I was involved in bringing two churches

together and building a new church and parish center of Holy Family parish. I consider Duluth my 'home' away from home and still keep in touch with some friends."

Father Andy returned to Saint Paul in 2001 to become a Vocation Director for the Midwest area of the United States. He remained there for six years. Afterward, he took a sabbatical year in Rome and Aix-en-Provence. His next role took him to Sisseton, South Dakota where he ministered on a Native American reservation – the Oblates' Tekakwitha Mission. "It was challenging but very interesting and educational," said Fr. Andy. "It was once my dream to work with the Native Americans in the Northwest territories in Canada, so this was my chance."

From Sisseton he was sent to Tewksbury, Massachusetts to become a pastor of one of the largest parishes in the Boston Archdiocese: St. William of York. "I spent seven and a half years as a pastor at St. William of York. It was a very busy parish with many groups active in the parish," Fr. Andy explained. "We had the great privilege of having a Perpetual Adoration, which was a great blessing for many people."

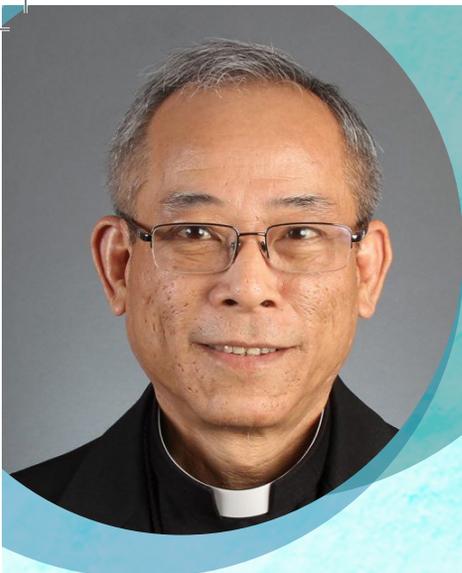
While at St. William of York, Fr. Andy was able to work once again with something he is passionate about: the faith formation of children. "The parish had a family Mass so it was great for me to get back to working with the children, having special homilies for them and playing guitar."

Father Andy's latest move was made last summer, when he arrived at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. "This is a new chapter for me and hopefully my previous experiences, mostly in the parish ministry, will help me to minister at the Shrine and help people on their journey."

"The most surprising thing about being an Oblate, I think, is the unknown of going to many different places, meeting all sorts of people and sharing in their life journey. How enriching this is – and all because of the missionary call." †



In addition to his work at the Shrine, Fr. Andy will serve as the Oblate Chaplain Director at the Missionary Association. Father John Madigan, O.M.I. will assist Fr. Andy with these duties.



By Sea and Land

The Missionary Journey of Fr. Tuan Pham, O.M.I.

ended in 1975, there was a lot of conflict in the country. Adding complications for the Pham family was that their father had worked for the previous government, making him a target of the new Communist regime.

In 1983 Fr. Pham decided it would be best for him to flee the country. He left his family and friends behind and escaped with other refugees on a boat. It took almost two weeks for the boat to reach Hong Kong. Father Pham then spent more than two years as a refugee before being allowed to immigrate to Canada.

In Canada Fr. Pham followed through on his desire to become a priest. In 1991, he entered St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario. In 1996, he joined the Missionary Oblates because he wanted to be a missionary to a far-off place like South America or Africa. But then he realized that being a missionary doesn't

The most difficult time of Oblate Fr. Tuan Pham's life was also the most inspirational. It was when he was one of the "boat people," escaping the turmoil of Vietnam. He spent more than ten days on the open sea, not knowing if he would live, die or where he would end up.

"In a strange way, I felt like I was reborn out there on the ocean. It was at that time I really started to think about becoming a priest," said Fr. Pham.

Father Pham was born in 1955 in Vietnam. Even after the Vietnam War



mean having to travel far away.

“A missionary is not necessarily someone who goes out to another country to work,” said Fr. Pham. “You can be a missionary right here at home.”

Father Pham was ordained in 2002 and ministered in Canada several years, including with the Vietnamese population. Then he received his “missionary” assignment. But it was not to a far away country. It was to the United States.

One of his American assignments was ministering for six years at St. Patrick Church in Lowell, Massachusetts. Saint Patrick’s is a multicultural parish, with Sunday Masses being held in five different languages. Father Pham was responsible for the Masses in Vietnamese and Burmese.

Children and teenagers often read as lectors at the Vietnamese Masses. This was a way to bring generations together as the young people had to work with their parents or grandparents in practicing how to read in Vietnamese.

Today Fr. Pham wears many hats in his missionary activities. He is a Vocation Director for the Oblates covering the northeastern part of the United States. He is also often on the road preaching missions for Vietnamese communities in the U.S. and Canada.

In 2016 Fr. Pham began serving as an area chaplain for the northeast chapter of the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement (VEYM). Specific to the Vietnamese community, VEYM aims to teach youth ages 7-17 to become better

individuals as well as excellent Christians. There are 14 chapters of the VEYM in the northeast including Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut and New Jersey.

About every two years, Fr. Pham returns to Vietnam to visit his two families: his biological family and his Oblate family. Father Pham has been instrumental in getting the Oblates’ Vietnam mission up and running effectively.

“Things have really started to grow at our missions in Vietnam in recent years,” said Fr. Pham. “It’s something that brings great pride to me and the Oblates.”



“A missionary is not necessarily someone who goes out to another country to work,” said Fr. Pham. “You can be a missionary right here at home.””

The Oblates in Vietnam

The Missionary Oblates were allowed by the Communist government to enter Vietnam in 2000 to perform limited missionary work. The Oblates are one of just a handful of religious congregations given permission to work in the country.

There are currently 19 Oblate priests and three brothers working in Vietnam. Much of their work is pastoral in nature, but they also have outreach programs including overseeing the Bung Orphanage.

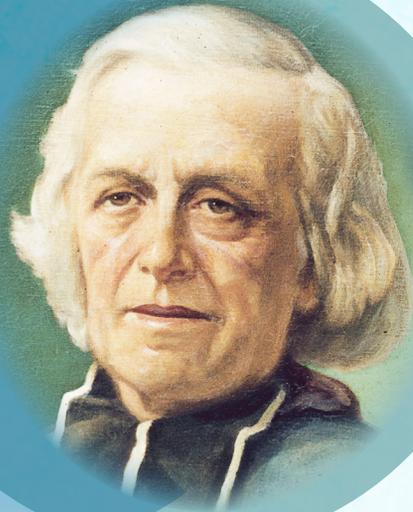
A source of great pride for members of the Vietnam mission is that there are 53 Oblate seminarians currently in the country discerning a calling to religious life. This is the largest number of Oblate seminarians in any country in Asia.

The Oblates in Vietnam are currently taking part in a Year of Vocations. They kicked off the year with a special Mass in January that was attended by more than 150 Oblates. Bishop Joseph Nguyen Tan Tuoc presided at the Mass.

“I pray that every Oblate is aware of his belonging to God, that he obeys God’s Will completely within the charism of the Oblate founder, St. Eugene De Mazenod,” said Bp. Joseph. “In this way, the Oblates will continue to bring the Good News to the poor and most abandoned in Vietnam for many years to come.” †

“I pray that every
Oblate is aware of his
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that he obeys God’s
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within the charism of
the Oblate founder.”

St. Eugene De Mazenod



Oblate Crossings

Oblates Working For Water Justice



Oblate School of Theology (OST) in San Antonio, Texas partnering with Peace CENTER, served as one of 80 sites around the world for an international and interactive conference on water justice that coincided with International Water Day.

The event highlighted the need for initiatives in the areas of access, drought, pollution, rising tides and flooding. Participants interacted with live feeds from New York City; Melbourne, Australia; London, England; Cape Town, South Africa and the Great Barrier Reef.

OST participants discussed how water justice issues play out in their own communities in San Antonio and abroad, and strategized on ways to spread the message and address the problem back in their communities.

Celebrating The Olympic Spirit

Father Vincenzo Bordo, O.M.I. was given the honor of being a torchbearer for the Winter Olympics in South Korea. Torchbearers were selected for having made a

significant impact in their communities.

Father Vincenzo runs an extensive charitable organization called Anna's House in Seoul that serves the homeless and disadvantaged. Originally from Italy, Fr. Vincenzo has been ministering in Korea for more than 25 years.

"Our center keeps getting bigger and bigger: 550 meals distributed every day, a dormitory for the homeless, a small craft workshop for the unemployed and four homes for street kids," said Fr. Vincenzo.



"To manage all these activities there is a constant commitment of 600 volunteers, 5,000 benefactors, 40 young employees — social workers, educators and counselors. It is clear we are responding to the real needs of people."

Building A Better Future In **THAILAND**

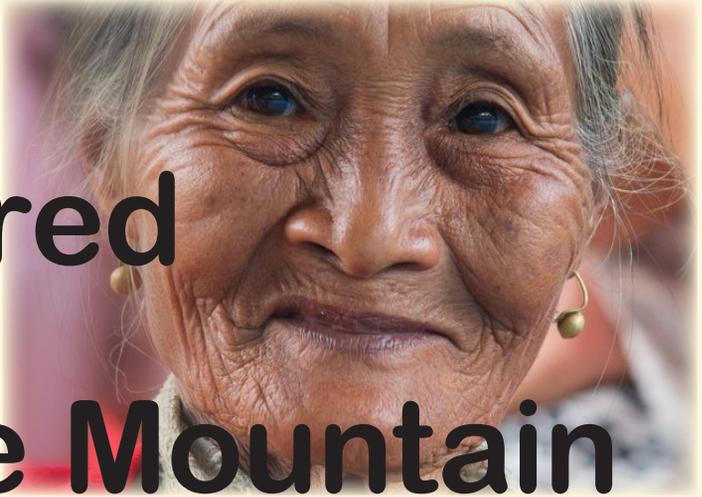


Fr. Domenico Rodighiero, O.M.I. is an Italian Oblate who is ministering in Thailand. Recently he moved to the jungle village of Mankaw. Father Rodighiero is an accomplished photographer who shares his work at his website: rodighierodomenico.org. He also has a Flickr feed of his work which can be accessed from the website. Here Fr. Rodighiero shares images of the people and places from his missionary work. †





One Hundred Years on the Mountain



The village of Mankhaw, Thailand is located deep in the mountains along the border with Laos. In this remote area, people face many hardships caused by poverty and isolation. The Missionary Oblates have a small parish in Mankhaw with about 200 parishioners. Here, they tell the story of the eldest member of their parish.

Everybody calls her Pa Mi (Auntie Mi) and she is almost 100 years old (as she forgets her own age). Her long life has been full of surprises and not an easy one.

Pa Mi was born along the border of Laos and Thailand. At that time there were no boundaries among the two countries, so she never considered herself either Thai or Laotian.

“We used to work in the fields and in the mountains and usually spent the entire season there living in a hut,” said Pa Mi. “We went back home only once or twice a year. Nobody cared if our property was in Laos or Thailand, nobody asked us for any kind of identity document. We

worked all year long bringing home only what was enough to survive.”

But in 1975 everything changed. War engulfed Southeast Asia and soldiers began to patrol the border area. Pa Mi knew she was Thai but had no passport or documentation. So she became a refugee in her own country.

For 13 years Pa Mi lived in the village of Nan at a refugee camp managed by the United Nations. At the end of the 1980s, she was relocated to Payao, also in the northern part of Thailand. Then she was relocated to Nakhorn Phanom near the Mekong River.

During that time the Thailand government recognized Pa Mi and the other refugees as Thai, but there was no way to have proper documents. In order to start an integration process, a piece of land in the mountain range of Phetchabun was assigned to them. But the local inhabitants wanted nothing to do with the refugees, and refused to accept them. So Pa Mi and

the others had to move even deeper into the forest, a place that eventually became Mankhaw.

“There were no roads only a muddy footpath, there were no houses. We had to build our own hut,” said Pa Mi. “The positive thing about this remote place was that there was plenty of water so we could start what we were good at: work in the fields.”

For more than 20 years Pa Mi worked in the fields of Mankhaw. It was, and continues to be, a hostile environment. Pa Mi stopped working in the fields only a few years ago, at about the age of 95.

“I am too tired; I cannot go up the steep slopes that used to feed me. Now I am relying on my children even though they do not have much either,” said Pa Mi.

Since she became a refugee more than 40 years ago, life has not changed much for Pa Mi and the people of Mankhaw. Poverty is still there. To work on the mountain fields is still hard, but at the end of the week

everybody comes back home and, maybe, finds time to join the Sunday Mass.

“I am old and I am preparing myself for the last journey in the world I live in,” said Pa Mi. “Life is a journey where I discover always new worlds. Life brought me here, now my children and my children’s children have the duty to continue the journey I started.”

The Missionary Oblates are the primary Catholic presence in small villages like the one where Pa Mi lives. The Oblates provide for the spiritual and physical needs of people who have largely been overlooked by the government. At the request of elders like Pa Mi, the Oblates have recently focused their attention on providing educational opportunities for young people in the villages. The Oblates run academic enrichment programs for children in their parishes and also provide scholarships so teenagers can attend high schools in larger cities. †





"We Have Each Other"

Oblate Supported Farm Impacting Lives In Puerto Rico

Although they are separated by more than 1,500 miles of ocean, farmers in Washington,

D.C. and farmers in hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico are working together to restore agricultural projects on the island.

The Washington, D.C. farmers are part of Three Part Harmony Farm, an urban farm located on the grounds of the Missionary Oblates' Provincial House. Earlier this year, Gail Taylor, owner/operator of the farm, traveled to Puerto Rico to take part in a farmer-to-farmer solidary program that provided hands-on work and education to help farmers in Puerto Rico recover from the effects of Hurricane Maria.

"The experience was life-changing for me," said Taylor. "I left the island richer than when I arrived, mainly because of the amazing people I met along the journey."

Taylor is a member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective. The group co-sponsored the First Food Sovereignty Brigade that sent agricultural specialists to Puerto Rico to help in the recovery efforts. During her trip to Puerto Rico, Taylor provided hands-on support for the work of the Boricua Organization for Ecologic Agriculture of Puerto Rico, a 28-year old farmer-led organization dedicated to rebuilding the island's food sovereignty.

"These farmers and their work represent a critical piece of food production, health and livelihood in Puerto Rico," said Taylor.

The effects of Hurricane Maria on the ecology of Puerto Rico will be felt for years. The disaster destroyed most farms on the island. Today, 97 percent of the food for Puerto Rico's residents has to be imported from foreign countries.

A highlight of the trip for Taylor was working side-by-side with the Future Farmers of Puerto Rico at the Botijas School Farm in Orocovis. The agro-ecological program at the school is a model for growing food to meet the needs of people in the community around the school.

"I've seen school gardens before but never an entire school farm. It was so impressive," Taylor said.

Hurricane Maria was also a wakeup call about the effects of climate change and the shift away from agricultural economies to industrialization. For generations, Puerto Rico had an economy based primarily on farming. Today, most people work in the factories of large American corporations.

"Now, more than ever, it's clear that we really need to focus on food sovereignty, or suffer the consequences like we see today in Puerto Rico," said Taylor.

Three Part Harmony Farm was created in 2012 on two acres of land owned by the Missionary Oblates in Washington, D.C. The Oblates helped to establish the farm



as part of their environmental ministries through their Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office in Washington, D.C.

At Three Part Harmony Farm, urban farmers grow mostly vegetables as well as herbs and cut flowers. There is also a greenhouse nursery operation that supplies local community and school gardens. The farmers use sustainable practices without chemical pesticides or herbicides. †



“I’ve seen school gardens before but never an entire school farm. It was so impressive.”



On March 11, 2006 Pope Benedict XVI declared Fr. B.A. Thomas, O.M.I. a “Servant of God.” With this designation, Fr. Thomas is now under consideration for sainthood by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The Oblate priest from Sri Lanka was the founder of the Congregation of the Rosarians, which in 1934 became the first indigenous community of contemplative monks to be established in Asia.

felt unattainable.

One day during Sacred Scripture class, the professor was explaining the urgency of the fundamental call of Jesus: “If someone wants to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow me.” (Matt 16:24). These words were decisive for Fr. Thomas. He mustered all his strength, overcame all physical

On the Path To Sainthood



Father Bastiampillai Anthonipillai (B.A.) Thomas, O.M.I. was born in 1886 in the village of Padiyanthalvu, Sri Lanka. He was a fighter from day one. The newborn was so weak he wasn't expected to live but a few days. Instead, he would reach the age of 78.

As a young man Fr. Thomas was a brilliant student at a high school run by the Missionary Oblates. After high school he entered the seminary with the dream of becoming an Oblate priest. But he had constant health problems, and the goal of becoming a priest

obstacles (at one point even receiving the Last Rites) and was ordained an Oblate priest in 1912.

Because of his fragile health Fr. Thomas was assigned to St. Patrick's College, where he was put in charge of the Hindu Residence. Father Thomas started a serious dialogue with the Hindu students, with some later embracing the Catholic faith and a few even becoming priests.

During the 1920s, Pope Pius XI was encouraging the creation of contemplative communities

in mission countries. The Bishop of Jaffna asked Fr. Thomas to create such a community in Sri Lanka. In 1934 Fr. Thomas founded a congregation of local monks — the Rosarians. Twelve years later a female branch of the Rosarians was born. Both groups would establish several monasteries in Sri Lanka as well as in India which are still active today.

Through the Rosarians Fr. Thomas created a contemplative Christian lifestyle that also has links with Hindus and Buddhists.



Choral Hindu-style chants are used instead of the classical Gregorian chants. Rosarians adhere to a strict vegetarian diet. They also work collaboratively with local people, most of

“If you want to see a true saint, you should go to Sri Lanka...”

whom are not Catholic.

Father Thomas insisted that there not be a caste system with the Rosarians. He admitted candidates from all backgrounds, from the very rich to the desperately poor. This lack of a class system drew opposition from both inside and outside the Church, and Fr. Thomas was even labeled the “Mad Monk,” a nickname he gladly welcomed. To reinforce his “madness,” he suggested the Rosarians’ motto be: “We are fools for Christ’s sake,” 1Cor 4:10.

Towards the end of his life Fr. Thomas’ broken health often put him in the hospital. He died in 1964 surrounded by his brother Oblates. Shortly before his death he received a visit from the Superior General of the Oblates, Fr. Leo Deschatelets, O.M.I.

After visiting the dying priest, Fr. Deschatelets expressed these words about Fr. Thomas: “If you want to see a true saint, you should go to Sri Lanka. You will find in that old man everything that the word ‘holiness’ implies. Everything about him corresponds to the idea we have a man of God.” †

125 Years of Faith: St. Casimir's Parish



Known as the “Parish made by Immigrants,” St. Casimir’s church in St. Paul, Minnesota has an incredibly rich history. The parish is recognizing its 125th Anniversary, as its first Mass was celebrated on December 3, 1892. The historic parish was established through the sheer faith and determination of Polish immigrants who came to America to seek refuge from persecution and tyranny.

The immigrants who came to St. Paul had a long road ahead of them. They struggled through the Great Depression and discrimination that came from being different. But they carried with them a strong faith in God and worked tirelessly to create a faith-filled church and school to reflect the beliefs and traditions that were the foundation of their lives. The first building that was built housed a school on the first floor that opened in September 1893 with 50 enrolled students. The upper floor of the building served as the church. However, the permanent Romanesque church building that we

know today as St. Casimir’s Church was completed in 1904.

As the years passed, the parish neighborhood began to grow and change. While the parish remained strong in its Polish roots and traditions, people from other nationalities began to call St. Casimir home. Despite the diverse congregation, the parish still celebrates a traditional Polish Easter Blessing of the Food. On Christmas Eve, churchgoers sing Polish Christmas carols.

The Church was staffed by diocesan priests until 1916, when the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate became a part of St. Casimir’s rich history. They continue to oversee the parish to this day. Father Andrew Stojar, O.M.I. became the parish’s first Oblate Pastor and remained in the position for 39 years. In the years to come, ten St. Casimir parishioners would become Oblate priests and brothers.

Over the years the parish grew and expanded to meet heavy demands from the community. A new school

was built in 1923, allowing up to 600 students to receive a Catholic education within its walls. In 1932 a new convent was completed on the parish land.

In 1945, however, the parish experienced some setbacks. Two young boys were lighting candles in the church and were involved in a scuffle. Sadly, the boys began a fire which nearly destroyed the organ and the altar. Miraculously, the Blessed Sacrament was rescued by the assistant pastor and the vessels were rescued by the nuns.

Today the parish and its 274 families is under the leadership of Fr. Michael Powell, O.M.I. To acknowledge the 125th Anniversary, Fr. Powell wrote a letter to the parish family:

"It is an honor to be the Pastor of St. Casimir's as we celebrate the 125th Anniversary of its first Mass. St. Casimir's has such a long and full history. Sharing our history now in pictures and stories is a great way to celebrate this occasion. It also reminds us to be thankful to God for how He has blessed our parish. There have been the priests and sisters who have served the people. Without their ministry, the community would not have formed and grown. We also show thanks for the generosity of past parishioners who built the church, school and rectory, as well as the regular weekly support of the parish that they provided. They helped to form a firm foundation that makes it possible for

us to practice our faith today. We indeed have much for which to show our gratitude, 125 years' worth! "On this occasion we must also look to the present and future of St. Casimir's. In the past few years we have welcomed our Karen members to St. Casimir's. (The 'Karen' people are a Christian minority group from Myanmar which has engaged in the longest-running civil war in world history. The Karen along with other ethnic groups from Burma have been brutalized by the Burmese military and driven from their villages and homes and forced into refugee camps. After several years in the refugee camps, the Karen were allowed to relocate to another country, and several have relocated in St. Paul, MN.) They are a part of St. Casimir's that is full of life and growing. While the Karen do come from a very different culture, they do fit in with the tradition of St. Casimir Church. It has always served the working class immigrants of this part of St. Paul, and it is continuing to do so. Indeed, the Lord still has much planned for our parish. Let's try to accomplish His will together." †



My Vocation Story

Lazaro Angel Leal



Lazaro gets a thumbs up from Fr. Alejandro Roque, O.M.I., Director of the Oblate pre-novitiate program.

Lazaro Angel Leal will not take part in his final vows as a Missionary Oblate brother for several years. It will be big day for him. But it might not even be the most important Oblate event he ever attends.

That day may have taken place in 2016 when Lazaro's friend was ordained an Oblate priest. It was a

special moment for Lazaro, when the young man realized he needed to follow a calling to become a Missionary Oblate, a calling that has been building since a very early age.

Lazaro was born in 1992 and grew up in Brownsville, Texas. His parents were married by an Oblate in 1988 and Lazaro was baptized at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Brownsville which is staffed by the Oblates.

As a child Lazaro's parents and family felt it was important to pass along their faith to their son. Lazaro's paternal grandmother, who lived in his childhood home, was particularly

active in sharing her faith. Lazaro was always involved with Church activities, participating in a variety of youth groups.

“In high school I wanted to grow deeper in my Catholic identity, so I decided to attend a Catholic college, and that is when my vocation journey really took a big leap,” said Lazaro.

Lazaro enrolled at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. He joined the campus ministry program, becoming a sacristan and being involved with the music ministry. The Oblates were working in campus ministry at the university at the time and Lazaro began to consider an Oblate vocation. He contacted the local Vocation Director, Fr. Charlie Banks, O.M.I. who gave him an unexpected suggestion – don’t come.

“Father Charlie suggested that I finish my degree first because I was just a few semesters away from graduation,” said Lazaro. “It was great advice because it allowed me time to form my own identity and finish what I had started. It just wasn’t the right time for me to join the Oblates, and Fr. Charlie knew that.”

Lazaro earned his BA in Religious Studies and Theology. He then spent a few months in the workforce before getting an invitation to attend an Oblate ordination for someone who had worked with Lazaro in the campus ministry program.

“I went to the ordination not as a discerner but as a friend,” said Lazaro. “That day changed my life, and I knew it was time to join the Oblates.”

Lazaro jokes that when he arrived at the ordination he tried to avoid the vocation directors in attendance. By the end of the ceremony, he was seeking them out. Just three months later, Lazaro was a member of the Oblates’ Pre-Novitiate program in Buffalo, New York. He spent a year there living in community with other young men discerning a calling to religious life.

Last August Lazaro entered the Oblate Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois. The novitiate year is a time to step away from society and deeply determine how God is calling one to serve. Lazaro is spending his novitiate year with novices from Africa, Australia and North America.

“Today, as an Oblate novice, I am living in an international community of young men examining their calling to religious life. They have quickly become my friends,” said Lazaro. “Prayer is especially important during the novitiate year. And I ask for your prayers as I continue on this amazing journey.” †



Donor Highlight:

Mary Agnes Leonard

Family is everything to Mary Agnes Leonard. And a Missionary Oblate played a vital role in keeping her family together during its greatest crisis.

“Father John Patrick Walsh, O.M.I. was a gift from God to my family” said Mary. “Ever since I was a little girl he has been my role model and

But John Leonard survived his near-death experience. His health remained poor and he had to remain in the iron lung. Mary was 11 years old at the time; and her mom was pregnant with her ninth child.

As the oldest of the Leonard children, Mary was told to keep a secret from her younger brothers and sisters: social workers didn’t think that her mom could care for nine children and an invalid husband. They wanted to split the family up and send the children

“For me, Fr John was like the north on our family compass,” said Mary. “The Oblates are still like that today, always pointing people in the right direction.”

someone I try to imitate. He loved everyone and never engaged in judgement or criticism; just like Jesus!”

In 1952 Mary’s father, John Leonard, contracted polio and became paralyzed from the neck down. He was placed in an iron lung and at one point doctors said he had only about 20 minutes to live.

Mary vividly remembers going into his hospital room to tell her father good-bye.

to different foster homes.

That’s when Fr. Walsh came to the family’s rescue.

Father Walsh was Mary’s uncle on her mother’s side. When he heard about the family’s plight, he helped organize efforts to get a special room built at their house so that John Leonard could be cared for by his family. Father Walsh also worked to make sure that the bank would not foreclose on their home. His actions helped to convince social workers that the family could

remain intact.

“Father John was truly the person that kept our family together. I am forever grateful for his kindness. Besides my parents, he is my hero,” said Mary.

Making Fr. John’s actions even more heroic was that he was the Assistant Superior General at the time for the entire worldwide Oblate congregation. He was responsible for Oblate missions around the world, but still had time to come to the rescue of his family back home in Colorado.

Mary and her siblings took on a lot of responsibility caring for their father. John Leonard had to spend three years in the iron lung before he was able to live with the help of a respirator. He lived nine years after the doctors had told him he only had 20 minutes of life left.

Mary said her Catholic faith has been a constant source of strength throughout her life. She spent seven years ministering in Chicago, the family home before Denver, as a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and is currently an associate member of that congregation.

Mary is also a regular supporter of the work of the Missionary Oblates. The Oblates are the major beneficiaries of her estate.

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“Father John Patrick Walsh, O.M.I. was a gift from God to my family” said Mary. “Ever since I was a little girl he has been my role model and someone I try to imitate. He loved everyone and never engaged in judgement or criticism; just like Jesus!”



Mary Agnes Leonard, back row second from right, with her siblings.

Oblate Crossings

An Unresolved Oblate Martyrdom

More than 20 years have passed since Bp. Benjamin de Jesus, O.M.I. was murdered outside of his cathedral in Jolo, Philippines. The murder remains unresolved to this day.

Bishop de Jesus was a staunch supporter of building bridges between Christians and Muslims in a part of the Philippines that is 97-percent Muslim. His views angered militant Muslim groups in the area who are believed to be responsible for his murder.

The Oblates in the Philippines remain committed to bringing peace to the Jolo area where tensions still exist between Christians and Muslims. Bishop de Jesus' successor, Bp. Angelito Lampon, often travels with armed bodyguards to ensure his safety.

In life, and death, Bp. de Jesus continues to inspire the Oblates and all peace seekers in the Philippines:

"I am an ordinary human being, weak and vulnerable. But God still uses me to proclaim His love and compassion to others," said Bp. de Jesus.



Honorary Oblate Leaves Lasting Legacy



Honorary Oblate Tom Benson passed away in March at the age of 90. He was a longtime friend and benefactor of the Missionary Oblates.

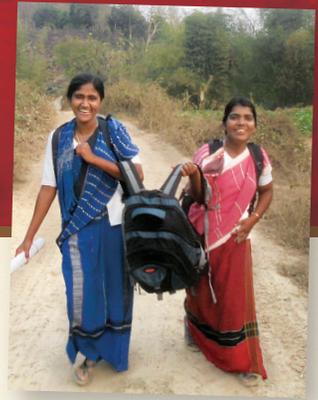
Mr. Benson was a self-made success, starting with a string of auto dealerships in New Orleans and San Antonio. In 1985 he bought the struggling New Orleans Saints of the N.F.L. and turned them into winners, including the Super Bowl in 2010.

He was considered a hero by many in New Orleans for keeping the Saints in the city after Hurricane Katrina. Mr. Benson also became the owner of the city's N.B.A. team, the Pelicans.

A devout Catholic who attended Mass daily, Mr. Benson became acquainted with the Oblates in San Antonio and New Orleans. He supported numerous Oblate ministries, including Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio.

"The Oblates made me feel very conscious and very good about the fact that God put us here for a purpose," said Mr. Benson. "I want everybody after me to have the opportunity I had to be able to be associated with these good priests." †

Reaching Out to People in Need Through a Charitable Gift Annuity



Education is a key way to break the cycle of poverty. When the Missionary Oblates begin a new mission, one of their first goals is to establish an education system for those they serve in the mission.

When the Oblates began working in the village of Mongrabosti in Bangladesh in 1996 they explained the importance of education. It worked: a school was established in the village. A boy named Shamol Tirky was one of its first students. Today, 21 years later, he is the school's teacher.

Shamol wrote, "I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Oblate Fathers and benefactors who loved me and who helped me to come up to this stage. I firmly believe that it was education that changed my life and the life of our village."

Thanks to friends like you, Shamol Tiky and countless others all over the world have received an education. When you establish a charitable gift annuity through the Oblate Annuity Trust (\$5,000 minimum) you will receive fixed payments for the rest of your life (minimum age 59 ½). You will also receive a one-time charitable deduction for the year in which the gift is made. Upon your death, the remaining amount will be used to strengthen the Oblates' many ministries, creating a lasting legacy in your memory.

The charitable gift annuity program through the Oblate Annuity Trust has been in operation for over 70 years and remains strong and secure. A charitable gift annuity is an ideal way to convert cash, maturing CDs or appreciated stock into a generous gift for God's poor people — and secure lifetime payments for you. Two-life and deferred charitable gift annuities are also available (\$5,000 minimum).

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“In the Church we should love one another as children of the same Father
and there should be no exception.” St. Eugene De Mazenod