



OMI INFORMATION OMI INFORMACION OMI INFORMAZIONE OMI NACHRICHTEN OMI WIADOMOŚCI OMI

OMI Information No. 572 (English)

December 2016

## The Church of Laos joyfully celebrates its martyrs

*Fr. Roland JACQUES, Vice-Postulator, was an eye-witness to a beautiful event in the life of the Church in Laos and in the history of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

In Vientiane, Laos, on Sunday morning, 11 December 2016, the third Sunday of Advent, there was only one Mass celebrated in all of Laos. The Church of the Sacred Heart, the pro-cathedral and the only place of worship in the capital, Vientiane, seemed very tiny as the faithful, coming from all directions, filled the 400 places inside the building and then took over every space available all around it – in the courtyard of a school – and then in the neighboring streets. Big tents had been set up to allow the crowds to gather, protected from the burning sun. As they arrived, each one received gifts – flowers, images and medals of the martyrs. An atmosphere of peace, joy and reflection permeated from the very beginning of the festival, which began with the traditional procession of Christ the King in the nearby streets.

The Catholic Church in Laos is very small, humble, almost hidden. There are only 4 bishops, 21 Lao priests and deacons, a few dozen nuns, and just under 50,000 lay faithful. Its story is not well-known. Once planted with the sweat and blood of three generations of missionaries, today it can rely only on its own forces, supported only by a handful of priests from Vietnam or Thailand. That goes to show to what extent the event of this day was unique, unheard of for this small country and for this very young Church.

Pope Francis had sent Cardinal Orlando QUEVEDO, who had come from Mindanao in the Philippines; He is a man as humble and close

to the little ones as the person he represented here. With him were 15 other bishops – from Laos and Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam -- the Superiors General of the Foreign Missions of Paris, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Voluntas Dei Institute, and more than 150 priests, of which a large number came from Vietnam and Thailand; those coming from western countries were only a tiny handful. The faithful were more than 6,000, besting the most optimistic expectations of 3 to 4,000 participants.

In the first rows of the assembly were representatives of the government and delegates of religions recognized in Laos, including Protestants and Muslims. There were also the Ambassadors of France and Germany and some other diplomats. Then there were the families and relatives of some of the martyrs who came from distant parts of Laos or France. Among these close relatives, there was Archbishop Tito Banchong, nephew of the catechist Thoj Xyooj; Bishop Louis-Marie Ling, the only survivor of the attack which cost the life of his cousin, the catechist Luc Sy; Father Yvon L'HENORET, cousin of Vincent L'HENORET and also a missionary in Laos; the nieces of Noel Tenaud and Marcel Denis, m.e.p. In such an assembly, one can understand how much emotion there was. But there were also other issues, much more important than nostalgia or looking back.

In the middle of the celebration, Cardinal Quevedo read the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis declaring “Blessed” the 17 martyrs, and fixing their feast on December 16<sup>th</sup>. This short text highlights the fidelity of these “heroic witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel of peace, justice and reconciliation, at the cost

of their lives.” In his homily, the representative of the Pope, commenting on the life and death of Father Joseph Tien and several others, repeated this theme at length.

At the end of the celebration, to the great astonishment of the assembly, the Deputy Director of the Lao Front for the Building of the Nation, a state agency under the leadership of the Party and the Ministry of the Interior, which oversees the religions, praised at length the doctrine and action of the Catholic Church in Laos, and in his turn developed the ideas put forward by Pope Francis, telling of what the nation expected of this Church for the good common. The Apostolic Nuncio Paul Tschang In-Nam, himself deeply rooted in the culture of East Asia, did not hesitate to take hold of that outstretched hand: he expressed his wish that harmony and collaboration will develop, so that all the people of Laos can progress in unity despite religious differences.

The use of languages was a sign of the profoundly Asian and Laotian character, both of the celebration and of the Church. Some 75% of it was in Laotian. The celebrant, of course, spoke his Filipino English; for the rest, the usual languages of this little corner of Christianity were heard: Khmu, Hmong, and Vietnamese. For French and Italian, it will be necessary to wait for other celebrations, which will be held in due time in Europe.

And to sum up this memorable day? Here is a humble and very small Church that dares to publicly affirm its existence, its pride and its immense respect for those who in the last century have moistened with their blood the seeds of the Gospel planted in Laotian soil. Here is a Church which will no longer hide itself, and which will find its place more and more every day in the bosom of the nation and of the whole of Christendom.

---

## Asia-Oceania

---

### LAOS

#### **Homily of Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, at the Beatification of the 17 Martyrs of Laos**

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

This is truly a day that the Lord has made! I extend to you our Holy Father's warm greetings of peace and joy in the Lord.

In his Apostolic Letter granting the request of Bishops to beatify the 17 Martyrs of Laos, Pope Francis calls them “heroic witnesses of the Lord Jesus and of his Gospel of peace, of justice, and of reconciliation.” He instructs the Church in Laos to celebrate their feast day every year on December 16.

Today is first of all a celebration of God's enduring love, God's love for the people of Laos, God's love especially for our 17 Martyrs. In response to God's faithful love they gave up their lives for the sake of Jesus. This is why Blessed Joseph Thao Tien and his 16 companions are heroes of faith. They gave up their lives in the service of the Lord and in the service of their

brothers and sisters of the faith. They believed and so they spoke of Jesus (see 2 Cor. 4:13) not only in words but with their lives.

We have to tell and retell their individual stories of heroism to every generation. Their names are forever inscribed in the annals of the Church in Laos: one diocesan priest, 5 priests of the Paris Foreign Missions Society, 6 priests of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 5 lay members of the faithful, including a 19 yr old catechist and a 16 year old student-catechist. One catechist, Joseph Outhay, was actually born in Thailand and became a catechist in Laos after the death of his wife and child.

The Laotian diocesan priest, Blessed Joseph Thao Tien, and the lay catechists were young. The words of St. Paul could very well have reverberated in their hearts: “Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (1 Tm. 4:12). Their heroic lives have indeed set an example of persevering fidelity to the Lord. Their individual stories are most inspiring and edifying.

Their violent deaths spanned the period of 1954 to 1970. The last Martyrs, the young Kmhamu' catechist, Luc Sy, and his companion, Maisan Pho Inpeng, died for the sake of Jesus in 1970, only 46 years ago. Surely our own Bishop Ling, who was a very young deacon at that time has a treasury of memories of his heroic companions. Bp. Ling and Msgr. Banchong also endured later on great suffering for their faith in Jesus. Many of you who are now 70 years old might remember our heroes of the faith and the circumstances of their violent death. Perhaps some of you were their relatives or friends.

Faithful to Jesus to the end, each of them, priests, foreign religious missionaries, and Laotian lay people, could undoubtedly exclaim with the Psalmist: "The way of loyalty I have chosen; I have kept your judgments. I cling to your testimonies, Lord" (Ps. 119:30-31).

Why were they determined to commit their lives to the Lord? Because they loved the Lord without limit. In faith they committed themselves as priests and catechists to serving their brothers and sisters. Through faith, they shared in the sufferings of Christ. Theirs were the words of the Apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.... I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal. 2:19-20).

Because of their faith in Jesus and their love of Jesus, because of their service to the communities of faith in various towns and villages of Laos, the Lord gifted them with eternal life, as they now gaze with love and joy at the glory of God (see John 11:40, 3:36).

You, my dear People of God, are a very "small flock" among the millions of people in Laos. But if, indeed, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church" (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, chapter 50), then we shall surely see the fruit of their spilled blood:

- in the various places in Laos where they gave up their lives;
- among priests and religious men and women;
- among lay people of various callings,

- married and unmarried, parents and widows;
- and among the young.

The grain of wheat has fallen to the ground and has died. With the utmost certainty it shall bear fruit (see Jn. 12:24) in the number of Catholics, in the quality of your faith, in the number of vocations to the priestly and religious life, in the greater dynamism of the young, and in the spiritual energy of lay movements and communities.

Today, the Spirit of the Lord calls us to follow the life and ways of our 17 Martyrs. They are heroic witnesses of the Lord's work of justice and mercy, of peace and reconciliation. For these values of the Gospel, they died.

We honor them not only by praying to them, for they are definitively in heaven. We honor them by living our faith the way they lived their faith, by loving the Lord the way they loved the Lord -- in our daily struggles to persevere in the faith and in the daily insecurities of living our faith. The words of Isaiah the prophet in our First Reading today inspires us: "Be strong, do not fear!" (Is. 35:4). We hear the very same encouragement from St. Paul: "Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

My brothers and sisters in the Lord, like our 17 heroes of the faith, we too can be witnesses of Jesus by proclaiming him and telling his story not by words but by the way we live. St. John Paul II tells us that the faithful living of a Christian life is the quiet but most eloquent witnessing to Jesus (see *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23).

Let us "encourage one another and build one another up...cheer the fainthearted" (Thes. 5:11, 14), especially in times of great trials for our faith. May Mary our loving Mother be our constant companion on the journey to a life of deep faith and of vibrant love. May our 17 Martyrs help us to love and serve others especially the poor and the needy so that God's justice, peace, and reconciliation may always reign in your beautiful country of Laos.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, grants you his fatherly apostolic blessing.

### N.B. after the Post-Communion Prayers

In my own name I express by deep-felt gratitude to Bishop Jean KHAMSE VITHAVONG and the Catholic Bishops' Assembly of Laos for their warm welcome and hospitality.

On behalf of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, I thank the Government of the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Laos for its kindness in making this celebration possible. Pope Francis prays for harmonious relationships among all the people of Laos. He prays for the leaders of government that they may always lead the people of Laos towards peace and justice, progress and development.

Thank you and God bless. (Vientiane, Laos – December 11, 2016)

### **THAILAND**

#### **A year of many celebrations**

Besides celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Thai-Lao Delegation has celebrated, together with the rest of the Oblate Congregation, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding. On November 19, 2016, the members of the Delegation gathered at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Din Daeng, Bangkok, to thank God for his unending graciousness to the delegation. The event was highlighted by the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of religious profession of Fr. Pricha THAMNIYOM and Bro. Bernard WIRTH; as well as the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of priesthood of Fr. Claudio BERTUCCIO.

Presiding at the Mass was Bishop Phibul Wisitnonthachai of the Diocese of Nakhorn Sawan. Also concelebrating were Archbishop Paul Tschang In-Nam, the Papal Nuncio to Thailand; Fr. Gerry DE LOS REYES, the Delegation Superior; Fr. Lauro DE GUIA, the Provincial of the Province of the Philippines; and about 30 priests from various religious communities, dioceses and the Oblate members of the Delegation.

Before the final blessing, Bishop Phibul delivered a message to the Oblates, encouraging them to continue giving witness to the poor by their

example. He emphasized the service the Oblates are providing in their ministry to the Hmong people in his diocese. He asked them to continue their commitment to this work.

### **TURKMENISTAN**

#### **Three priests in the Turkmenistan desert**

On 22 November 2016, the Italian newspaper, La Stampa, published this article in its blog, Vatican Insider. It was written by Luciano Zanardini.)

Being a minority doesn't mean you can't proclaim Christ. In order to do it, what is important is to live the day-to-day life of the local people, the buildings can wait (there aren't any permissions to build churches here). This is the testimony of Andrzej MADEJ, a Polish Missionary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Superior of the Missio sui Iuris in Turkmenistan. He lives with two other priests (Fr. Rafal CHILIMONIUK and Fr. Pawel SZLACHETA) in a small two-floor rented house in Asgabat, near the border with Iran and Afghanistan. 82% of the country's surface area is occupied by Karakum desert so the biggest problem here is the lack of water. Locals say that "one drop of water is like a nugget of gold". There are no other congregations or priests around.

"For now, we are the only Catholics representing the Church here. Often, when I return to Poland for the holidays I'm asked: 'Why don't you stay here? The country's in great need of priests'. To which I reply that in Poland there are around 30,000 priests while in Turkmenistan there are only three".

A Romantic poetry buff, his ministry took him first to Poland and then to Kiev, where for four years he proclaimed the Gospel in a closed down parish that had been turned into a concert hall. He managed to partially turn it into a church again. "During my training back in the 60's, under the Soviet regime, we were forced to learn Russian; this is how the Holy Spirit prepared me for this beautiful missionary experience in the former Soviet Empire". In 1997, he left for Asgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. "The Catholic community is made up of around 2000 faithful but our contacts include Christians of other faiths and Muslim people and families who are



willing to receive us. What is characteristic about our house is that we are a real hub, not just for faith-related issues but also for human relations. Nineteen years on, we would like to build a small church and an Apostolic Nunciature.”

Turkmenistan’s main religion is Islam but there are some communities, albeit very small, of Christians (Catholics, Orthodox and Evangelicals). “There are twelve Orthodox parishes. We try to maintain fraternal relations with everyone. Our relations with some Evangelicals are excellent: we share God’s word together in our chapel every Sunday. We also meet for other moments of prayer and praise.” During the Jubilee “our spiritual experience was mainly through the liturgy. We try to be close to those who are lonely, sick or face other problems. The first priestly ordination of a young Turkmen who joined our Congregation was a special grace in this Holy Year of Mercy. Two other young people are in training and these are signs of hope for this fledgling Church”.

Every day the Oblates devote a few hours to prayer and Eucharistic celebration, visiting families – not just Catholic ones – and trying to offer spiritual support to the sick. One of these people, in Slavomir (700 km from the capital), created a wooden pedestal with a hidden cross that he sculpted as a sign of gratitude for his healing. “He confided to me that while he was making the sculpture, those who saw the cross urged him: ‘We don’t want to look at this ugly thing, hide it’. This is when I better understood the words of St. Paul when he said that the Crucified Jesus will continue to be a scandal until the end of time, for those who do not believe.”

Despite international tensions, Christians live peacefully alongside their “Muslim brothers and sisters. We attend Muslim feasts we are invited to. What we want is to build relationships with everyone and work to eliminate the prejudice that sees Christians or westerners as individuals who are only interested in war or on imposing their own civilizations.” But there is something else that concerns him: “When I see Europe’s empty churches I ask myself what is happening when in other parts of the world Christians are going to great lengths to be faithful and testify

their faith...” (Luciano Zanardini in <http://www.lastampa.it/2016/11/22/vaticaninsider/eng/world-news>)

## **KOREA** **Realizing a dream**

*While it is not rare that some Oblate missionaries eventually assume citizenship in the country where they are preaching the Good News, Fr. Vincenzo BORDO, a native of Italy, speaks eloquently here of his own feelings as he assumed a new “identity” and a new name as a citizen of Korea.*

The great dream of a missionary is to go to a far-off country, to live as the people live, to speak their language, to dress as they do, to eat the same food, to study and to appreciate their culture, and with humility and dedication, to serve the poor in that nation. To become like them and to become one of them. And then to rest in peace in that corner of the world.

Looking back at my life, on the threshold of turning 60, I think I can say that, thanks to Jesus, so many of these dreams have come true. I live in a country that I love and appreciate and I work for the poor. I speak their language; I share the same meals; I dress like them. And perhaps because of this, the Government, seeing this sincere, long and arduous journey of sharing, decided, by a presidential decree, to honor me with Korean citizenship. During the ceremony of handing over the passport, after I made the oath of allegiance to the Republic, when the Minister handed me the flag of Korea, sweet tears of joy fell from my eyes. Yes, now I am in fact a Korean citizen. My dream has come true.

So, when you come here and you wish to see me, do not look for Vincenzo Bordo, because this person is no longer in the Korean registry. Instead, look for KIM HA JONG. In the documents, this is my new name. “Kim” is the surname of the first Korean priest. He was a wonderful young man, in love with life, with God and with his people. He died a martyr when only 24 years old! “Ha Jong” means “Servant of God. Yes, following in the footsteps of Jesus, I learned to choose the poor and to be a servant

of these destitute brothers and sisters. So that little dream of a young boy has turned into a beautiful mission of brotherhood and friendship between two peoples: Italy and Korea. They are nations that were able to meet one another, to get to know and esteem one another in the richness of their ancient cultures, thanks to that tiny, fragile and wobbly bamboo bridge that I too helped build.

Over these years I have also learned that the fears of the new are simply excuses to mask our petty selfishness, hidden behind legitimate claims of security. That the mistrust of others is just a phantom, due to stupid ignorance and the presumptuous arrogance of those who have nothing to learn.

Meanwhile, I have realized that a life of welcoming, listening, sharing and of dialogue leads to broaden the mind to new and wonderful knowledge; the spirit to infinite horizons and it opens our hearts to incredible sensations never before felt. That which is different is not a threat but rather an unfathomable richness.

Now I'm getting ready to fashion the last piece of this great mosaic that has been my life in the Orient: to rest in peace among the rolling hills and beautiful forests of this nation. And to do that, I have enrolled as an organ donor. That will be, whenever God wishes, the last piece of the enchanting DREAM which the Lord has made in this corner of the world. (Fr. Kim Ha Jong Vincenzo)

---

## Africa-Madagascar

---

### **CENTRAL PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA Bishop Erwin Hecht, OMI: 1933-2016**

On 19 November 2016, Bishop Erwin HECHT, the Bishop-emeritus of Kimberley, South Africa, died in Hünfeld, Germany, where he had moved in 2013.

Born in Burgrieden, Germany, in 1933, he was ordained a priest in 1959 and went to South Africa as a missionary. When he was only 38 years old, he

was named Auxiliary Bishop of Kimberley, South Africa, and Titular Bishop of Obba. Two years later, he became the Ordinary of Kimberley where he served until his retirement in 2009. At the time of his retirement, he was Africa's longest serving bishop.

Among the priests whom he ordained during his years as bishop is Bishop Wilhelm STECKLING, former Oblate Superior General and now the Bishop of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay.

---

## Canada-United States

---

### **NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP Saint Paul University's new Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre Offices**

On November 7, Dr. Chantal Beauvais, Rector of Saint Paul University (SPU), together with Catherine McKenna, MP for Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi, MPP for Ottawa Centre, Jim Watson, Mayor of Ottawa, and several other dignitaries, officially opened the university's new Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre Offices.

The creation of the Centre was made possible by a leadership gift of \$800,000 from the Saint Paul University Oblate Fund Inc.

face of change by building a more inclusive and compassionate society," said SPU Rector Chantal Beauvais. "Actualizing that vision starts with our unique programs and services, such as those offered by our Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre. We are extremely grateful to the Saint Paul University Oblate Fund Inc. for its generous donation, which supports our efforts to become transformational leaders."

"The completion of this project clearly reflects the University's commitment to meeting new needs with purpose, generosity and creativity," noted Father Luc TARDIF, chair of SPU's fundraising campaign.

"Our vision at Saint Paul University is to be the

The Centre is one of the main providers of

community counselling services in the Ottawa–Gatineau region. It welcomes a diverse clientele, and offers counselling services in English and French for individuals, couples and families. Fees are negotiable depending on the client's financial situation.

Services are provided by counselling interns at the master's and doctoral level in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Saint Paul University. The interns are supervised by counsellors, psychotherapists and/or psychologists who are certified and accredited by a recognized professional association. This year, 120 students will provide more than 10,000 counselling sessions to clients in the region. (<http://ustpaul.ca/>)

### **ASSUMPTION PROVINCE, CANADA** **Remembering persecuted Christians**

In the year of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Year of Mercy, Assumption Province's media ministry, Catholic Family Radio, undertook the initiative to organize the Canadian premier of the Oratorio *Persecuted for the Faith because of My Name*, which took place on October 23, 2016, at the Living Arts Center in Mississauga. The mission of this event was to make our society aware of Christian prosecution in different parts of the world, especially in the Middle East.

In the twentieth century, 45 million Christians were martyred. In recent years, worldwide, 105-170 thousand Christians have been killed for their faith in Christ. Christians are persecuted and live in mortal danger in more than 50 countries and in 70 countries around the world, faith is restricted. A portion of the proceeds from the concerts will go towards the needs of the church in Syria and Iraq.

This Oratorio is the latest composition of Piotr Rubik and lyricist Zbigniew Ksiazek and was composed at a request of the Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy Father, dedicated to Christians that were martyred in the twentieth century. *Because Of My Name* had premiered in Kielce, Poland on June 26, 2016, and was followed with a performance

on July 29, 2016 during World Youth Day in Krakow. It was enthusiastically received by the youth in attendance. Lyrics and narration were inspired by homilies and speeches made by Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko in the years proceeding his murder in October of 1984.

The songs performed in the Oratorio consist of deep reflections on the persecution of Christians. The concert started off with a composition defining "good" and what it means to each of us. The program then moved through the topics of prayer, war, and peace.

The second part of the concert focused on the killing of Christians and on evil in the world, ending with a prayer to Mary asking her to save our world and stop these murders. Short excerpts from Fr. Popieluszko's letters, journals and homilies were read between sections of the performance, leaving the audience in awe. Everyone in attendance responded with great enthusiasm and at the end of the concert thanked Mr. Rubik, along with the performers, with a long-standing ovation. (Ania Olejniczak in *Assumption Province News and Views*, November 2016)

### **OMI LACOMBE, CANADA** **Prairie Flower House of Prayer**

*Fr. Douglas JEFFREY tells of a new prayer ministry in Western Canada.*

Have you ever planted a garden? Have you noticed how the seeds you place in the soil never look at all like the plant they eventually become?

In January 2015, God brought Dan and Janice Lamoureux to The Oblate Hill in Battleford, intent on helping the Oblates there. At the same time as they were responding to that prompting of the Spirit, I was returning from ministry east of The Battlefords. I was not listening to God's prompting. I was engaged with God. I was asking God for help in moving the idea of a house of prayer forward. When I arrived home, Dan and Janice were visiting with Brother Don CLAERHOUT. What a surprise we had when we met and they shared their desire to help,

and I shared my prayer and our need. From that moment, it was obvious that the hand of God was at work.

In April 2016 God's grace intervened, as new doors were opened for us when Dan and Janice purchased a small, 100-acre farm just west of the town of Wilkie in West Central Saskatchewan. The dream of an Oblate Associate / Oblate contemplative community began to be realized. It is our dream to live and work and pray and minister together.

Today the community is taking shape. Our beginnings are small. There is a two-bedroom house and a two-bedroom trailer. There are several buildings on the property, a good supply of water, and 100 acres of good Saskatchewan soil. Our community life and ministry is characterized by Oblate values, by self-sustainability, and choices that are eco-friendly. Our focus is contemplative prayer and faith formation (in-house and outreach).

Together we shape a communal way of life -- work, prayer and ministry that enables us to answer in word and deed the question posed by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" What the future holds for us is only partly known to us.

Today we are focused on following the Spirit of God moment by moment. We recognize that the seed has begun to grow. We know that the invitation to draw nearer to God is clear and that in some small way we are being invited to share God's life and love with others, enabling them to be more fully alive.

Since receiving the encouragement of the Oblate district and the Provincial Core Team leadership to move forward with this idea, we have met with the leadership of the local Diocesan churches (Prince Albert and Saskatoon) and have received further encouragement, support and blessing. Our meeting with the local pastor has also been a wonderful encounter. His openness and his support is a source of encouragement for us. We look forward to assisting him, when we can, in his work of building up the Body of Christ.

We know that we want to welcome others who share a need for contemplative prayer and community life. Because of that, visitors and enquirers are always welcome for prayer, to enjoy the life and work of the farm, and / or for some Oblate hospitality around the kitchen table. There is always a quiet place, a pair of work gloves or a waiting chair. Come and see! (*Oblate Spirit*, November 2016)

## Europe

### UKRAINE

#### Celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary

In Ukraine, the Missionary Oblates launched the celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Congregation on 25 January 2016, by feeding more than 300 homeless persons in the streets of Kyiv. Over the course of the year, the Oblate parishes in Ukraine had their own special celebrations. As the anniversary year moved towards its conclusion, all the Oblates working in Ukraine, Crimea and Russia came together for a retreat on 14-19 November 2016.

While they would have liked to travel to Aix-en-Provence for the retreat, that was not possible. Therefore, they invited Aix to Ukraine by inviting the superior of the Aix community, Fr. Krzysztof

ZIELEND, to preach the days of recollection. The topic was: "In the midst of the Oblate charism." In addition to the conferences, there was time devoted to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The retreat concluded with a visit from the President of the Bishops' Conference of Ukraine, Archbishop Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki of Lviv. He concluded his visit by solemnly handing over the relics of the great witness of charity, Pope St. John Paul II.

Writing on behalf of the Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Mokrzycki said: "Reverend Father, Superior of the Delegation! Through you, I would like to convey greetings to the whole Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on the occasion of the great 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence of your religious family.



It is no accident that 200 years ago, on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, your holy Founder Eugene de Mazenod, along with several other priests, began the apostolic activities of a new religious community.

“It seems that the Apostle Paul was very close in spirit to your Founder. One could think so, based on the similarity of their lives, remembering, for example, their conversion that opened them to God and the Gospel. Choosing this way of life, St. Eugene de Mazenod described it thus: ‘The Lord has sent me to evangelize the poor.’ Such was the need of the time and the conditions of the Church and the world.

“That was 200 years ago, and today we see the relevance of those words and the need for your ministry in the universal Church. The vocation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate to proclaim the Gospel to both the spiritually and materially poor is needed in Ukraine. For 27 years now, the priests of your Congregation have been a sign of faith for the people of our country.

“By gift of Divine Providence, your anniversary takes place during the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy, thus emphasizing the Lord’s great love for all people and that the Almighty longs and looks forward to our doing the same. May your pastoral ministry lead believers to the gospel, provide a helping hand to the poor, and plant signs of love through which the faith and the hope of God’s people might be strengthened.

“Thanking you for your service in Metropolitan Lviv, your sacrifice and your testimony of a holy life, I commend you to the care of Mary Immaculate, and I ask Almighty God to give you generous gifts of blessing and peace.”

As a sign of gratitude for the zealous service of the Missionary Oblates in Ukraine, the archbishop presented to Fr. Pavlo VYSHKOVSKYI, the Delegation Superior, a memorial medal on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of the structures of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine.

## ITALY

### Celebrating 200 years!

One of the most faithful OMI bloggers is Fr. Fabio CIARDI, Director of the General Service of Oblate Studies (<http://fabiociardi.blogspot.it/>). Here he describes the three day festival of the Oblates and their associates in Italy for the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Oblates.

700 x 200 do not equal 140,000 but they equal a great party! From all over Italy, 700 persons came together at Sacrofano, in the beautiful Roman countryside, to celebrate the 200 years since the birth of the Oblates.

There were three days of events, sharing of experiences, performances and prayers to thank God for having given to the Church this great charismatic family, which for two hundred years has been seeking to bring far and wide the proclamation of the Gospel, humbly and in simplicity of life.

A handful of Oblates were there and lots of lay persons that share the charism, the spirituality and the mission. In many, many parts of the world this year, there have been such celebrations and now it was the turn of Italy.

The arrivals themselves showed that we are part of a large family. We see some of them often and some of them we had not seen for years. But there was that immediate recognition, as if the same blood is flowing in our veins.

The youth were in charge of Saturday evening. They talked about their experiences in Cracow for World Youth Days; they sang their songs. No one pretended that the level of artistry was that great, but they are our young people and we feel at home with them; it felt like family, with a simple and real joy.

The highlight of Sunday morning was a conference by the historian and biblical scholar, Andrea Lonardo. We had invited him to speak to us to get a reading on St. Eugene and his missionary story from the point of view of an outsider, placing him primarily within his history

time-frame. It was a beautiful presentation with a great effort to make the message current. His fundamental premise was the holiness of St. Eugene and his foundation: “Holiness is an essential element in understanding the faith. The saints are the genuine interpreters of the Gospel. There is no holiness without mission. Personal holiness cannot be separated from the holiness of others.”

Even the arts reminded us of our beginnings. In the evening, there was a musical performance of “Mite” and his band. The musical about the apparition in Lourdes, “Aquero” was just the right touch for the day, as well as a delightful impersonation of Saint Eugene and the missionary story of the Oblates.

But the celebration was not limited to thought of the beginnings. It was especially a sharing of the experiences of today, of a life that goes on, of the mission as it is lived by our people in their day to day lives. There were profound and intense moments of prayer, such as two hours spent in prayer and meditation, walking through woods bathed in the sun. At a given moment, the people began to remember, calling out the names of so many Italian Oblates they had known and who are now in heaven. We felt that they were again present and one with us.

May these 200 years become an encouragement to move onward and to carry forward the ideals of the beginnings.

---

## Latin America

---

### **BOLIVIA**

#### **Celebrating our 200 years**

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, present in the Bolivian Church since June of 1952, are celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of their religious Congregation.

The 200<sup>th</sup> jubilee began in Rome on 25 January 2016, and will have its climax on 8 December in the city of Cochabamba, with a solemn Eucharist in the cathedral, presided by the Bishop-emeritus of Cochabamba, Msgr. Tito Solari.

There were two foundations in Bolivia. The first was in the region of the Chaco in 1925. At the end of the Chaco war, the missionaries remained in Paraguay and founded the mission of the Vicariate of Pilcomayo. Then in 1952, the missionaries came again, but this time to the mining regions of Norte de Potosi; from there, they spread out to various parts of the country. Their presence is important because they have always dedicated their mission to the poor and the humble, to the farm workers and the miners. Presently, the missionaries are in La Paz, Cochabamba, Norte de Potosi, Oruro and Santa Cruz.

Today, the Missionary Oblates face new challenges, as Pope Francis told them:

“The Church, along with the entire world, is experiencing an age of great transformation, in the most diverse of fields. It needs men who carry in their hearts the same love for Jesus Christ that lived in the heart of the young Eugene de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for the Church, which strives to be an ever more open house. It is important to work for a Church that is for everyone, a Church that is ready to welcome and to accompany! The work to be done in order to achieve all of this is vast; and all of you also have your own specific contribution to offer.”

Some of their important works:

- RADIO PIO XII is one of their most representative works. Many of the missionaries have understood the importance of living, working and building, with the people, a more just and united society.
- CEPROMI accompanies many groups of women, fostering their dignity and their active participation in society.
- CEPA helps indigenous peoples to build upon their own history and support the defense of the environment and the care of our common home.
- All of their parishes try to be MISSIONARY PARISHES that focus on bringing the Good News to all peoples.

Some names are preserved in the annals of Church history. Father Gregorio IRIARTE, with his analysis of reality, has made us understand and change. With his enlightening books, we can easily look at a Church that lets itself be challenged and engages in social transformation. Then there is Father Mauricio LEFEBVRE who was shot to death in the days of the dictatorship; he founded the faculty of sociology at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz. He is well remembered for working to build a better Bolivia. (Fr. Guillermo SILES PAZ)

## BOLIVIA

### Roberto Durette, a life of struggle

*A Bolivian journalist, Lupe Cajías, writes about a courageous Oblate priest, Fr. Roberto DURETTE. (Los Tiempos, 12/02/2016)*

There are journalists who struggle for one day and they are appreciated; there are others who fight from time to time and they contribute a lot; some dedicate their work and their daily life to the defense of freedom. Only a few sacrifice their time on this earth as a gift to the destitute, to the poorest of the poor, to the saddest and most inhospitable settings. Neither their land of origin, nor their family, nor their health takes them away from their commitment.

That's where you will find Roberto Durette, an unknown among those who live in the cities. However, he is the best one of all after a half-century dedicated to the miners and the indigenous of the historic region of Catavi-Siglo XX-Llallagua, Province of Bustillos, Potosí.

Born in 1935 in the United States, the second in a family of eight children, he felt the Lord's call at school and was ordained an Oblate of Mary

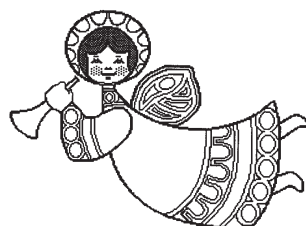
Immaculate in 1960. Two years later, he arrived in Catavi, when priests were already involved in the social struggles. Watching close-up the agony and death of dozens of patients of silicosis as they spat out their lungs in the hospital of Comibol sealed forever his devotion to the working masses.

After a couple of years in Cochabamba he returned to Llallagua in the critical moments of the dictatorship of René Barrientos; he was already working at "Radio Pío XII" with Father Gustavo (PELLETIER). After the workers' mobilization of 1975, the military occupied the area and closed the station created in 1959. Some priests considered that it was better to close it and others defended it as their most important work. It was Roberto who offered to manage it in the midst of the repression.

"La Pio" was there in the most significant moments of both the miners' struggles and those of the Aymara peasants. Roberto supported the broadcasting and condemnation of the abuses against the people and, for that reason, he suffered successive closings down of the station and even the destruction of the transmitters.

At the end of 1977, the Oblates of the area encouraged the women to start the historic hunger strike to recover democracy and Gustavo took over the logistics. In 1980, the radio was the last to be silenced after a week of resistance coup. It stayed with the few workers who remained after the relocation and in the democracy, it continued as an alternative voice.

An incorrigible smoker, at the age of 80, he continues to encourage the press at the service of the Common Good, of fraternity and of the living Gospel.



---

**Anniversaries for January 2017**


---

**50 years of religious life**

01.01.1967	11807	Fr. Wladyslaw Laskowski	Poland
------------	-------	-------------------------	--------

**25 years of religious life**

06.01.1992	13543	Bro. Benedict Mahase Khakhane	Lesotho
06.01.1992	13467	Fr. Albert Mahlomola Lerotholi	Lesotho
06.01.1992	13465	Fr. Francis Tseliso Masike	S. Africa, Central
06.01.1992	13466	Bro. Bernard Lefu Mokoena	Lesotho
06.01.1992	13468	Fr. Stephen Koenane Molefi	Lesotho
18.01.1992	13346	Fr. José Luis Castillo Villegas	Mexico
18.01.1992	13345	Fr. Guzmán Héctor Luján	Mexico
18.01.1992	13354	Fr. Josenildo Tavares Ferreira	Brazil

**25 years of priesthood**

23.01.1992	13060	Fr. Edmund Reginald Saveripillai	Poland
------------	-------	----------------------------------	--------



## Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 77-85

Name	Prov./Del.	Born	Died at	Date
Fr. Jean (Joao) Hébette	Belgium/Netherlands	15/02/1925	Baillonville	11/11/2016
Fr. Roger J. Lamoureux	United States	14/01/1933	Tewksbury	14/11/2016
Bishop Erwin Hecht	Central Province, South Africa	13/10/1933	Hünfeld	19/11/2016
Fr. Edward Williams	Japan-Korea	02/01/1930	Tewksbury	23/11/2016
Fr. Jean Louatron	France	03/03/1925	Lyon	27/11/2016
Fr. Fernando Ernest Premasiri	Colombo	27/12/1942	Colombo	28/11/2106
Fr. John de Nobrega	Northern Province, South Africa	25/06/1921	Johannesburg	29/11/2016
Fr. Eric Boulle	Natal	28/04/1929	Durban	05/12/2016
Fr. Christian Hoet	Belgium/Holland	24/09/1928	Aye	10/12/2016

*“They are before God, bearing the sign, the kind of character proper to our Institute, the vows common to all its members, the firm habit of the same virtues. We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our main residence. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them.” (Letter of Founder to Fr. Courtès, 22 July 1828)*

OMI INFORMATION is an unofficial publication  
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate  
via Aurelia 290, I 00165 Roma, Italy  
Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail: [information@omigen.org](mailto:information@omigen.org)  
<http://www.omeworld.org>  
Editor: James Allen; Webmaster: Shanil Jayawardena  
Printing & circulation: Shanil Jayawardena