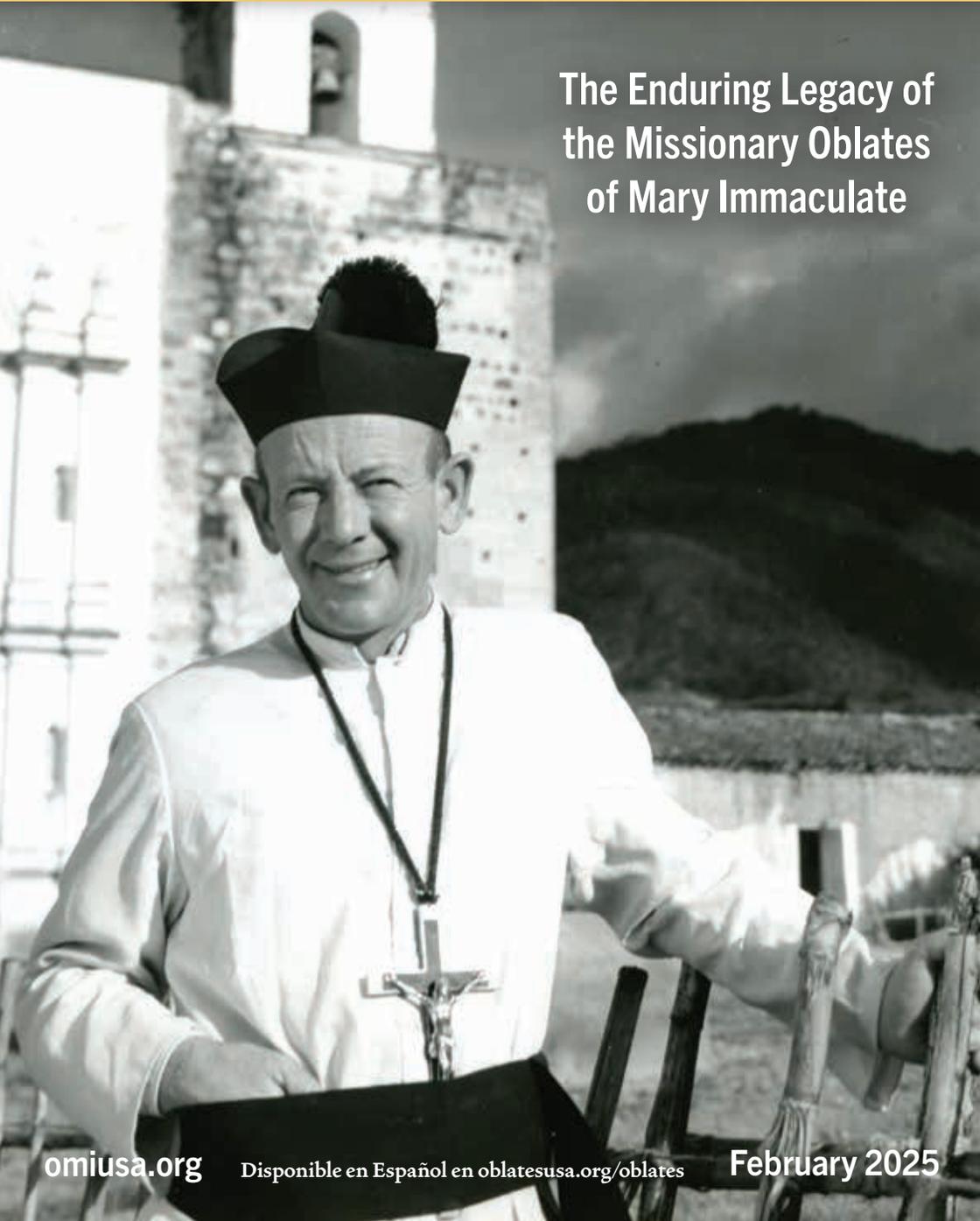




*Oblate*WORLD

MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

The Enduring Legacy of
the Missionary Oblates
of Mary Immaculate



- 4-12 **A Beacon of Hope: The Enduring Legacy of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate**
- 13 **RAM's Corner**
- 14-17 **Turkmenistan Oblates Persevere For 25 Years: A Journey of Quiet Faith and Unyielding Devotion**
- 18-21 **The Transformative Power of Service: A Youth Ministry's Journey of Compassion**
- 22-25 **The Spiritual Legacy of St. Kateri Tekakwitha**
- 26-27 **Legacy of Love and Mission: The Oblates and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus**
- 28-30 **Adapting to a Changing World: The Oblate Academy's Virtual Outreach for Families**
- 30 **Embracing the Digital Age: The Launch of Oblate Studio in San Antonio**

Front Cover:

Father Jim Norman, OMI, in San Pedro Mártir Quiechapa, Mexico, circa 1966.

Back cover:

Father Daniel Aliou Mane, OMI, in Ghana, surrounded by smiling children waving with joy.

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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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Publisher: Fr. Raymond Cook, OMI

Creative Direction: Scott Pfau

Production Director: Fr. David Uribe, OMI

Writers: Roger Brooks

Designer: Kate Brown

Photography: Sarah Abbott, Scott Pfau,
Will Shaw

Translator: Rosario García



From the Provincial *Fr. Raymond Cook, OMI*



Dear Friends in Christ,

As we share this Spring Edition of Oblate World Magazine, I am filled with gratitude for the many blessings we have experienced together in our shared mission. Through your prayers and support, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate continue to bring hope, love, and faith to those most in need, across the world.

In this edition, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of our presence in Zambia, where we continue to work alongside the local community, and we reflect on the challenges and joys of our ministry in Turkmenistan. Additionally, we share the inspiring work of our youth ministry in Houston, where young hearts are being touched and transformed through our Oblate mission, helping to cultivate the next generation of leaders for Christ. These stories and others offer a glimpse into the vital work we are privileged to do, inspired by the example of St. Eugene de Mazenod, who called us to serve with compassion and dedication.

As you read through these pages, I encourage you to join us in prayer and reflection, knowing that together, we can continue to bring God's light to the most remote and underserved regions of the world.

In Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Fr. Raymond Cook, OMI
Provincial
United States Province

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Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate USA
323 Oblate Drive
San Antonio, TX 78216



Girls dancing in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Zambia Mission

A Beacon of Hope: The Enduring Legacy of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

Missionary work remains an active and vital force today, sustained by dedicated individuals and organizations who work in service to others. Among these, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) hold a unique place, committed to evangelization and uplifting the marginalized. This account highlights the modern relevance of the Oblates' work, which continues to foster faith, hope, and resilience around the globe.

FOUNDING VISION AND HISTORICAL ROOTS

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate began in the early 1800s in France, under the leadership of Eugene de Mazenod. Amid the social turmoil following the French Revolution, Eugene—a young priest—saw the deep spiritual and material needs of rural



Saint Eugene de Mazenod

communities, especially among the poor. His response was to form a congregation of priests dedicated to serving society's most forgotten souls. Through his humility and dedication, Eugene instilled resilience, shaping the Oblates' core mission: to offer compassion, hope, and faith to those in need. This foundational spirit set the stage for a global ministry that would reach far beyond France.

REACHING THE MARGINS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Today, the mission of the Oblates remains as essential as ever. As communities across the world face unique challenges, the Oblates' commitment to humanitarian and spiritual outreach has only strengthened. They have become pillars of support for people in some of the world's most remote and underserved

regions, bringing tangible help and hope to those who need it most.



A young student in Zambia, emphasizing education as the cornerstone of the mission

COMMITMENT TO HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY IN AFRICA

In many African nations, the Oblates play a critical role in community development, particularly where government resources fall short. In Zambia, for example, their missions serve as community centers and lifelines for healthcare, offering clinics and hospitals that bring essential medical services to those without access. Their healthcare facilities address immediate medical needs and act as defenses against epidemics, providing treatments and vaccinations that save lives.

Education is another cornerstone of the Oblates' African mission. Recognizing that access to education is a critical pathway out of poverty, the Oblates have established schools and vocational

training programs, empowering young people to pursue brighter futures. In areas where few resources exist, these schools are essential, offering hope and opportunity where none may have existed.

MINISTRY TO THE MARGINALIZED IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, the Oblates' ministry adapts to the challenges of both urban and rural areas, offering support to those on society's margins. From street ministries in urban areas to outreach in economically distressed neighborhoods, the Oblates serve as a source of hope and compassion. Their



Volunteers serving food with care and dedication to those in need

work extends to offering food, shelter, and spiritual support to the homeless, as well as counseling for those struggling with addiction, mental health issues, and incarceration.



Father Ted Pfeifer, OMI serving with faith, medicine, and hands-on care in rural communities

In both cities and rural areas, they work with local organizations to support families facing hardship. Their compassionate ministry reminds people that they are not alone, offering a sense of belonging and resilience in difficult times.

A BEACON OF HOPE IN LATIN AMERICA

In the slums and rural areas of Latin America, the Oblates confront harsh realities of poverty, violence, and instability. In these challenging environments, they provide spiritual guidance alongside practical assistance. They run community development projects and promote social justice, helping communities build strength and self-sufficiency.

In regions impacted by violence, the Oblates often work as peacemakers, mediating conflicts and fostering reconciliation. Despite personal risk, they remain committed to promoting peace and justice, contributing to the transformation of communities through the power of hope and unity.

MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

Beyond their social outreach, the Oblates also deeply touch the spiritual lives of those they serve. Their pastoral care extends to prisons, hospitals, and shelters, where they often offer the only spiritual support available. In places of suffering and despair, the Oblates bring a message of love, redemption, and hope, embodying the compassionate heart of Christ's ministry.

Through this ministry, the Oblates offer a reminder that God's love can bring healing and transformation even in the darkest circumstances. Their presence is a lifeline for those who feel forgotten, bringing hope to those who need it most.

EMBRACING MODERN TOOLS AND PARTNERSHIPS

In today's fast-paced world, the Oblates continuously adapt to meet new challenges. Recognizing the

importance of connecting with broader audiences, they have embraced modern technology and communication platforms. Through social media, the Oblates share their message of hope and mobilize support for their work, reaching people across the globe with stories of transformation.

Partnerships have also become a valuable part of their mission. By collaborating with NGOs, government agencies, and other faith-based organizations, the Oblates extend their impact, addressing complex issues such as poverty, injustice, and health crises. This spirit of collaboration underscores their commitment to a unified approach to global challenges, promoting the well-being of all people.

BUILDING GENUINE CONNECTIONS THROUGH LIVING AMONG THE PEOPLE



Father Leiznig, OMI, in Brazil, sharing a moment of faith in a rural hut

The Oblates distinguish themselves by fully immersing in the communities they serve, living among the people rather than apart from them. This

approach fosters trust and builds meaningful relationships, allowing them to make a deeper impact on the lives they touch. By sharing in the experiences of those they serve, the Oblates gain a profound understanding of the resilience of the human spirit and the beauty of shared faith.

While this approach is not without challenges, it is deeply rewarding, leading to authentic connections and the building of relationships based on mutual respect and compassion. The Oblates are more than just missionaries; they become friends, mentors, and companions on life's journey.

A LEGACY OF SERVICE AND A CALL TO ACTION

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate offer a profound example of unwavering commitment to the call to serve others. Their mission, inspired by the Gospel and guided by Eugene de Mazenod's vision, remains vital in a world that still cries out for compassion, justice, and hope. The Oblates' dedication to the most vulnerable reflects true discipleship, bringing the love of Christ into some of the darkest corners of our world.

Their journey of faith and sacrifice serves as a reminder of the transformative power of compassion. Each act of service lights the way for those in need, embodying the enduring legacy of missionary work. The Oblates' legacy is one of hope, dignity, and healing—changing lives through faith and love.

As they continue their mission, the Oblates extend an invitation to others to join them. Through prayer, support, and solidarity, everyone is called to be part of this legacy of love and service. Together, we can all be beacons of hope, bringing light and love into the world.

FORTY YEARS OF FAITH AND MISSION: CELEBRATING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MISSIONARY OBLATES IN ZAMBIA

This year, we honor a profound milestone—the 40th anniversary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate’s presence in Zambia. Over the last four decades, the Oblates’ unwavering dedication has transformed lives, uplifted communities, and deepened the spiritual fabric of countless individuals. As we reflect on this legacy, we’re invited to consider the enduring impact the Oblates have had, both on the people they serve and within their own lives.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: A JOURNEY ROOTED IN FAITH



Father Duffy, OMI, hearing confession beside a vehicle in rural Zambia, bringing grace since 1985

On January 6, 1984, a small yet resolute group of Oblates from Texas embarked on a mission led by the Holy Spirit. Fr. Pat Gitzen, Fr. Paul Duffy, Fr. Jack Joyce, and Brother Joseph Kaplinger responded to a call, stepping forward with courage and a spirit of deep compassion to bring the message of Christ to the people of Zambia. These early days were marked by both hardship and hope, as these missionaries faced the challenges of an unfamiliar land



Celebrating 40 years of faith and service in Zambia, honoring a lasting legacy



Receiving Communion and a blessing in Muzaka, Zambia, strengthening faith and community in God's grace

with little more than their faith, a sense of duty, and a heartfelt mission.

The four Oblates arrived with few resources, but their hearts overflowed with love and dedication. They began in Lukulu, a remote area far from urban centers, where their daily work included spreading the Gospel, offering sacraments, and providing essential services to local people. Their ministry was shaped by long days of travel on rough roads, living in simple conditions, and enduring the challenges of limited resources and supplies. Yet, through all of these challenges, the Oblates maintained their focus on the people they served, embodying Christ's love and compassion. Today, Fr. Pat Gitzen remains active in his mission as a Formator at De Mazenod House of Formation in Makeni, Lusaka, a living testament to the endurance of his calling.

A GROWING MISSION: FROM FOUR SERVANTS TO A FLOURISHING COMMUNITY

What began with four humble servants has blossomed into a vibrant community of 72 Oblates, including two bishops, 54 priests, two brothers, and 16 scholastics. This growth is a testament to the power of God's love and the resilience of the human spirit in a developing

nation. Alongside their work as priests and leaders, these Oblates offer comfort and hope through humanitarian services, including healthcare, education, and community development initiatives.

In addition to those already serving, the future of the Oblate mission shines brightly through the three novices and 28 pre-novices currently discerning their call to service. Each one has chosen to join the Oblates in bringing Christ's love to the people of Zambia. Their presence not only promises continuity but signifies a strong, unbroken chain of devotion that will extend far into the future. It is a blessing to witness how new generations have been inspired by the example of the early Oblates, joining the mission with hearts prepared to serve the people of Zambia.

EMBRACING THE THEME: "PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION"

As we commemorate this anniversary, we reflect on the theme chosen to guide this sacred celebration: "Pilgrims of Hope in Communion: Following Christ the First Pilgrim and Missionary." This theme calls us to unity, reminding us that each of us is on a journey—walking together with faith as our guide and hope as our

destination. This pilgrimage encourages all Oblates to renew their commitment to bring hope to the communities they serve, emulating Christ's love for humanity.

On August 24, 2024, a sacred gathering took place at Mary Immaculate Parish in Lusaka, Zambia. This occasion was filled with heartfelt reflection and gratitude, as the faithful gathered to honor the mission entrusted to the Oblates. The day was marked by a profound sense of connection, as Oblates and parishioners remembered their humble beginnings in Lukulu. They marveled at how the mission had spread beyond its origins to Kalabo, Mongu, Limulunga, Lusaka, and other regions, carrying the message of Christ's love to new communities and lives.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT: SERVING THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA

Over the years, the Oblates' mission has grown to encompass a wide range of services that address pressing issues in Zambian society. From healthcare to human rights advocacy, education to worship, the Oblates have brought the light of Christ into the lives of those often left in darkness. By establishing hospitals and clinics, they have provided essential healthcare to people who otherwise would have none. In remote areas, the Oblates' healthcare centers are a lifeline, offering vaccinations, treatments, and preventive care that save lives and improve community well-being.

Education remains another cornerstone of their work. The Oblates operate numerous schools and vocational training centers, providing knowledge and skills to young minds. These institutions are often the only

opportunity for children in these regions to escape the cycle of poverty and envision a better future. By empowering youth with education, the Oblates build a foundation for long-term community transformation, giving children a chance to break through barriers and achieve their dreams.

The anniversary celebration highlighted the Oblates' commitment to justice and equality, principles they integrate into every aspect of their mission. Each Oblate, by virtue of their Perpetual Oblation, is called to serve with humility and unwavering perseverance. Whether they are advocating for human rights or standing in solidarity with marginalized communities, the Oblates have become a voice for those who often go unheard.

WELCOMING THE YOUNG OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE (Y.O.M.I)

In a spirit of unity, the celebration included a joyful gathering of the Young Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Y.O.M.I) from across the Africa-Madagascar subregion. Guided by the theme "Serving Christ and Him Crucified," the young Oblates demonstrated their commitment to follow in the footsteps of Christ, carrying His message of love and service to the poor.

The youth gathering was an inspiring testament to the continuity of the Oblates' mission. In these young people, we see the future of the Oblate mission—their enthusiasm, faith, and love for Christ serve as a beacon of hope for generations to come. These young Oblates represent the future of the Church in Zambia, and their presence was a reminder of the mission's enduring vitality.

BISHOP VALENTINE KALUMBA'S INSIGHT: LIVING THE GOSPEL THROUGH LOVE

During the celebration, Bishop Valentine Kalumba of Livingstone, Zambia, shared a profound message,



Bishop Valentine with fellow Oblates in Zambia, united in faith and mission

calling the faithful to understand that eternal life is found not only in following commandments but in embodying a loving and self-sacrificing attitude toward others. His words resonate with the mission of the Oblates, who seek to serve others with humility and compassion, bringing the Gospel to life through every act of kindness.

This reminder serves as an anchor for the Oblates' work in Zambia. It is a message that strengthens their commitment to God, reminding them that to serve Christ is to serve His people with an open heart and a helping hand. Bishop Kalumba's insight will continue to inspire the Oblates to extend God's boundless love to the marginalized and suffering, reaffirming their mission to bring the light of Christ into the world's most challenging places.

LOOKING FORWARD: A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND RESILIENCE

As we celebrate these 40 years, the Oblates look to the future with hope and determination. They know the road ahead may be filled with new challenges, but their commitment remains steadfast. The Holy Spirit will guide them as they continue to bring Christ's love to the people of Zambia. Whether through pastoral care, healthcare, education, or social advocacy, the Oblates remain dedicated to their calling, and they are grateful for the many blessings that have sustained them throughout these four decades.

In these forty years, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have established a legacy of faith, resilience, and unwavering commitment. They have embraced Zambia's people as their own, forming bonds that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. Through their presence and their actions, the Oblates remind us all of the power of faith to transform lives and communities.

As we mark this anniversary, let us recognize and celebrate the work of the Oblates. Their dedication and sacrifice illuminate the path of service and love, showing us that the legacy of missionary work is not merely preserved but continually renewed. They carry forth the mission entrusted to them, adapting to the changing needs of humanity while remaining true to the heart of their call: to bring the love of Christ to all corners of the earth. †

The RAM's Corner

A Legacy of Faith: The Journey of Father Jim Allen

Father Jim Allen, a beloved and revered member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, has dedicated over 65 years of his life to serving God and community. Originally hailing from Omaha, Nebraska, his lifelong commitment to the Oblates has deeply shaped the mission and outreach of the community. As Director of the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows from 1985 to 1991, Father Allen played a pivotal role in expanding and enriching the spiritual home that has become a place of solace for so many.

In a recent conversation, Father Allen reflected on the Shrine's rich history and evolution. He traced its origins back to European devotional practices, highlighting the profound influence of a vision received by a German Oblate, which inspired the dedication to Our Lady of the Snows. This vision, which has since become a cherished symbol of devotion within the Oblate community, continues to draw pilgrims and visitors from across the world, seeking the intercession of the Blessed Mother.

Father Allen recounted with pride the remarkable transformation of the Shrine, from its modest beginnings to the expansive and welcoming sanctuary it is today. He recalled the early days when the Shrine was situated at St. Henry's Seminary, and how it eventually found its current home in Belleville, Illinois. The journey was not without challenges, but the unwavering faith and support of the community ensured its growth and

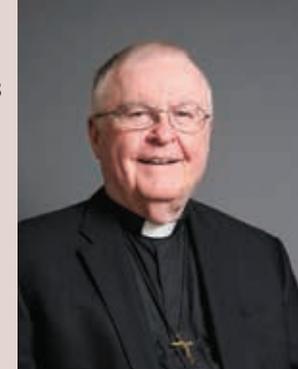
stability. Father Allen's leadership during this time was instrumental, helping guide the Shrine through both trials and triumphs.

Throughout his years of service, Father Allen has witnessed the Shrine become a beacon of hope and prayer, serving not only as a place of worship but also as a center for outreach, healing, and connection. He spoke with gratitude for the countless faithful who have supported the Shrine's mission, each contributing in their own way to its lasting impact.

Father Allen's reflections offer more than just a historical account—they are a reminder of the deep spiritual roots that have shaped the Shrine and continue to sustain it today. His lifelong dedication to the Oblates and to the Shrine itself is a testament to his enduring faith and commitment. As he shared stories from the past, it became clear that his influence extends far beyond the walls of the Shrine; his legacy is one of faith, leadership, and unwavering service.

In his final thoughts, Father Allen expressed his deep love for the Shrine and the community that has grown around it. He remains a source of inspiration for all who have the privilege of knowing him, reminding us that the Shrine is not just a physical place but a living testament to the power of prayer, faith, and dedication.

Father Jim Allen's journey with the Oblates is a powerful story of faith in action. His legacy continues to inspire those who come to the Shrine, offering hope, guidance, and a reminder of the profound love that has been poured into this sacred space over the years. †





Children actively engaged in worship, growing in faith and community

Turkmenistan Oblates Persevere For 25 Years: A Journey of Quiet Faith and Unyielding Devotion

In the distant and often forgotten corners of the world, where expressions of faith can go unnoticed or even discouraged, a quiet but profound mission has been unfolding for the past quarter century. Since 1997, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have steadfastly served in Turkmenistan, one of the most religiously restricted regions in the world, under the guidance of the Holy See. Here, where practicing one's Catholic faith is often met with adversity, the Oblates have sown seeds of faith with courage and unwavering love, cultivating a community whose growth testifies to the endurance of the human spirit and the boundless grace of God.

One of the first to answer the Holy Spirit's call to Turkmenistan was Father Andrzej Madej, OMI. Arriving in

the capital city of Ashgabat, he embarked on a mission that seemed almost insurmountable. Few Catholics resided in the area, and those who did



One of the first to answer the Holy Spirit's call to Turkmenistan was Father Andrzej Madej, OMI

had faced years of religious suppression. It was a daunting start, yet Fr. Madej was driven by a profound faith and a deep commitment to serve. In the

earliest days, his congregation consisted of just 15 to 20 individuals, many of whom had experienced years of spiritual isolation and suppression. Yet, within this small group, faith endured, growing slowly but resolutely.

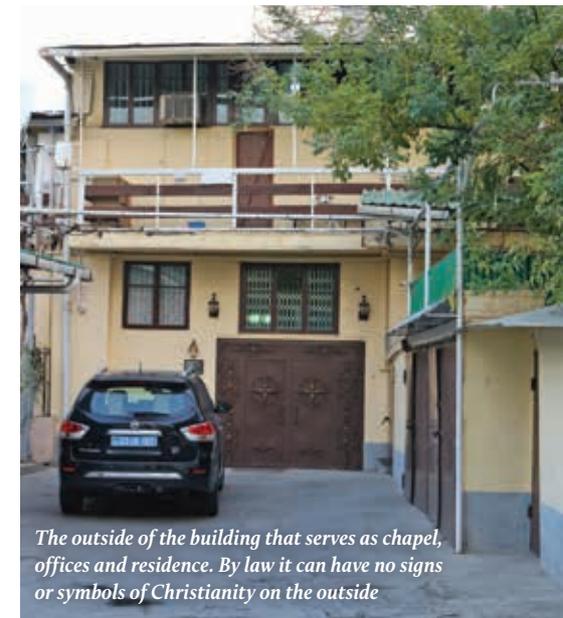
Over the years, what began as a modest gathering has flourished into a community of approximately 200 Catholics, spread across three distinct communities within Turkmenistan. Despite the geographical distance that separates them, these believers are united by their shared love for Christ and their desire to live out their faith. Within these small Catholic enclaves, three devoted Oblate priests celebrate Mass and Eucharistic Adoration daily, providing spiritual sustenance for the faithful. Their commitment shines as a beacon, drawing others to the quiet refuge of God's love and fostering a profound sense of hope amidst often daunting challenges.

TESTIMONIES OF FAITH AND TRANSFORMATION

The impact of the Oblates' ministry is evident in the countless lives they have touched. One particularly inspiring story is that of a woman who encountered the love of Christ through their mission. Initially from a different faith background, her life was transformed through the compassionate guidance and teachings of the Oblates. As she experienced the boundless mercy and love of God, her perspective shifted, leading her to embrace a faith that has since become the foundation of her life. Stories like hers illustrate how even in the remotest parts of the world, where God's presence might seem distant, His grace

remains ever active, reaching hearts and renewing souls.

Another testimony came from a young man who had grown up with little exposure to Christianity. Intrigued by the Oblates' compassion and humility, he attended a Mass out of curiosity. That first experience left an indelible mark, prompting him to seek a deeper understanding of faith. Over time, he grew to appreciate the unique message of love, forgiveness, and redemption that Christianity offers. Today, he serves as a source of inspiration for others, encouraging those around him to discover the joy of knowing Christ.



The outside of the building that serves as chapel, offices and residence. By law it can have no signs or symbols of Christianity on the outside

A SACRED MISSION ENDURES THROUGH CHALLENGES

Despite the growth of this faith community, the mission in Turkmenistan remains fraught with challenges. The Oblates face numerous restrictions that would discourage even the most determined spirits. Public



Mass in the chapel, Fathers Jim Brobst, Jim Chambers and Lou Studer join the locals (Fr. Andrzej on left)

expressions of faith are limited, and religious gatherings must often take place quietly to avoid drawing attention. Despite these limitations, the Oblates persist, fortified by a deep-rooted belief in the importance of their work. The small chapel in Ashgabat has become a sanctuary for those seeking peace and connection with God. Its doors are open to anyone seeking solace, offering a place of reflection and prayer for the faithful and the curious alike.

During a recent visit to Turkmenistan, Father Louis Lougen, OMI, Superior General of the Missionary Oblates, witnessed firsthand the profound resilience and faith of this community. He likened the experience to the early Christian Church, where small communities gathered in private homes, bound by an unshakeable love for God and one another. Fr. Lougen was moved by the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit among the faithful and spoke of the

Oblates' mission as a modern-day Acts of the Apostles. His interactions with both Christian and Muslim families during his visit underscored the commitment to peace, love, and mutual respect that defines this sacred mission.

A TESTAMENT TO GOD'S UNYIELDING LOVE

For the Oblates and the Catholic community in Turkmenistan, their mission may never be in the global spotlight, but their quiet perseverance ensures that the light of Christ continues to shine in a land where it might otherwise fade. Through small acts of kindness, steadfast faith, and a commitment to serve, they embody the love of Christ, inspiring those around them to embrace hope and compassion. These small yet powerful moments of connection are what sustain this community, providing a source of strength and renewal for those who seek it.

As they continue their mission, the Oblates are mindful of the unique spiritual challenges their community faces. They have embraced a ministry of

presence, knowing that their simple acts of devotion and service can plant seeds of faith that may one day bear fruit in ways beyond measure. Every Mass, every prayer, and every word of encouragement offered in the quiet confines of their chapel is a testament to the enduring power of God's love, bringing hope to those in need and reminding them of His unwavering presence.

A CALL FOR PRAYER AND SUPPORT

Dear reader, we invite you to join us in prayer for these courageous Oblates and their faithful community. Their mission is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the boundless grace of God. Through the prayers and support of those who stand with them from afar, this hidden yet sacred mission in Turkmenistan can continue to grow, bringing light to all who encounter it. May their work continue to bear fruit, and may God's love be made known to all they encounter. Let us lift them up in our hearts, asking for strength, guidance, and protection as they serve in this vital ministry. †



Fr. Studer, OMI, and Fr. Andrzej, OMI, administering Communion with reverence.

The Transformative Power of Service: A Youth Ministry's Journey of Compassion

In the vibrant city of Houston, a dedicated youth ministry is making waves through the power of service. Led by a passionate team of youth leaders, including Alfonso Lopez, this ministry has been creating a space for young people to express their faith in profound and impactful ways, using action rather than mere words. By stepping into the needs of their community and beyond, they are demonstrating that faith isn't just something to discuss—it's something to be lived fully and authentically.

A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND FAITH

Several years ago, the youth ministry in Houston noticed a significant change in the young people they served. Many had been profoundly affected by the isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only created physical separation but also left many feeling disconnected from their faith and communities. The period of disruption led to challenges in social skills, self-expression, and even spiritual growth, as the once-close-knit community found itself at a distance from one another.

Alfonso Lopez, a youth leader at Immaculate Conception Parish, recognized the gravity of the situation. "Our youth are more willing to engage with our faith than we think. We just haven't given them a chance to show it. They may not express it through words, but through action. This is where our ministry has evolved—to meet them where they are," he reflected. Alfonso's insight became the guiding principle for the ministry's new direction, recognizing the need to create avenues for the youth to engage with their faith in tangible ways.

Alfonso Lopez and volunteer advancing the mission, one box at a time



The ministry team understood that traditional approaches—conferences and retreats—were no longer enough to captivate the hearts of the young people. They needed to offer something more engaging, something that resonated with the youth's desire for meaningful, real-world impact. The answer emerged through service, as the ministry began focusing on mission trips that allowed young people to live out their faith through action and community engagement.

THE BEGINNING OF MISSION TRIPS

The first mission trip took place around eight years ago, marking a pivotal moment for the ministry. Inspired by the overwhelming needs at the U.S.-Mexico border, where migrants and immigrants were struggling to survive, the youth ministry organized a transformative trip to McAllen, Texas. Here, they volunteered at the Migrant Center, where families were in desperate need of food, shelter, and care.

What the youth didn't anticipate was the profound transformation that would unfold within them as they engaged directly with those they sought to help. "The youth were completely transformed," Alfonso recalled. "They went from being

tired and hesitant on the first day to waking up at 5:30 a.m. the next morning, eager to help serve breakfast to the migrants, even though it wasn't part of our original schedule."

That experience, where they witnessed firsthand the suffering of others and the tangible impact of their actions, helped the youth grasp the true meaning of compassion. It wasn't about eloquent speeches or grand gestures—it was about getting their hands dirty and meeting the needs of the people they served. This shift in perspective became a defining moment in the ministry, guiding future service projects and mission trips.

ADAPTING TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Since that first trip, the youth ministry has continued to evolve, responding to changing circumstances and different areas of need. After the border

trip, the group turned its focus to the devastation caused by natural disasters, particularly in places like New Orleans, which continues to struggle with homelessness and the aftermath of hurricane damage. This adaptability



Youth working together in the kitchen, preparing food to share with those in need and community



Young hands are busy preparing food, showing care and kindness while serving others in need

reflects the ministry's commitment to being responsive to the cries of the world, embracing the call to serve wherever it is needed most.

Father Tony Rigoli, OMI, pastor of St. Jude Shrine in New Orleans, has played a crucial role in fostering connections between the youth and the local communities in Louisiana. His guidance and support have been invaluable, ensuring that the youth can make meaningful contributions while also learning from those they serve. Though each trip presents new challenges, Alfonso and the team remain focused on helping their youth grow through service, emphasizing the importance of allowing the young people to take ownership of their ministry.

"This is their ministry," Alfonso asserted. "When you allow them to make it their own, to decide where and how they want to serve, they become so much more invested. They feel the impact of what they're doing, and they take ownership of it. Their actions speak louder than words." This sense of ownership fosters a deeper connection to their faith, as the youth experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from serving others.

Over the years, the youth have taken part in numerous outreach efforts, including helping at local shelters, working with community centers, and serving meals to the homeless. The ministry's impact has become more than just an act of service—it's a journey of faith, where young people discover the power of their actions and their capacity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

GOD'S WORK THROUGH QUIET HEARTS

One of the most profound realizations for the youth leaders has been that faith isn't always expressed in loud, extroverted ways. "God is always at work," Alfonso shared. "Even when the youth seem quiet or reserved, they are engaged in the process of learning, growing, and deepening their faith. The outward silence doesn't reflect the inward work God is doing in their hearts."

In many ways, the quietness of the youth is where God's work is most visible. The youth may not always be outwardly expressive, but they are deeply engaged in the process of spiritual growth. Through their service and commitment, they are living out the values of compassion, selflessness, and faith in action. This subtle transformation is often witnessed in small moments—the warm smile shared with someone in need, the quiet prayer offered before a meal, or the thoughtful reflection shared in group discussions after a service trip.

A FUTURE SHAPED BY SERVICE

As the ministry continues to grow and evolve, it remains committed to its mission of empowering youth through service. Alfonso Lopez and his team believe that these mission trips are not just about helping others but about shaping the next generation of leaders who are ready to step into the world and make a positive impact. Their vision encompasses not only addressing immediate needs but also cultivating a spirit of lifelong service and engagement in their faith journeys.

Looking ahead, the youth ministry in Houston plans to continue expanding

its reach, with new mission trips and outreach initiatives in the works. By allowing young people to lead, serve, and connect with communities in need, the ministry is cultivating a sense of purpose and faith that will last a lifetime. Each initiative is carefully designed to foster leadership skills, empathy, and a deeper understanding of their faith as they engage with diverse communities.

This story of youth ministry in Houston serves as a powerful reminder that the future of faith lies in action. Through service, the youth are not only transforming the lives of those they help but also discovering their own capacity for compassion, leadership, and faith in the process. Their journeys reflect a commitment to building bridges, fostering understanding, and creating a more compassionate world.

With God's guidance and their unwavering willingness to serve, the young people of Houston are becoming powerful witnesses of His love, building a more compassionate, faith-filled future for all. Their legacy will be one of hope, action, and a steadfast belief that through service, they can change the world, one heart at a time.

REFLECTIONS ON MISSIONARY WORK: THE ESSENCE OF THE TEKAKWITHA INDIAN MISSIONS

As we navigate an increasingly interconnected world, the thoughts surrounding missionary work often evoke images of distant lands. Yet, the Tekakwitha Indian Missions, established by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, challenge this perception by illuminating the profound significance of local outreach. These missions remind us that missionary work is not limited to distant lands; it also calls us to serve within our own communities, including among Indigenous populations here in the United States. The essence of missionary work lies in its capacity to cultivate connections, promote understanding, and foster spiritual growth where it is needed most. †



Youth ministry group with Alfonso Lopez, building community and faith together



Youth unpacking donations, ready to serve the community with love



Youth creating signs, preparing for an exciting fundraising event ahead



Youth coming together with Alfonso Lopez and Father Henry Walker, OMI, for a day of service and fellowship



The Spiritual Legacy of St. Kateri Tekakwitha

The Tekakwitha Indian Missions derive their name from St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a beacon of faith and resilience for Native Americans. Born in 1656, St. Kateri faced numerous challenges, including the loss of her family to smallpox and the cultural conflicts of her time. Despite these formidable obstacles, she emerged as a figure of strength, embodying a spirit of faith that transcends cultural boundaries. Her life inspires the Oblates' mission, encouraging us to reflect on how faith can serve as a unifying force amid diversity.

When contemplating missionary work, one may ponder its essence: what does it mean to be a missionary? At its core, missionary work is a call to serve, to listen, and to engage with communities on their own terms. It invites us to reflect on the importance of building relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. The Oblates' approach emphasizes the need for cultural competence, recognizing that effective engagement with Indigenous communities requires an appreciation of their histories, traditions, and lived experiences. This reflection on the nature of missionary work calls us to acknowledge the richness of Indigenous cultures and the wisdom they hold.

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

A hallmark of the Tekakwitha Indian Missions is their unwavering commitment to culturally sensitive engagement. The Oblates recognize

that every community possesses its unique challenges and strengths, and their approach reflects a deep understanding of these dynamics. This awareness prompts us to think critically about how we can serve without imposing our beliefs or practices onto others. Instead, the focus is on fostering an environment where faith can flourish authentically and meaningfully for community members.

In contemplating missionary work, we must consider the significance of spirituality within cultural contexts. The Oblates' ministry includes opportunities for catechesis, retreats, and access to the sacraments, all tailored to resonate with the spiritual lives of Indigenous peoples. This integration of faith and culture is essential; it allows community members to express their spirituality in ways that honor their heritage and traditions. Such reflections invite us to consider how we can create spaces that allow for diverse expressions of faith while fostering a shared commitment to the core values of love and compassion.

EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY AS MISSIONARY ENDEAVORS

Missionary work transcends spiritual nourishment; it encompasses education and advocacy as vital components of the mission. The Oblates advocate for social justice, emphasizing the urgent need to address systemic issues affecting Indigenous communities, such as poverty, healthcare access, and educational inequities. Reflecting on these efforts prompts us to think about

our roles as advocates for change within our own communities and beyond.

The importance of education in breaking cycles of poverty cannot be overstated. The Oblates' support for culturally relevant educational initiatives underscores their belief that empowerment begins with knowledge and understanding. This focus encourages us to reflect on how we can contribute to the education and empowerment of those around us, fostering a sense of agency among individuals and communities. By promoting educational programs that respect and integrate Indigenous languages and traditions, the Oblates help ensure that future generations remain connected to their heritage while gaining the skills necessary to navigate contemporary society.

In our thoughts on missionary work, we may also consider how education can serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation. The Oblates are dedicated to supporting initiatives that allow Indigenous voices to be heard and valued, reinforcing the idea that education is not merely a means to an end but a way to honor and uphold cultural identities. This dedication to cultural revitalization invites a broader discussion about the importance of preserving diverse cultural identities in a rapidly changing world.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Another critical aspect of missionary work is community building. The Oblates recognize that strong, resilient communities are the foundation of sustainable change. Their approach prompts us to reflect on how we can contribute to the well-being of our

communities by fostering connections, collaboration, and shared purpose.

The role of youth engagement in these efforts is particularly noteworthy. By providing opportunities for young people to develop leadership skills through mentorship programs and community service projects, the Oblates empower the next generation to embrace their cultural identity and

take active roles in their communities. Such reflections on youth engagement challenge us to consider how we can support and uplift young leaders in our own communities, fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and responsibility.

THE ROLE OF CLUB TEKAKWITHA INDIAN MISSION

Central to the Oblates' mission is the involvement of individuals and supporters through initiatives like the Club Tekakwitha Indian Mission. This club embodies the spirit of collective effort, inviting members to reflect on their roles in supporting the missions financially and through prayer.



Volunteer serving meals with kindness and care



Father Cox, OMI, offering service with devotion

As members engage with the club, they receive updates about the missions' activities and impacts, reinforcing their connection to the vital work being done in the community. This initiative serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for community and collaboration to further the mission of the Oblates. It prompts us to consider how we can participate in collective efforts that uplift those in need, whether through direct involvement or support from afar.

A CALL TO REFLECT AND ENGAGE

The work of the Tekakwitha Indian Missions invites us to reflect on the essence of missionary work, challenging us to recognize its relevance within our own borders. It serves as a reminder that missionary work is about meeting communities where their needs are, embracing the

Moment of worship with St. Kateri Tekakwitha



diversity of human experience, and fostering connections rooted in love and respect.

In the spirit of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, let us contemplate how we can respond to the needs around us. Together, we can create a future where every person is valued, cultural heritage is honored, and communities are empowered to thrive.

For those wishing to deepen their engagement with the Tekakwitha Indian Missions, consider joining the Tekakwitha Indian Missions Club. By staying connected and involved in this vital mission, you can make a meaningful difference. Your participation supports the legacy of St. Kateri and the Missionary Oblates as they continue to inspire and uplift those they serve. Learn more at oblatesusa.org/how-to-give/clubs/club-tekakwitha-indian-mission/

Legacy of Love & Mission: The Oblates and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus



In every era, certain individuals stand out as beacons of love, humility, and dedication to God’s work. Among them, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus shines especially bright. Though she lived a brief, cloistered life, her legacy of “The Little Way” has influenced countless hearts worldwide. Her profound connection to missionary work has inspired many, especially the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, whose commitment to sharing God’s love echoes her spirit. As we delve into the story of St. Thérèse, we see not only her spiritual legacy but also how her life intertwines with the missionary fervor of the Oblates, bringing hope to underserved communities across the globe.

Born on January 2, 1873, in Alençon, France, St. Thérèse was the youngest of nine children in a devout family. Her parents, Louis and Zélie Martin, were later canonized as saints themselves, highlighting the deep faith that permeated Thérèse’s upbringing. From an early age, she exhibited a strong desire to serve God, coupled with a remarkable

understanding of the importance of love and humility. Her childhood, marked by loss and trials, deepened her faith and commitment, laying the foundation for her spiritual journey.

At just 15 years old, Thérèse entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux,

adopting the name “Thérèse of the Child Jesus.” Within the cloistered life, she developed what would become her renowned “Little Way,” a spiritual approach that

emphasizes the beauty of simplicity and childlike trust in God. Rather than striving for grand gestures of holiness, she taught that one could achieve sanctity through small, daily acts of love, performed with great faith and dedication.

Despite never venturing beyond the walls of her convent, St. Thérèse was fervently dedicated to sharing God’s love with the world. She often expressed her longing to be a missionary and prayed for people engaged in missionary work across the globe, demonstrating a profound spiritual connection to those laboring in



St. Thérèse’s parents Louis and Zélie Martin



the field. This heartfelt intercession resonated deeply with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, whose members were committed to serving marginalized communities and spreading the Gospel in often challenging circumstances.

The connection between St. Thérèse and the Oblates runs deep and is essential to understanding her legacy. It was Ovide Charlebois, OMI, the Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Keewatin, who first proposed St. Thérèse as the patron saint of missions. His vision was rooted in her powerful example of love, humility, and dedication. Following her canonization in 1925, the missionary bishops of Canada recognized the potential impact of St. Thérèse’s intercession on their work. They united in a petition to the Pope, advocating for her to be named the patron saint of missions. Their collective appeal culminated in her official proclamation by Pope Pius XI on December 14, 1927.

What makes St. Thérèse’s story even more remarkable is her life’s message. She taught that holiness is not only for the elite but is attainable for everyone. Her “Little Way” emphasizes that one need not embark on a grand journey to effect change; often, it is the small, loving acts performed in our everyday lives that resonate most profoundly. In her own words, she said, “It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters.”

The Oblates have always seen St. Thérèse as an integral part of their mission, embodying the core values of compassion, selflessness, and dedication to God’s work. Their commitment to St. Thérèse extends beyond

her canonization; they have continually sought to foster her legacy through prayer, education, and service, further solidifying her connection to the global missionary effort. Their work in over 70 countries demonstrates a tangible manifestation of her spirit, as they strive to bring hope, healing, and faith to diverse communities. The Oblates are living witnesses to her teachings, actively engaging in the mission fields she once longed to reach.

In honoring St. Thérèse, let us also acknowledge the vital role of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in carrying forward her mission. They remind us that the essence of mission lies not only in traveling to far-off places but also in nurturing a spirit of compassion and love in our everyday lives. The image of St. Thérèse serves as a powerful reminder of the deep bond between her life and the mission of the Oblates.

As we celebrate St. Thérèse’s legacy, let us reflect on how we can embody her spirit of love and compassion in our own lives. Whether through prayer, acts of kindness, or support for missionary efforts, we all have the opportunity to participate in the ongoing mission of Christ. Together, through prayer and action, we can contribute to the ongoing legacy of St. Thérèse and the vital work of the Oblates, ensuring that her spirit continues to inspire future generations. May we draw strength from St. Thérèse’s example and embrace our own call to serve, recognizing that we are all part of the same great mission to share God’s love with the world. †



St. Thérèse’s presence at the Oblate office



Adapting to a Changing World: The Oblate Academy's Virtual Outreach for Families

In an increasingly fast-paced and digitally connected world, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have found innovative ways to stay true to their mission while meeting the needs of today's families. Through the Oblate Academy, the Oblates provide families with meaningful and accessible resources that guide the spiritual development of children, ensuring that the next generation can grow in faith, virtue, and service to others.

The Oblate Academy's journey began in April 2020, during the global lockdown, when children could no longer attend their traditional formation classes. The world was uncertain about how long the lockdowns would last, and parents, many of whom were donors, urgently needed resources to continue their children's Catholic formation. It was in this moment of need that the first email was sent. This was the culmination of a concept first developed in 2013 by two direct marketing team members in San Antonio, Texas, who had begun gathering content and shaping the vision. The pandemic's sudden onset gave the Academy an unexpected launch, marking the beginning of a new way for families to stay spiritually connected.

In 2024, the Oblate Academy expanded its curriculum to include summer formation, a new initiative that allows the program to run year-round.

This ensures that families continue to have access to age-appropriate spiritual formation for their children, even during the typically slower summer months when traditional faith programs pause. By offering year-round engagement, the Oblates help families remain connected to their spiritual journey and continue teaching their children about faith, no matter the season.

Each month, the Academy provides resources centered on a different saint and the Christian virtue they exemplified. These resources are designed for children ages 3-10 and include activity sheets, coloring pages, teaching tips, and practical suggestions for how to incorporate the month's virtue into everyday life. The aim is to make the stories of the saints accessible and engaging, so that parents and caregivers can share them meaningfully with young children. The saints serve as timeless role models of virtues such as kindness, courage, humility, and faith, and the Academy's materials help bring these qualities to life in fun, practical ways.

The introduction of summer formation in 2024 ensures that the momentum built during the school year continues through the summer. It provides families with a seamless transition between seasons, avoiding gaps in religious education and keeping faith vibrant at home. With year-round

resources, the Academy helps families remain engaged, supporting the ongoing spiritual development of children without interruption.

The flexibility of the Oblate Academy is one of its most valuable features. Many families juggle work, school, and other commitments, leaving little time for extra activities. Parents, grandparents, and caregivers can engage with the Academy's resources at their own pace, fitting them into their schedules without feeling overwhelmed. The program's digital nature makes it highly convenient, allowing families to access materials from home and download them as needed. Whether it's a quick activity sheet before bed or a more in-depth lesson on a saint and virtue, families can use the resources in whatever way suits their lifestyle.

This flexibility is especially crucial for families who are physically distant from local faith communities or who lack access to traditional church-based religious education programs. The Oblate Academy bridges this gap by offering accessible online resources, allowing families to continue their faith formation at home. With this digital outreach, the Oblates can serve families across the country and around the world, sharing their mission of education and evangelization with anyone who has an internet connection.

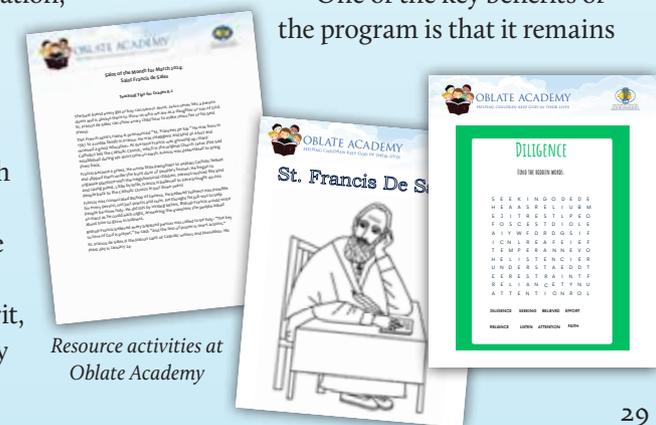
In addition to spiritual formation, the Oblate Academy helps families teach the importance of service and compassion. The saints provide numerous examples of living out one's faith through action—whether it's helping the poor, the sick, or the marginalized. The Academy emphasizes this missionary spirit, encouraging families to not only

learn about the virtues of the saints but to live them out in daily life. By engaging in acts of kindness or service, families learn to practice the virtues in ways that have a positive impact on their communities.

The Oblate Academy also reflects the broader mission of the Oblates, who are dedicated to evangelization and serving others. While the Oblates are renowned for their work in mission fields around the world, they are equally committed to supporting families in the home. Understanding that the foundation of the Church lies in the domestic church, the Academy helps parents and caregivers take an active role in raising children rooted in faith and virtue.

The Oblates' commitment to service, education, and evangelization is evident in the Academy's approach, which is expanding to include a standalone website. This site will serve as a one-stop shop for a variety of resources, including content on the virtues, saints, activity sheets, prayers, the Order of the Mass, how to pray the rosary, Bible stories, and more. Future additions will include the history of the Oblates and bios of Oblate missionaries, especially the Fathers of Courage who have worked tirelessly serving the poor and most abandoned throughout the world, as well as daily affirmations for children.

One of the key benefits of the program is that it remains



Resource activities at Oblate Academy



free to the public, available via the website and promoted through Facebook ads that encourage parents to sign up and receive the emails. These efforts have yielded surprisingly positive results, with many families opting into the program and benefiting from its resources.

The future of the Oblate Academy holds great promise, as it continues to

adapt to the needs of families today while remaining grounded in the mission of the Oblates. By integrating a year-round approach to faith formation, they help families nurture spiritual growth, strengthen their own faith, and serve others. In a world that is constantly changing, the Oblate Academy provides a reliable and meaningful way for families to live out their faith, bringing the message of the Gospel to homes around the world. †

Embracing the Digital Age: The Launch of Oblate Studio in San Antonio



Behind the scenes at the new Oblate Studio

In an increasingly connected world, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have embraced a new chapter in their mission to reach people wherever they are. The opening of the Oblate Studio in San Antonio, Texas, marks a bold step forward in using modern technology to share the Oblates' spiritual messages, resources, and programs with a global audience.

The vision for the studio was clear: create a space where technology can bridge the gap between the Oblates and those seeking spiritual guidance, education, and community. By launching this cutting-

edge facility, the Oblates now have the tools to expand their outreach beyond traditional boundaries, making their message accessible to people at home, on their phones, or wherever they may be.

As the Oblates reflect on this exciting development, the next steps are already in motion. The Oblate Studio will continue to grow its digital offerings, incorporating live-streamed events, online courses, and interactive programs to invite participation from across the globe. With the power of multimedia and the internet, the Oblates have the opportunity to create a virtual space where people can engage with their faith, learn, and grow in new and innovative ways.

The Oblate Studio is more than just a physical space; it represents the Missionary Oblates' commitment to meeting people where they are and providing an accessible, virtual environment for spiritual enrichment. With continued innovation, the possibilities for connecting and nurturing a global community of faith are limitless. †

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WE TRULY APPRECIATE your generous support of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and our service to the poor. Are you interested in continuing this support for years or generations to come? You can when you leave a legacy to help the Missionary Oblates spread the Good News of Jesus Christ by feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and giving shelter to the homeless here at home and around the world.

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To help you better understand your legacy options, the Missionary Oblates have put together a simple brochure explaining various gift giving opportunities.

To receive your free, *Leave a Legacy with Lasting Impact* brochure, simply contact Kim Weilmuenster at 1-800-233-6264 or email charitablegifts@oblatesusa.org.



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our harvest, if we do
not give up.”

— GALATIANS 6:9



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