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Newsletter of the U.S. Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate



**Statue of St. Eugene de
Mazenod, Brownsville, TX.
(see p. 16)**

The Jubilee Year continues.....

Twenty Oblate Bishops renew their call to mission during visit to Rome

By Fr. Raymond M. Mwangala, OMI

As the Oblates of Mary Immaculate celebrate the congregation's 200th anniversary, 20 missionary Oblate bishops from 12 countries gathered in Rome to renew their call to serve as "Pilgrims of Hope in Communion." There are currently a total of around 50 Oblate bishops, several of whom are retired. The oldest Oblate in the world is retired Bishop Daniel Verstraete, OMI, who recently celebrated his 102nd birthday. Belgian born, he is the Bishop Emeritus of Klerksdorp in South Africa.

The theme of the meeting, Oblate bishops as *Pilgrims of Hope in Communion*, reflected the

theme adopted by the last General Chapter in 2022.

At the invitation of the Superior General, Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, OMI, the bishops gathered in Rome to celebrate the jubilee and reflect on their double vocation, as members of the congregation and as bishops, so as to strengthen the bonds of communion with the congregation.

The bishops began their reflections by focusing on the life of the institute's founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, who was himself was a bishop. They were

Oblate Bishops: PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION



invited to consider how they themselves are living the charism. Bishop Neil Frank, OMI, of Mariannhill Diocese, South Africa, led this reflection.

Other presentations included interventions on episcopal ministry in three different contexts—in a situation of war by Bishop Radoslaw Zmitrowicz, OMI, Auxiliary Bishop of Kamieniec-Podolski, Ukraine; in the context of secularism by Bishop Pierre-Olivier Tremblay, OMI, Bishop of Hearst-Moosonee, Ontario, Canada; and in the context of a minority community by Archbishop Bejoy D'Cruze, OMI, of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Bishop Guillermo Steckling, OMI, former Superior General and Bishop Emeritus of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, gave the final reflection, focusing on the contribution Oblate bishops make to the larger charismatic family.

In his closing remarks to the meeting, the current Superior General, Fr. Rois Alonso, thanked the bishops for their presence at the meeting and for their witness to the charism. He reminded them that even as diocesan bishops, they remain members of the congregation and have the

obligation to witness to the charism, giving preference to the poor and those on the margins in the ministry. He concluded his remarks by sharing with them his hope that they may be prophets, missionaries, mystics, and saints.

During their time in Rome, the bishops participated in the Wednesday General Audience with Pope Leo XIV and had the opportunity to greet him.

Reflecting on the experience of the meeting, Bishop Mark Edwards, of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga, Australia, remarked that the meeting reminded him of the vast expanse of the Oblate congregation's outreach. On the personal level, he said, "the meeting served as an opportunity for renewal in the desire of give of my best in my ministry."

The meeting concluded with the festive celebration of the Mass on May 21, the feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod, in the chapel of the General House, in the company of the community and of the Oblates living in other communities around Rome. Vaticannews.va

Celebrations of the Oblates' 200th Jubilee year continue at OMI ministry sites throughout the world.

EAGLE PASS, TEXAS: On February 17th, 2026, the Our Lady of Refuge Parish community in Eagle Pass, TX, installed the Stations of the Cross to celebrate the jubilee year. The pastor at that time, Fr. Lawrence Mariasoosai, OMI, blessed the Stations at a ceremony that was attended by Oblate Associates and parishioners.



Celebrating where we were born.... Aix-en-Provence and Marseille

From July 10th to 12th, 2026, celebrations were held in Aix-en-Provence and Marseille (France) to mark the 200th anniversary of the approval by Pope Leo XII of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and its Constitutions.

In one of his homilies, the Superior General reminded those present that this anniversary

is about rediscovering who we are today. He challenged us to live out our shared mission with fresh energy: "May we understand well what we are! As children of Mary Immaculate, may we launch ourselves with audacity, leaving nothing undared in carrying the Gospel and announcing the Kingdom to the most abandoned." (OMI World on Facebook)



Pilgrims surround the final resting place of St. Eugene de Mazenod in the Cathedral he built in Marseille.



ABOVE: Dedication on the statue of Mary consoling her suffering Son:

To the missionaries who departed from this high place to announce the good news of Jesus Christ to our brothers (and sisters), the people of the entire world.

The statue stands in front of the Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde, built during the episcopacy of St. Eugene de Mazenod, overlooking the Mediterranean and Marseille. As the missionaries departed, they would look upon the statue of Mary on the steeple of the church and sing the "Salve Regina".



Oblates and friends pause for prayer in front of the Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde, overlooking the city of Marseille and the waters of the Mediterranean whence the first Oblate missionaries began their journeys to distant lands. (See dedication on the statue on the previous page.)



During their Jubilee pilgrimage to the Oblates' holy sites, a necessary stop was at the chapel of the former Carmelite monastery where St. Eugene and his first companions gathered on January 25, 1816, as the "Missionaires de Provence," later to become the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1826.

Formation News

Preparing men for Oblate ministry

Oblates profess first vows ... and new novices take their place



l-r: Bros. Jose Minz, Minh Lam, Luis Gonzalez, Frs. Salvador Gonzalez, David Ullrich, Ray Cook, Bros. Carlos Martinez, Comfort Mwanza and Alfred Mutale Maango.

Professing vows...

On May 29, 2026, the feast of the Oblate Apostle of Lesotho, Blessed Joseph Gerard, six young men completed their novitiate formation and pronounced their first vows as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

The US Provincial, Fr. Ray Cook, OMI, presided at the Mass at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, IL. Besides the Novice Master, Fr. Salvador Gonzalez and his associate, Fr. David Ullrich, over a dozen Oblates concelebrated and many friends and relatives of the newly professed were present.

Beginning their new lives as professed Oblates are Brothers Luis Gonzalez (US Province – Mexico); Minh Lam (US Province – USA); Alfred Mutale Maango (Delegation of Zambia); Carlos Martinez (US Province – Mexico); Jose Minz (Province of India); Comfort Mwanza (Delegation of Zambia).

After a summer experiencing life at several ministry sites in the United States, the six young Oblates began their studies at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX, in August.

I-r: Novice Bro. JC (José Carlos) Dairo, Frs. David Ullrich & Salvador Gonzalez, Novice Bro. Francis Adams and Fr. Marcin Serwin.

Joining the family...

During a Rite of Reception, two new novices began their novitiate year on June 12, 2026, feast of the Oblate Martyr, Blessed Joseph Cebula, at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in Godfrey, IL.

The Vicar Provincial of the Assumption Province (Canada), Fr. Marcin Serwin, OMI, and Novice Master, Fr. Salvador Gonzalez, OMI, received Brothers Francis Adams (US Province) and JC (José Carlos) Dairo (Canada, Assumption Province) into their novitiate year of formation. Many area Oblates joined in prayer and support as these men entered



into this important stage of their vocational and formational journey.

For 50 weeks, these men will create community with the novitiate staff while attending classes on Oblate life and history, the Oblate Constitutions and Rules, and other lessons

that will aid their continued discernment to missionary religious life.

The novices will also engage in ministry in the Godfrey, Alton and St. Louis areas to help shape their life perspective of outreach to the faithful.

Two more newly professed...

On August 1, eight young men pronounced their first vows as Oblates in Guatemala City where they had just completed their year of novitiate. Among them were two members of the US Province, Brothers Julián Cruz and Víctor Izquierdo, originally from Tijuana, BC, Mexico.

Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI, Treasurer of the US Province and Provincial Councilor, received the vows of Bros. Julián and Victor. Also concelebrating at the Mass of Profession was Fr. Jesse Esqueda, OMI, Director of the pre-novitiate in Tijuana.

Bro. Victor will pursue his theological studies in Mexico City and Bro. Julián, in São Paulo, Brazil.



I-r: Oblates Jesse Esqueda, Julián Cruz, Víctor Izquierdo and Antonio Ponce

Major steps for Bros. Floriberto and Fulgencio in Mexico

Brother Floriberto Gonzalez, OMI, a member of the US Province studying in Mexico City, recently had two major events in his journey toward the priesthood and Oblate ministry. On March 15, Fr. Ray Cook, US Provincial, received Bro. Floriberto's perpetual vows at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in the Mexican capital. Two and a half months later, on May 31, US Treasurer/Councilor Fr. Antonio Ponce was in attendance as Bro. Floriberto, along with two other young Oblates from the Mexican Province, was ordained to the Order of Deacon at Cristo Salvador y Señor Parish, in Iztapalapa, Mexico City. Floriberto will be spending a period of internship as a deacon at the US Oblate parish in Ensenada, BC, Mexico.



Also, a day before the diaconate ordination, Fr. Antonio received the renewal of vows of Scholastic Bro. Fulgencio Ochoa at the scholasticate in Mexico City. After spending one year at the scholasticate in Mexico City, Bro. Fulgencio traveled to Rome, Italy, to join the Oblate International Scholasticate to continue his theological studies.



Preparing for perpetual vows "in the steps of the Founder"



In July 2026, two Oblate seminarians from the Blessed Mario Borzaga community in San Antonio had the privilege of walking in the footsteps of St. Eugene de Mazenod during a two-week session of preparation for perpetual vows. Brothers Pablo Henning (US Province) and Etienne Kabemba (Notre Dame du Cap Province in Canada) [2nd and 5th from the right in the picture] were participants in the program which took place at the Oblates' foundation house in Aix en Provence, France. It was

there that St. Eugene and his first companions began community life on January 25, 1816.

There were also young Oblates from scholasticates in Poland, Australia, Vermicino (Italy) and Rome.

This personal journey enabled them to deepen their vocational discernment, better discover the richness of our Founder's charism, and strengthen their bond with the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The

experience also fostered authentic fraternal life, nurtured by sharing, prayer, and communion.

In his closing homily, Fr. Mario Brandi, OMI, from the staff in Aix emphasized that the scholastics are the good soil in which God sows the seeds of vocation, so that—in due time—they may bear abundant fruit in the service of the Church as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. (from omiworld.com)



Congratulations to Francis Adams, the first Oblate seminarian to graduate from the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio since the pre-novitiate moved to that city. A few weeks later, Francis began his novitiate year in Godfrey, IL.

Left: Pre-novitiate Director, Fr. Abraham Chimese, OMI, and Francis Adams.

Formation: a life-long process

Annual “Under 10” Meeting

By Fr. Victor Patricio, OMI

From June 2 to 5, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate who are within their first 10 years of perpetual vows gathered at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. The annual meeting served as a dedicated time for deepening fraternity, engaging in ongoing formation, and building stronger connections among the group. Out of the 12 eligible members serving throughout the United States, nine were able to attend this year's event.

Cont. on p. 14



Rear, l-r: Vincent Adaikalasamy, Ray Cook, Emmanuel Mulenga, Abraham Chimese, Antonio Ponce. Front, l-r: Elvis Mwamba, Basil Obieje, Henry Zayamoe, Steven Montez, Mateusz Garstecki, Solomon Gaja, Victor Patricio.

GHANA/US PROVINCE partnership enters new phase

The Oblate community in Ghana has been officially become an administrative unit of the United States Province. The decision is the fruit of a two-year discernment process within the OMI Central Government in Rome and the provincial administration of the US Province.

The Mission of Ghana was established on May 13, 2021, by the then Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, as a Mission under the General Administration. Four Oblates are currently assigned to the Mission and work at Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine and an adjacent parish, in the Diocese of Ho.

In 2024, the Superior General, Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, requested the US Province to assume financial responsibility for the Mission of Ghana. The Province accepted this responsibility and began a formal relationship with the Mission, with several members of the Province visiting Ghana over the years. And in October 2025, Fr. General invited the US Province to begin a discernment process about assuming responsibility for the Mission of Ghana.

Having consulted with members of the province, Fr. Raymond Cook, the US Provincial, informed the Superior General in May 2026 that the US



Province was ready and willing to assume responsibility for the Oblate community in Ghana. **Communique OMI 158**

This partnership with the Oblates in Ghana is one more way that the Oblates of the United States can experience brotherly ties with the Oblates in Africa. For over 40 years, we have come to know and love our brothers in Zambia, ever since Oblates from the former Southern Province began a very fruitful ministry there in 1984.

Front, l-r: Novice Pierre Yao Alagnon, Pre-novices Roger Ali Kouma & Osword Etse Agbanu, Novice Marcel Bendarama, Oblate Bro. Bruce Joachim Mwenda; Rear, l-r Oblate Frs. Daniel Aliou Mane, Hyacinth Onukogu Nwaneri, Raymond Cook, Antonio Ponce and Jean Baptiste Ablam Apouvi



Ghana visit reveals a mission alive with faith and fraternity

A pastoral visit highlights the grace, welcome, and growing promise of the Oblate mission in Ghana.

Father Ray Cook, OMI, returned from a recent pastoral visit to Ghana with gratitude for a mission marked by warmth, prayer, and missionary energy. Alongside Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI, he encountered Oblates whose welcome was more than hospitality; it was a visible sign of brotherhood and shared purpose.

From meals shared in community to parish celebrations, conversations with local Church leaders, and visits to schools and village communities, the trip offered a vivid glimpse at how the Gospel is being lived among the people served by the Oblates in Ghana.

"I thank my God every time I remember you...because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."—
Philippians 1:3-5

Those words from Saint Paul captured the spirit of the visit. Gratitude was everywhere: in the welcome at the airport, in prayer with the brothers, in the presentation of food as a sign of communion, and in the joyful witness of communities gathered around the Eucharist.

Mary at the Heart of the Mission

One theme emerged with particular clarity: Mary leads people to Christ. In conversation with Bishop Emmanuel Kofi Fianu, SVD, the local ordinary of the diocese of Ho, Fr. Ray took note of why the Oblates were asked to assume responsibility of

Cont. on p. 12, Ghana





Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto. Bishop Emmanuel (*left*) said, “I wanted a religious order that would promote a devotion to Mary in this region of Ghana.” He felt that the Oblates understand the importance of promoting faith in Christ by fostering devotion to Mary.

That mission is lived not only at the grotto, but also through preaching, retreats, parish ministry, and the daily witness of Oblates who help others encounter Jesus through Mary’s loving presence. At the same time, the grotto remains a place of prayer and pilgrimage, calling for continued care so that all who come may be welcomed with dignity and reverence.

The visit also revealed a mission growing in hope. The admission of two men to the prenovitiate and two men to the novitiate offered a powerful sign that the Oblate charism continues to inspire new vocations. (Pierre Yao Alagnon and Marcel Bendarama of Togo were admitted to the novitiate in Cameroon. Roger Ali Kouma of Togo and

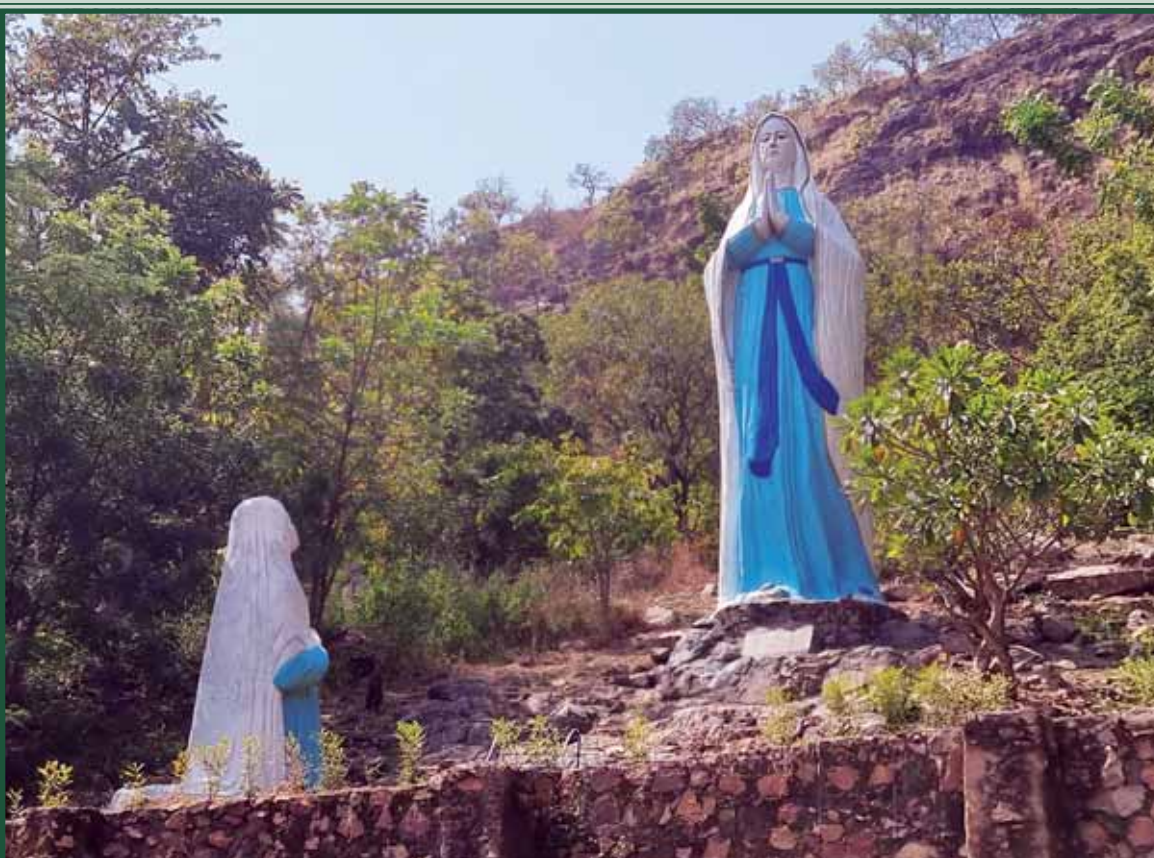
Osword Etse Agbanu of Ghana were admitted to the pre-novitiate in Cameroon).

Young people are also central to the future of the mission. With the bishop’s blessing, two young adults from Oblate ministries in Ghana may join young people from Oblate parishes in the United States at World Youth Day next summer in Korea. Such encounters can deepen faith, build friendships, and strengthen the sense of belonging to one Oblate family.

One Province, One Mission

As the Ghana District is formally welcomed into the life of the United States Province, the moment is more than administrative. It is an invitation to deeper communion, broader missionary imagination, and shared responsibility for the Gospel. The Oblates in Ghana are not alone; the wider Province walks with them in prayer, fraternity, and mission.

In Ghana, the Oblate mission is alive with promise: rooted in community, centered on Mary, attentive to young people, and open to the future. May Mary Immaculate continue to accompany the brothers and all those they serve. RC



The Oblates in Ghana minister at the Grotto Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, at Agbenoxoe. Pilgrims can see the 8-meter statue of Our Lady for two or three kilometers before they arrive at their destination.



Top left: Fr. Provincial has found a new friend!
Center, l-r: Bro. Bruce, Frs. Daniel, Ray, Hyacinth, Antonio, and Jean
Top right: Fr. Antonio's friend wants in the photo.
Center left: As part of the local custom, Fr. Ray receives a basket of food from parishioners.



Joy in Zambia

On April 19, the delegation of Zambia had the joy of witnessing the perpetual vows of Bro. Marcario Mumba, OMI. Less than a month later, on May 16, he was ordained to the Order of Deacon by Archbishop Gian Luca Perici, Apostolic Nunzio.



Cont. from p. 9, "Under 10"

The gathering's featured presenter was Fr. Bryan Silva, OMI, a professor at the Oblate School of Theology (OST). Holding a doctorate in clinical psychology, Fr. Silva brought his extensive expertise in pastoral counseling, clergy formation, and building healthy communities to the sessions. His presentations offered valuable insights into navigating early ministry challenges and fostering resilient, supportive community lives.

Spiritual life was at the heart of the four-day event. In keeping with a cherished tradition of

the "Under 10" gathering, the opening Mass was celebrated by the group's most recently ordained priest. This year, Fr. Henry Zayamoe presided over the liturgy, while Fr. Mateusz Garstecki delivered the homily.

The importance of this young demographic to the wider province was underscored by the presence of the US Provincial Administration, Frs. Ray Cook (Provincial); Emmanuel Mulenga (Vicar Provincial), and Antonio Ponce, (Treasurer). They joined the sessions to offer their encouragement, listen to the experiences of the younger

Oblates, and reinforce the province's commitment to their ongoing growth.

Beyond the chapel and lecture halls, the participants enjoyed shared moments of leisure aimed at strengthening their personal bonds. On one of the evenings, the group headed into downtown Belleville for a community dinner, followed by a lively night of bowling. These informal moments provided a relaxed environment for laughter, storytelling, and building the lifelong friendships essential to sustaining their shared missionary vocation.

The Kusenberger Chair of Oblate Studies welcomes new leadership

Excerpts from Press Release by

Bianca Soto

Oblate School of Theology (OST) has named Fr. Alberto Ruiz González, OMI, as the new holder of the Kusenberger Chair of Oblate Studies, succeeding Fr. Frank Santucci, OMI. The appointment was commemorated with a chair transfer luncheon on May 8, 2026, at the OST campus in San Antonio, attended by faculty, administrators, and the Kusenberger family.

Fr. Ruiz was born in Spain in 1980 and pronounced his first vows as an Oblate in 2000. Ordained a priest in 2007, he is a member of the Mediterranean



Oblate Frs. Louis Studer, OST President; Alberto Ruiz, Kusenberger Chair; Frank Santucci, Superior of OMI General House, Rome.

Province and has co-authored a book on Oblate Martyrs with Fr. Fabio Ciardi, OMI.

The establishment of the Kusenberger Chair began in 2016, on the 200th anniversary of the foundation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, when the first step was taken to establish an institution dedicated to the study of the charism, life, spirituality, and mission of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Through the vision and dedication of former OST presidents Fr.

Ron Rolheiser, OMI, and Fr. Billy Morell, OMI, the idea was presented to Deacon Robert and Ruth Kusenberger, HOMI, who gave a generous endowment to make the Chair possible. In 2017, on the final day of the bicentenary celebrations in Rome, the Kusenberger Chair of Oblate Studies was inaugurated.

“This generous gift of Bob and Ruth Kusenberger made it possible for the Oblate charism to be shared, deepened, and enhanced through classes and studies at OST,” said OST President Fr. Louis Studer, OMI. “The Oblate Charism, the gift of the Oblate Congregation to the life and mission of the Church, lies at the heart and purpose of OST.”

Fr. Ruiz González officially began his new role on July 1, 2026. As the new Chair holder, he hopes to explore how the Oblate charism’s global presence can be better understood through unique regional perspectives. He also seeks to examine certain Oblate figures and highlight

models who exemplify specific virtues, with the goal of presenting concrete examples that inspire others to imitate them.

Fr. Ruiz González shares, “I will try my best to continue nurturing and developing this important work for the good of Oblate School of Theology and our congregation. I will strive to reciprocate by helping people deepen their faith through the Oblate Studies Chair, and I hope to live up to these expectations with the grace of God.”

Oblate School of Theology expresses deep gratitude to Fr. Santucci for successfully pioneering the Kusenberger Chair of Oblate Studies and growing this effort into what it is today. Fr. Santucci’s passionate service in teaching and preaching about the life and ministry of St. Eugène de Mazenod has laid a firm, lasting foundation for this Chair to continue with hope and confidence. Fr. Santucci now serves as the Superior of the Oblate General House in Rome.

Oblate carries the JPIC message abroad

In November 2022, the Vatican published guidelines for Catholic organizations that invest their funds in various public entities. Entitled *Mensuram Bonam* (tr: “Good Measure”), the guidelines provide advice on investing in ways that promote peace, justice and care of creation.

In May of this year, Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI, Director of the US Province's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office, was a speaker at a meeting in the Diocese of Bilbao, Spain, entitled *Global Dialogue on Faith and Finance*.

The two-day conference brought together nearly 70 diocesan treasurers, financial officers from religious congregations, and professionals in the field of ethical finance.

Cont. p. 16, JPIC



r-l: Fr. Seamus Finn and Bishop Joseba Segura.

Cont. from p. 15, JPIC

The event, held at Deusto Business School and the Diocesan Institute of Theology and Pastoral Studies, addressed a question that, according to the Bishop of Bilbao, Joseba Segura, “has been circulating for years regarding the financial management of many Church institutions :Are we investing in a way that is consistent with what we preach?”

Fr. Séamus, who helped write the *Mensuram Bonam* document, has almost fifty years of experience in faith-consistent investing in the United States, spoke of some of the practical and pastoral dimensions of the topic.

He stated that the key to *Mensuram Bonam* lies

in awakening a sense of responsibility: "If you own shares in a company—Exxon, Iberdrola, any company—as an owner you have a responsibility. The document seeks to awaken people to that awareness .”

He also emphasized the importance of institutional transparency as a condition for credibility: “ People who support the Church with their donations must be able to understand that their money is being used responsibly .” He also expressed optimism regarding the progress made by the financial sector: “Many money managers have taken the document seriously because their clients are asking for it .” (OMI JPIC)

Living the Gospel in Brownsville and Matamoros

“ I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... (Matthew 25:35)

By Fr. Nick Harding, OMI

During Advent 2022, as usual at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Brownsville, TX, we celebrated the Posadas for 9 days before Christmas. The Posadas ritual symbolically represents Mary

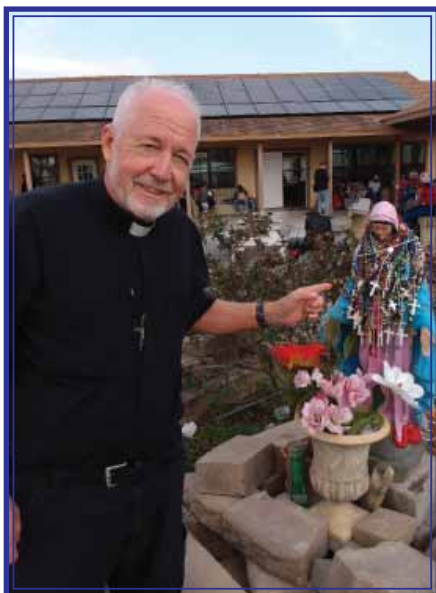
and Joseph seeking lodging for the birth of the Child Jesus. Shortly after that miraculous birth, the Holy Family became refugees in Egypt.

Little did we know at the beginning on December 23, 2022, our parish gym would be full of current-day migrant families (mostly refugees from Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Haiti). Unusually cold weather descended upon the Rio Grande Valley and on the night of December 23, we heard a pregnant woman and

her husband José shouting for help at the back of the rectory. Unbeknownst to us, the nearby bus terminal had begun a policy of clearing out all people at 10 pm.

This was the beginning of a new use for our gym. The number of refugees grew and as the word spread, our parishioners spontaneously brought food, clothing, blankets, toys, etc. Eventually, on an average night, we had more than 300 persons, women and children in the gym, men outside in tents. Many, perhaps most, had had traumatic experiences on their journey (especially, the Darién Gap, a remote 66-miles





Fr. Nick Harding, OMI

stretch of roadless rainforest, mountains, and swamp on the border between Panama and Colombia, as well as the drug cartels in Mexico). So they were grateful and felt safe at the Cathedral property.

Almost all had crossed legally and were anxious to get to their destination. Sometimes, they would seek temporary employment in the Valley to pay for their bus tickets. The diocese, through Sister Norma Pimental of Catholic Charities, came to our rescue with cots, blankets etc.

As of January 2025, the flow of people stopped and there has been no need to help migrants in Brownsville but there are some stuck across the border in Matamoros that we still visit.

We go across to Matamoros every 2 weeks to *Casa Indigentes* (for homeless elderly) and *Casa Migrantes*. We provide food, diapers, blankets, clothes and spiritual help (the Good News). People share the stories of

why they left their countries, the difficulties in making the journey (many kidnapped and victims of extortion).

One refugee told us, "Your visits help me to know God still loves us and we should have hope." Another stated, "Because of you, I feel happy. I know I have Jesus in my heart and I still have the dignity of a child of God." A twelve year old boy recounted how he was helpless to stop the rape of his mother.

Previously we would also visit thousands in makeshift tents on the southern side of the Rio Bravo/Grande. However, the Mexican army cleared them out since January 2025.

Cover photo: Statue of our Oblate Founder, in honor of the many Oblates who brought the Gospel to the poor along the border in and around Brownsville, TX. Located near the Gateway International Bridge that leads to Matamoros, Mexico (see photo on the left).

PRESENTED TO THE CITY OF BROWNSVILLE
JUNE 7 1959
BY

ORDER OF ALHAMBRA**
ALVA CARAVAN No. 91

Commemorating the landing of the first Missionaries of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas on Dec. 2, 1849.

Founder
Bishop Charles Joseph Eugene De Mazenod
Aug. 1, 1782 – May 21, 1861



Homes made of canvas and netting

**The Order of Alhambra Alva Caravan No. 91 is a charitable and fraternal Catholic organization based in Brownsville, Texas. Dedicated to assisting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the caravan actively supports special education programs, provides academic scholarships, and honors local vocational training partners.



Our Missionary from afar...

Fr. Hyacinth Onukogu Nwaneri, OMI

Ed. Note: With this issue of our OMIUSA Newsletter, we introduce the man chosen to lead the establishment of the Oblates in Ghana, Fr. Hyacinth Nwaneri, OMI. In subsequent issues, we hope to introduce the other Oblate missionaries in that country.

Fr. Hyacinth Onukogu Nwaneri will soon celebrate his 60th birthday. Born in Amuzi Ahiara Nbaise, Nigeria, a town known for its grand celebration each year of the feast of St. Jude, the future Oblate missionary attended elementary and secondary schools in his hometown. Upon graduation from secondary school in 1986, he worked as a civil servant in the local government for five years.

The Oblate Delegation of Nigeria is attached to the Province of Cameroon, and it was in Nigeria that he began his formation journey. He left his homeland for the pre-novitiate in Cameroon in 1991 and a year later, entered the novitiate in Ngaoundere where he pronounced his first vows in 1993. After his three years of philosophy at the scholasticate in Yaounde, Cameroon, he had a year of internship at Mary, Mother of God Parish in Figuil, Cameroon. Theology studies

were at the scholasticate in Maroua; he pronounced his final vows in 1999 and in 2001, he was ordained to the priesthood.

It is a noteworthy blessing that his homeland of Nigeria has been a fertile source of Oblate vocations. The 2026 General Statistics indicated 40 scholastics, most of them studying in Cameroon.

His first assignment as a young priest was at a parish in Nigeria (2001-2007) and during those years, he also served as superior of the Nigeria Mission.

In 2007, he returned to Cameroon where he served as parish priest at Holy Family Parish in Garoua (2007-2015) and St. Peter's Parish (2015-2022). In 2015, he was also asked to serve as Vicar Provincial of the Province of Cameroon.

In 2022, he answered the call of the Congregation to found and lead a new mission in Ghana. On March 25 of that year, Fr. Hyacinth was installed as the first superior of the new Mission of Ghana. At a Mass presided by Bishop Emmanuel Kofi Fianu, SVD, in the presence of many



parishioners and pilgrims from Accra, Togo and neighboring towns, the new superior recited the profession of faith and took the oath of office. It was a joyful event for the faithful who had never witnessed such an event. After communion, the new Oblate community consecrated their mission to the Blessed Virgin Mary. (JFA)



THE RAM'S CORNER

Fr. Stephen Conserva, OMI



Ed. Note: Fr. Steve Conserva has been a professed Oblate since 1968 and a priest since 1974.

I trace the roots of my vocation to our large Oblate parish in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, and my contact with the dedicated Oblate priests and Brothers who served there. I felt the strong pull to leave my close-knit family and the familiar, somewhat insular New England of my childhood, to join other Catholic boys and young men from different parts of the country in the High School and College program of the minor seminary in New York. This was my first taste of a wider experience of the world, and the foundation and strengthening of a missionary identity and call.

In my years of Oblate formation, the call led me much farther afield, first to Rome and preparation for the priesthood and, after Ordination and some years of pastoral experience, to Canada for graduate studies in theology.

At that time, it seemed to me and my superiors that I was destined to teach in our major seminary in Washington, D.C. However, even in my years

of study and teaching, I was strongly drawn to and heavily involved in regular weekend pastoral work, in preaching and in the regular confessional and spiritual direction ministry of the Oblates, at the nearby National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. Despite initial indications, then, it was to pastoral work that the greater part of the rest of my Oblate life would be dedicated.

This work began in the Bible Belt of rural north Florida, as pastor of two small, but very active, Catholic communities and a state prison. Here, I was welcomed by some wonderful people of southern culture and customs which had been unfamiliar to me.

There followed pastoral assignments in southern Florida, first to one of the three historically African American Catholic parishes in the inner city of the Archdiocese of Miami which were entrusted to our Missionary Oblates. Then, after a term as Novice Director in Godfrey, Illinois, I was assigned to a large multi-lingual community, north of the city of Miami. In each of these

assignments, I was happy to serve with people of widely diverse cultures and languages.

I was called from the east to the west coast and the pastorate of another large multi-cultural community, one of three contiguous mega-parishes in the northern San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles.

After a term in provincial leadership, with particular responsibility for the support of our Oblate missions, from Tijuana, Mexico, in the south, to Alaska in the north, I returned to my native New England, after nearly fifty years, and now collaborate in the work of preaching, confessions and spiritual direction at the inner-city Shrine of St. Joseph the Worker in Lowell, Massachusetts.

I am grateful, as I reflect on my life as a missionary Oblate. Our Lord promised that those who leave the familiar—family and home—for Him and the Gospel—would receive many times as many family, friends and homes. I confess that that this promise has been fulfilled richly for me.

A Holy Week pilgrimage of love...

Pre-novices and Affiliates bring the Good News to the poor.....

by Fr. Jesse Esqueda, OMI

Last Holy Week, our pre-novices from Tijuana and seven other young adults set out on a life-changing missionary journey to the rural regions of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz in Mexico. With the generous support of Oblate Partners and Serving Hands, these young missionaries, accompanied by Oblate Fr. Jesse Esqueda, were able to bring the presence of Christ to some of the poorest and most isolated communities, places where there are no resident priests and where the sacraments are a rare gift.

After flying into Mexico City, they joined other missionaries from the Mexican province and continued on an exhausting 15-hour bus ride, climbing into remote mountainous regions where many of these small villages are hidden. Yet their fatigue quickly gave way to purpose as they arrived just before Palm Sunday, ready to begin ten days of intense missionary service.

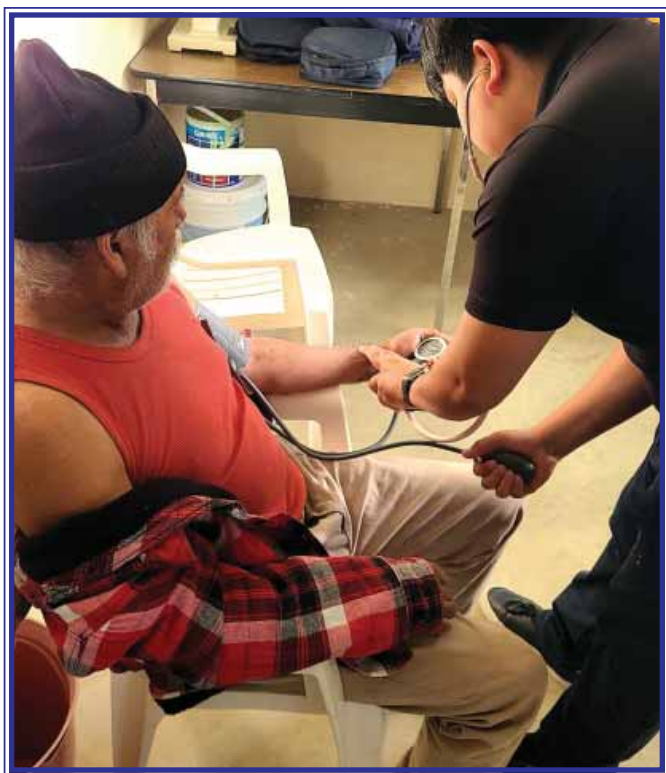
During their stay, these young adults became instruments of hope. They assisted with Holy Week liturgies, organized prayer services and processions, visited the sick and elderly in their homes, distributed food to families in need, and most importantly, shared their faith through their presence, their listening, and their love. In communities often forgotten, they became a visible sign that God had not abandoned them.

Among the missionaries was a powerful witness of faith in action: Dr. Erik Solis, a young physician from Tijuana. Once a participant in the same youth programs, Dr. Solis had received a scholarship that enabled him to pursue his medical studies. Now, as a doctor, he continues to serve both his parish and those most in need.

During this mission, Dr. Solis was assigned to a remote village in Oaxaca—one with no



Ready for a life-changing Holy Week.



Dr. Erik Solis, serving those in need.

clinic, no pharmacy, and no regular access to healthcare. Occasionally, a nurse passes through, but for most residents, reaching the nearest hospital requires more than two hours of travel. In this place of great need, Dr. Solis became a lifeline. He visited the homebound, treated illnesses, corrected harmful medical practices, and brought not only physical healing but also dignity and hope to those who had long felt abandoned in their suffering.

Years earlier, as a young man, Dr. Solis had walked these same villages during a Holy Week mission. He was deeply moved—and troubled—by the lack of medical care. In that moment, he made a prayer: if God was calling him to become a doctor, he wanted to return one day to serve these very people. This Holy Week, that prayer was fulfilled. He returned, not as a visitor, but as a healer.

The pre-novices and affiliates themselves were profoundly transformed by their encounters. They met countless individuals marked by poverty, illness, and loneliness—yet also by faith and resilience.

Fr. Jesse brings some smiles.

These experiences also opened the eyes of the young men in a new way. They witnessed communities that celebrate Mass only once a month, places where the Eucharist is longed for but rarely available. They saw firsthand the urgent need for priests, for committed lay missionaries, and for hearts willing to serve. In response, many felt their missionary zeal deepen, their commitment grow stronger, and their desire to give their lives more fully to God and His people.

From experiences like these, vocations are born. In Tijuana, the Lord has been abundantly generous. Today, eight young men from our parish in Tijuana, are in formation with the Oblates in the seminary. This August, three more young men will apply to the pre-novitiate program in Tijuana.

When young people encounter the transformative power of service—when they see the impact of love lived concretely—they begin to discover a deeper meaning for their lives. The joy of giving becomes a compass, guiding them toward purpose and hope. This is the vision of Eugene de Mazenod: to awaken in young hearts a passion for Christ and a commitment to the most abandoned.

And this Holy Week, in the mountains and villages of southern Mexico, that vision came alive once again.



National Gathering of Oblate Laity

By Dr. Scott Woodward

Protectors of the Flame. That's what Fr. Ray Cook, OMI, US Provincial, called Oblate Laity gathered together from across the US Province at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. They came from Oblate parishes, from places the Oblates served at one time but no longer do, and they came to share their service in the Charism of St. Eugene to mark the 200th Anniversary of the Approval of the Constitutions and Rules.

From July 31–August 2, the group met to hear speakers reflect on what the Constitutions and Rules mean in Oblate life. Plus, they were able to join in two nights of the Novena for Health and Healing at the Shrine. It was a moving time together.

It began with a presentation by Fr. Ray Cook, OMI, Provincial, who spoke about Oblates being guardians of the Charism, reminding those present they too carry the Oblate Charism wherever they go. He told them the Charism does not belong to the priests and brothers

alone; it belongs to them as well. "We do this in community," he said, "and we need you in this community." This is why he called them protectors of the flame. Oblate Laity have a big role in the world. "You, wearing your Oblate Cross, are the living, breathing presence of the Missionary Oblates in your workplaces, families, and neighborhoods," he said.

Fr. Juan Gaspar, OMI, spoke about the formation which the men preparing to be vowed Oblates go through. Formation is about discerning if these men can be guardians of the Charism. "It's through the essentials of Oblate life that we see if they have the qualities for missionary life. We judge whether they should continue in formation, and act to support them with prayer and development." He reminded the participants that the ends of the Congregation are personal sanctification and zeal for salvation of souls. These apply to Associates, too.

Cont. on p. 24, Associates

Protectors of the Flame



Oblate Constitution 43

We will keep alive the memory of our deceased and not fail to pray for them, faithfully offering the suffrages prescribed on their behalf.



Armand Carignan, OMI



John Madigan, OMI



Donald Lozier, OMI

RECENTLY DECEASED OBLATES

Armand “Pete” Carignan, OMI, (former Northern Province) died on April 30, 2026, in the Philippines.

John Madigan, OMI, died on June 14, 2026, in Belleville, IL.

Donald Lozier, OMI, died on July 22, 2026, in Tewksbury, MA.

RECENTLY DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Fr. Bernardo Pham, SDD, uncle of Fr. Tuan Pham, OMI, died on April 27, 2026.

Audrey Claire Leising, mother of Fr. Robert Leising, OMI, died on April 30, 2026.

Edward Hallée, brother of Fr. Roger Hallée, OMI, died on May 13, 2026.

Urszula Knop, mother of Fr. Andy Knop, OMI, died on June 15, 2026.

Robert Dixon, brother-in-law of Fr. John Hanley, OMI, died on July 12, 2026.

Kenneth Steiner, former Oblate (Central Province and Brazil), died on July 15, 2026.

Venezuelan Dignitaries visit the Oblates in D.C.

By Fr. Leo Perez, OMI

In early May 2026 the OMI Community in Washington, D.C., hosted a delegation of Church officials from Venezuela. The retired Cardinals Baltazar Porras Cardozo (Caracas), and Diego Rafael Padron Sanchez (Cumana) and their staff were invited to stay with the Oblates in D.C. while they met that week with State Department and White House Officials to advocate for the rights of the faithful in Venezuela. At the OMI House they received and met with Venezuelan in exile, Maria Corina Machado, who was awarded the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize for her work for democracy. A highlight of the visit and meeting was their stop for prayer in the house chapel.



l-r: Cardinal Diego Rafael Padron Sanchez, Maria Corina Machado and Fr. Honekker Molina



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US YOUR NEW ADDRESS! Or, if you
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move or not), please let us know: email to
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Thank you.

Cont. from p. 22, Associates

Dr. Michele DiVito spoke on her own experience of being raised in the shadow of an Oblate parish, Holy Angels in Buffalo, NY. She became the next generation of Oblate Laity in her household. Michele was the delegate from the US to the International Oblate Lay Congress in Aix-en-Provence in 2024. She shared how this congress worked in synodal fashion to discern the next steps for Oblate Laity on a global scale. She continues her work with the Oblate Associates in Buffalo.

Fr. David Uribe, OMI, spoke on Constitution—daring to live the gospel. “The Constitutions and Rules give us our identity”, he said. “Constitution 8 reminds us we have to be daring in our response to the gospel. Being close to the people is a tradition of the Oblates. This defines us as missionaries,” He asked, “How do Oblate Laity become close to people, granting them dignity?” He told them about visiting a chapter room at an abbey where the monks met to discuss how they might better live their rule of life. He told those present, “You as associates can do this. Come together to determine where Jesus is calling you, what action is needed. Where are you going to serve the needs of the poor?”

At the final session, Dr. Scott Woodward asked Associates, “What do we bring to the table?”

There was a variety of answers: “We bring the gifts we were given, our experiences of our neighborhood. We know what is going on,” one person said. “We have to be sensitive to the needs of people, not fulfilling our own needs by meeting people, but rather, listening to them,” said another. Perhaps the most important response was that through the Charism of St. Eugene, we as Oblate Laity can see the poor and abandoned in our neighborhood and help others do so as well. “The charism of St. Eugene enables us to see the poor and abandoned.”

The gathering ended with Eucharist and the recommitment of 14 Oblate Associates, three receiving an Oblate Cross for the first time. Fr. Ray Cook had suggested in his opening talk that people see this as commissioning, rather than a reunion. They did. They left reinvigorated in the charism; going back to families, neighborhoods, parishes, and workplaces to evangelize the poor and serve the most abandoned.

Many thanks to Bro. Lester Antonio Zapata, OMI, for his tireless work for this gathering and Bro. Elisha Chisanga, OMI, for helping as well. Great thanks to the US Province for covering the cost for the event at the Shrine. It was an exciting time for laity who aspire to follow Jesus through the Oblate Charism.