



## The new Bishop of Rome begins his ministry

### **“Benedict XVI’s election was clear from the beginning.”**

At a press conference at the Pontifical North American College after the new Holy Father’s first Mass, the Archbishop of Chicago, Francis Cardinal GEORGE, said that the election of the new Pope “was clear almost from the beginning.” “We have a man well prepared, who can understand western society and its history,” he added.

As for the challenges that Benedict XVI will face, Cardinal George said: “After 26 years (since the election of John Paul II), the greatest challenges for the mission of the Church now come from the West.”

“Someone who is looking for changes in the essentials of faith, is not going to see them under this Pope nor any other,” declared the cardinal.

“We all knew that Cardinal Ratzinger was a strong candidate due to his particular aptitudes,” noted the Archbishop of Westminster (England), Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor. “Only a few others could challenge him for his outstanding aspects,” he added.

Both cardinals expect that the fraternal atmosphere among the cardinals will continue. They also said that Benedict XVI held his colleagues in high esteem and as a Cardinal frequently sought their advice. ([www.aciprensa.com](http://www.aciprensa.com))

### **The inauguration of Benedict XVI’s ministry – A personal experience**

I would like to share some of my impressions of the celebration of the inauguration of Benedict XVI’s ministry. I suppose that you have seen the

ceremony that took place in St. Peter’s Square. I was among the hundreds of priests.

A month ago, I would never have thought that Cardinal Ratzinger would be pope. I always appreciated, and even admired the man during the 12 years that I was a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of which he was *ex officio* president: rather reserved, even timid, very easy to talk to, intellectually brilliant, spiritual, he knew how to listen, respected fully our work on the Commission and never imposed his views.... This is an image different from that presented in the media. But I did not see him as pope for two reasons: 1) his identification with the conservative movement, which would likely polarize the Church; 2) “It did not appear to me to be his charism,” the Pope being a front stage figure... whereas Ratzinger appeared to me rather as a back stage type.

But what I have seen and read of him during the past week, and especially the splendid liturgy on Sunday have struck out at my “prejudices”.... And why not the pope wanted by the Holy Spirit, I said to myself that afternoon after the celebration? What do you think, you who undoubtedly also saw the celebration on TV? First of all, it was far from an enthronement.... Even the title of the booklet for the ceremony set the tone: “*Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome Benedict XVI*”. The entire ceremony for the inauguration of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome had been renewed.... The words “Sovereign Pontiff” and even “Pope” were not used even once.... And what do you think of the homily? Yes, this pope can surprise us...

I note another significant gesture: his visit to Saint

Paul Outside the Walls to show that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, and his role in the universal Church, have their source in the joint martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome....

And then, perhaps with the wisdom of his age he will judge that most important, after all, are not the “ideas” on the plane of dogmatic and moral theology... and that even on this level, which also has its importance, of course, it is necessary to learn not to make absolutes of ones own ideas.... Now, I feel hopeful.... (*Fr. Marcel Dumais, OMI*)

### **WESTERN SAHARA** **The Pope's election** **in a Muslim country**

From Layounne in the Western Sahara Fr. Mario LÉON, a young Spaniard, shares his experience of being in a Muslim country during the election of the Pope. He has been in the Sahara for a year studying Arabic in preparation for the mission there.

We here in the Sahara were also able to follow very closely the recent events through the Internet, and satellite... We receive two Catholic channels, one in French and another one in Italian – from the Vatican I believe. The radio and some newspapers also carried the news. Our “abundant free time” allowed us to live everything in a peaceful and prayerful atmosphere united with Christians worldwide.

The day of the election found us on our way to Boujdour, where we were to make a pastoral visit. We met some nomads on the way. Very interesting! We were four and found ourselves with a picnic from heaven – rustic ham sandwiches and tortillas. We had taken along the

radio, just in case, although it was only the second day of conclave.

So we were able to follow – albeit with difficulty because the signal was weak – the entire event: the white smoke and the appearance of Ratzinger. We even stopped in a bar thinking that the Moroccan television might retransmit something of it, but we were let down. We didn't see anything until we got home.

For us, it has been a very beautiful experience living the death of John Paul II and the election of the new Pope here in the Muslim world. More than 100 people approached or telephoned us, and some stopped us on the street to express their sorrow at the death of John Paul II. “He was not only a Pope for the Christians, but for everybody.... He was also our Pope, we Muslims.” The affection that the Muslims had for him is unbelievable! Even the local television asked us to speak. They even televised part of the Sunday mass with the Christians of Minurso during which we prayed for the deceased John Paul II. (There were more than 30 at that mass – another full house for us!) Many people saw us on television. It is a pity we were not able to see ourselves.

That is one of the “gifts” of this mission lost in the middle of the desert. It is these kind of occasions that make being here worthwhile.

The Spirit blows where it will.... But how different from the Spanish broadcasts. I was especially sad to see the way that some of the Spanish media judged the figure of John Paul II. And what is worse, in many cases this was coming from Christians. We even know some of them....

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## **Asia-Oceania**

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### **Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka** **Buddhists honor John Paul II**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2005, the day after the Holy Father died, some Buddhist businessmen approached the Bishop of Anuradapura, Nobert ANDRADI, OMI. The Buddhists wanted to put up banners in the city and sought help from the bishop regarding protocol of addressing the Pope. Subsequently they put up banners expressing “thanks and veneration to John Paul II for his commitment to Justice and peace in the world.” A few days after, for the Sinhalese and Tamil New Year celebrations, there

were other banners put up in the city, but the Buddhists saw to it that the banner in the city square, in honour of the Pope, was not removed.

Last year, Bishop Andradi was appointed Bishop of Anuradhapura, which is the heart of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. He is known for his simplicity and ecumenical approach to other religions. This incident is a veritable witness to his dialogue with believers of other religions at the grass root level.

## **BANGLADESH**

### **“Bishop Bejoy” ordained**

May 6<sup>th</sup> saw an estimated crowd of 9,000 to 10,000 gathered at the Cathedral of Khulna for the solemn Episcopal ordination of the 3<sup>rd</sup> bishop of Khulna, Bejoy D’CRUZE, OMI. The retiring bishop, the Most Rev. Michael A. D’Rozario CSC, who presided the ceremony, was joined by the Apostolic Nuncio, 11 bishops from surrounding dioceses and 150 concelebrants. The three-hour liturgy was followed by lunch for all present (!) and a cultural programme in the afternoon.

The new bishop has chosen “The Lord is my joy” for his Episcopal motto. It is a fitting choice for a man who is known for his radiant smile and engaging laugh.

Fr. Gabriel NANAYAKKARA, the *pro tempore* provincial of the Colombo Province (Sri Lanka) represented Father Wilhelm STECKLING, Superior General, and the General Council, which is in Plenary Session in Rome. Fr. General, in a special message read by Fr. Nanayakkara, said: “The ordination of Bishop Bejoy D’Cruze, until now Superior of the Oblate Delegation in Bangladesh brings us great joy as one of our Oblate confreres receives this high pastoral office for the greater service of the Church. The Oblate missionaries have been present now for more than 25 years in the Church of Bangladesh, and thanks to the people’s response to our evangelization efforts our congregation has been able to grow. Fr Bejoy was our first Bangladeshi major superior. For the gift of Fr. Bejoy to us, and now to the wider Church of Bangladesh, we are truly thankful to God.”

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## **Canada – United States**

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### **LACOMBE – Edmonton**

#### **A 90 year old feeds ‘Christ in need’**

March 18<sup>th</sup> was his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and Fr. Yvon LEVAQUE, who is hooked up to an oxygen tank, was serving hot meals to the poor in Edmonton. The frail priest runs the soup kitchen at the Bissell Centre every Friday morning. That day, about 200 men and women in the queue for the meal sang Happy Birthday for him and most signed his birthday card. Fr. Levaque thanked them for the card and then led them in prayer.

“I feel good helping others,” the Oblate said in an interview with the Western Catholic Reporter. “Helping people is what keeps me alive.” But there is a deeper reason. “The Scriptures say you have to feed the poor.”

The priest’s birthday cake was later served as part of a meal that included hot stew, hot dogs, oranges and juice. Fr. Yvon, who spent \$200 on

the meal, also handed out chocolate bars to mark his birthday.

After the meal, the Oblate sat behind the main counter to distribute small crosses to those who wanted one. He ran out of crosses in a minute. He is also known to offer a prayer to anyone in need or to provide words of comfort or advice. “I see the figure of Christ in each one of them,” he says. “I see a hungry Christ; I see a Christ in need.”

Born in St. Eugene, Ontario, Yvon Levaque joined the Oblates after reading books on the order’s missions in the North. He was ordained in 1940 and his first mission was to Fort Nelson, British Columbia, more than 1,500 kms from Fort Vermilion. “It took me 15 days to reach Fort Nelson by dog team,” he recalled. “After three days you knew everything about a dog – from nose to tail.”

He spent 10 years in Fort Nelson, before joining the Royal Canadian Air Force as a chaplain during the Korean War. He was stationed in Tacoma, Wash., and flew regularly to Korea and Japan to serve the troops as a priest.

That tour of duty over, he served as principal of an Indian school in Lower Post, B.C., and a school in Cardston, Alberta, before going to Ottawa to head a commission that oversaw Oblate schools and missions across the country. He stayed in that position until the Oblates dissolved the commission in 1975.

In 1987, then Governor General Jeanne Sauvé presented Fr. Levaque with the Order of Canada in recognition of his work in “Indian communities in the Canadian North with dedication for more than 40 years.”

Asked if he will ever retire, Fr. Yvon says he might once he finds someone who is “organized, dedicated and responsible” to take over the operation of the soup kitchen! “I can’t just leave. For some people it’s the only solid meal they have all week.” (*Adapted from an article by RAMON GONZALEZ, Western Catholic Reporter Staff Writer Edmonton, March 28.*)

### **Notre Dame-du-Cap**

#### **Tireless friend of the downtrodden**

In a letter to the Oblate Brothers on May 1<sup>st</sup>, St. Joseph the Worker day, Fr. Jean-Claude GILBERT, provincial of Notre-Dame-du-Cap Province, praised their presence, their many talents, their witness and their charisma for community life, etc. At the same time, the

Outaouais region of Quebec rolled out the red carpet for one of them, who for 25 years has devoted himself to the service of the homeless, drug addicts, the unemployed, and the poor with their many faces. This is Brother Réjean GADOUAS, who has just been named “Personality of the Week”, after having received from Centraide Outaouais the “new prize” of “Community Builder”. Madam Lise Thibault, Lieutenant Governor of the Quebec was present for the event.

The Ottawa newspaper LE DROIT, Radio-Canada’s television station and the REVUE DE GATINEAU mentioned the events. Involved in all the welfare movements in the region, Réjean is the instigator of the “Gîte-Ami” (Friendly Shelter) and “Manne de l’Île » (Island Manna), among others. A disciple of the late Fr. Roger POIRIER (+1998), he attributes his success to the support of his community, the Missionary Oblates. His reward is to meet people “that have pulled through”, and thank him. Easy-going, he has a wet eye when talking about those he tried to help, but who gave up by committing suicide.

This modest and smiling religious does not strut and did not let himself get carried away by the torrent of the praises received from Mr. Marcel Beaudry, president of the National Capital of Canada, of Rock Archambault, president of Centraide Outaouais, and of Roger Ébacher, Archbishop of Gatineau Hull. Still young, and soon 70, with a twinkle in his eye and a warm heart, Réjean continues Eugene de Mazenod’s commitment of 1813. (*Alphonse Nadeau, OMI*)

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## **Europe**

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### **ITALY**

#### **Celebrating 10 years since the canonization of Saint Eugene**

“What’s that song in the air? This mystery that surpasses us...” asked the Bishop of Loreto – quoting the lyrics of a song composed some years ago by Fr Saverio ZAMPA – as he greeted the Oblates, the young people from the “Costruire” movement, the COMI, the friends of the MAMI and all those gathered at the John Paul II Center from the 23 to April 25, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Eugene (December 3, 1995). The answer, visible on the faces and in the smiles, was confirmation that the spiritual heritage of Eugene de Mazenod, that “among you charity”, had been received by his sons.

The extraordinary vitality of our “small family”, represented by a thousand participants, was felt right from the words of welcome of the Provincial, Fr. Marcello SGARBOSSA.

A remarkable video led us through our history again: from the first rays of dawn to the blazing fires that they lit and whose flames illuminate all the continents today. To those who want to walk in the footsteps of Eugene, Fr. Fabio CIARDI showed the way: holiness.

Our missionaries – we can say it with pride – are present from North Pole to the South. Thanks to modern technology, it was possible on Sunday morning to hear several of them tell about their work, their sacrifices and the life they share with the world.

The festive atmosphere of the Eucharistic celebration, presided by the Superior General, Fr. Wilhelm STECKLING, and concelebrated by some seventy priests, including a delegation from Germany with its Provincial, was marked by the prayerful participation of an assembly of more than one thousand three hundred people.

A large Oblate cross, blessed at the end of the mass, was officially given to the German delegation to carry to Cologne for the World Youth Day, from where it will then go to Lourdes.

During the afternoon programme Vincent GRUBER led us through the mysterious paths of the mission using songs, mimes and dances to present the life of St. Eugene. Frank SANTUCCI gave a meditation that recalled the sacrifice of Fr. Mario BORZAGA, on the very day even of the 45th anniversary of his martyrdom in Laos.

The testimony of some of lay people who share the in the Oblate charism concluded the meeting.

After the dinner, all gathered again at the shrine in Loreto, to be led in song by Fr. Alfredo FERRETTI and uplifted by the music of Fr. Francesco VOLPINTESTA, our two musicians for these two days. In the “House of Mar”, our hearts poured forth with thanksgiving and praise, entrusting to Mary the joy of being part of this family that we feel more than ever is the most

united on the earth. (*Elide Ceragioli, MAMI, Florence*)

## GERMANY

### Oblate Youth Cross

For the Oblate gathering at Hünfeld, which will precede the Cologne World Youth Days, the Pastoral Commission for Youth and Vocations of the European Region proposed the adoption of a meaningful symbol. We chose a giant Oblate cross. Brother Paul GÖRLICH, a carpenter at the Oblate house in Hünfeld, made the cross that will become the official symbol for Oblate youth ministry in Europe.

The cross was presented at Loreto (Italy) during the gathering organized by the Italian Province, April 22-24, to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Founder’s canonization. Fr. Wilhelm STECKLING, Oblate Superior General, blessed the cross during a Eucharistic celebration there. The giant cross returned then to Germany and is at present in the church at Hünfeld where the groups of young people preparing the WYD meet. After Hünfeld, the cross will go to Burlo where Oblates will lead a mission. It is already decided that it will be brought also to Lourdes for the pilgrimage of the groups of young people accompanied by Oblates to that Marian shrine in August 2006.

A gift of the Province of Germany to the European youth ministry office, the cross is thus available for all the Provinces of the Region that would like to use it at their youth gatherings. We hope that the cross can be used at the greatest possible number of gatherings. The Youth Ministry Service of the Province of Germany will coordinate its movements. Do not hesitate to contact us! (OMI-Jugendbüro, Klosterstrasse 5, 36088 Hünfeld, Germany; Tel. +49 06652 94711; [jugendarbeit@oblaten.de](mailto:jugendarbeit@oblaten.de)). (*Martin Wolf, OMI, Province of Germany*)

## FRANCE - Notre Dame de Lumières

### The 30-day week !

How can a week be expanded to contain thirty days? If you think it’s not possible, then you don’t know Jo BOIS. Jo was the director of the annual Retreat for Oblates held at Notre Dame Lumières. This popular shrine of Our Lady in the diocese

of Avignon and only about forty miles north of Aix-en-Provence was one of the first properties purchased by Eugene de Mazenod for his missionaries. That was back in 1837. In the intervening years, it has housed at different times a junior seminary and later a major seminary to prepare missionaries who would go to the ends of the earth, bringing the good news of the Gospel.

Today, a number of those missionaries have returned to spend their latter years under Mary's mantle in the peaceful valley of the Imergue. Superior Jean Marie TOUSSAINT, his energetic treasurer, Johannes RIVOIRE and the community are attentive to their needs.

The property also houses a retreat-centre-hotel, complete with heated swimming pool. It was there that a number of French Oblates gathered for their annual renewal week. Most of those present are involved in a wide variety of ministries throughout the length and breadth of France, but there were also Oblates from Italy, Laos, Poland and Ireland in the group. Besides, there was also a much broader world spectrum; many of those present had spent long periods in other countries: Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, Cameroon, Chad, Wales or Northern Canada; in all they represented more than one thousand man-years of mission service to the poor, a NOT negligible contribution to the spread of God's kingdom in the world.

Understandably, former colleagues in ministry paused to share memories occasionally when they met on the prayer-paths of Our Lady's sun-drenched valley, but this did nothing to take away from the general atmosphere of silence and recollection that pervaded the week. That silence was broken only by the community chant and prayer of the participants or by the gentle background music in the dining room, where each retreatant took his turn to serve the excellent fare prepared for us by Monsieur et Madame Vinot and their very discreet and courteous hotel staff. As for the chant, what may have been lacking in harmony was more than compensated by fervour. This was the setting and this was the audience

for whom Jo Bois telescoped the thirty days of the "Spiritual Exercises" into the week April 10-16, 2005, judiciously filtering Ignatian values through the experience and spirituality of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. Thanks Jo! We hope, as Saint Ignatius would have it, that we have "drawn profit" from those days. You've done your bit. You've helped to make the Spirit more available and, with Saint Eugene, we pray that "we may increase one hundred fold in the love of God". (Edward Carolan, OMI)

## FRANCE

### Corsica in 9 points

After years of being in charge of the community at Vico (Corsica), Fr. Jean-Pierre BONNAFOUX has left for another assignment. His knowledge of the Island of Beauty, which is also his native soil, is proverbial. In the *OMI France* newsletter of March 2005, he gives his view of Father Albini's native land in 9 points.

1. The media and another RUFIN\* report cause much harm because they globalize the Corsican reality and contribute to a reciprocal rejection, Corsica-continental France.
2. It is indisputable that there is an upsurge of racist and xenophobic acts in Corsica. Without exception they are to be unconditionally condemned. Likewise, everything that can lead to them must be banned.
3. These racist acts are very often the work of young people between the ages of 17 and 25. This needs an explanation: they have lost all point of reference, including identity. They no longer know who they are, *so they define themselves by rejecting the other who is different.*
4. The social, political and economic crisis is coupled with a crisis of Corsican identity, a crisis like none other in the past. The nationalist movements, even despite their excesses, were points of reference that no longer exist for the young people.
5. To condemn racist acts is not enough if, at the same time, we are not able to help with the current



readjustment of the Corsican identity. Otherwise, we remain on the level of all these irrelevant official statements, which ultimately make the situation worse by giving the feeling that there is nothing to be done!

6. There is a worldwide loss of MEANING. In the West, in France, everywhere... But more especially in Corsica, we ask ourselves if Corsican identity and culture have disappeared or changed. This questioning is all the more painful because it is not voiced!

7. Official institutions (political power, Churches, National education, Justice...) are not able to fill in this lack of meaning.

8. The concept of PROJECT is certainly central to rediscovering meaning.

9. There is much personal and community work to be done every day:

- a. to recreate together places for freedom and dialogue;
- b. to accept each other with our differences;
- c. this will result in both stronger personal freedoms and open community identities.

\* (This is a report by Jean-Christophe RUFIN, writer, doctor and man responsible for many humanitarian aid associations. Commissioned on June 29, 2004, this report was presented to the Minister for the Interior, Internal Security and Local Liberties of France on October 19, 2004.)

## FRANCE-BENELUX

### 2nd Medal of Merit for Fr. Kuroczycki

This time it was the French government that honored Fr. Joseph KUROCZYCKI, director of the Stella Maris Vacation Center at Stella Plage, about thirty kilometres south of Boulogne-sur-Mer for his priestly ministry, charitable and social services for Polish immigrants in France.

Sunday, April 24, in the name of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Paul Delevoye, past minister, conferred the Medal of Knight of the National Order of Merit upon Polish born Fr. Joseph Kuroczycki. The ceremony was held in the city hall of Touquet-

Paris-Plage and hosted by Mr. Léonce Deprez, Deputy for Pas-de-Calais, and mayor of the city.

Last year, the Polish government awarded the priest the Medal of Merit of Poland. A brief history of the Stella Maris vacation complex was presented in *OMI Information*, No. 431, April 2004. (See also [www.omiworld.org](http://www.omiworld.org)).

## EUROPEAN REGION

### Preparing the 3rd "European Session for perpetual vows"

April 2 and 3, a meeting to plan the European session for those preparing to take perpetual vows, took place at the General House. Present were Frs. Gennaro CICHESE (President of the European Bureau of Formation), Frank SANTUCCI (General Postulator) Antoni BOCHM (Spiritual Director at the scholasticate in Odra, Poland), and Fr. Paolo ARCHIATI, Assistant General in charge of formation.

This will be the third such session, which has been held every two years since 2001. It is for the scholastics of the European Region and the International Scholasticate in Rome who are preparing to take perpetual vows sometime in the future.

In a climate of fraternity and creativity the meeting succeeded in defining a program that will see presentations by several Oblates and scholastics over a three week period – August 16 to 28 – at the "mother house" in Aix-en-Provence. This year stress will be laid on the experience of Saint Eugene, the vows and the most important points of the Oblate charism.

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## Africa-Madagascar

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## CONGO

### What misery! What problems!

There is little about the Congo in the media these days. I speak of Congo-Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo! An immense country geographically (nearly two and a half million sq km!) in the heart of Africa, it is also a country with immense problems in many areas. Do you

know that the useless wars, which followed the departure of Mobutu, have caused nearly four million deaths in this country? And more and more die for lack of proper care, since the few health care facilities that existed formerly have been destroyed or damaged by this war in which more than seven armies faced off. What misery! What problems!

I do not want to speak to you about the dead because it is too late! I come to speak to you about the living, particularly those called “street children”: children left to themselves who roam about the streets of Kinshasa. Some have lost their parents during the war, others were rejected by parents under the influence of religious sects that saw these children as being sorcerers capable of harming the family! Some have just simply fled the family home, not being able anymore to bear the far too precarious situation in which the family lives. They gather to find solidarity, seldom for good but usually for evil, and in order to survive. They spend the night wherever they can and are generally violent towards those who threaten them. Many believe that life has nothing for them and they are ready to avenge for this injustice. A few however wait for better days in the hope of one day returning home where they will be able to live in peace... They are deeply wounded. They are the real poor today! And in Kinshasa they are legion.

There are centres in Kinshasa to accommodate some of them, but these are quickly overwhelmed. With some former Sisters we founded a fraternity of the Missionaries of the Holy Family and opened a school (St. Benedict's Institute) where we give preference to these poorest of the poor. About 15 km from the center of the city we also have a place to lodge orphans.... It is overflowing. To succeed in reintegrating these children, to educate and help them to become adults, we are constantly in need of money to build classrooms, to pay the teachers who come to assist us defuse this real time-bomb that the street children have become! If one or other Oblate knows of sources likely to finance us... we would be grateful! (*Benoît Kabongo, OMI Congolese currently on assignment in Corsica.*)

## CHAD

### Radio Terre Nouvelle

When one walks around the center of Bongor, a town of 40 to 50 thousand inhabitants, with its paved road and new small shops, one is rather well impressed. There are more and more people with a cellphone on their belt or hanging around their neck.

The paved road, which connects the administrative capital, N'djamena, with the economic capital, Moundou, has changed the life of the Bongorois. The recent installation of a cellular telephone network has changed it still more, especially in a country where the fixed telephone is rare, expensive, and the inhabitants have a great thirst to communicate but 75% cannot do so in writing because they are illiterate. But one should not judge too quickly from appearances. The standard of living has certainly risen in recent years, but only a minority has benefited.

For three months state employees, mainly teachers and healthcare personnel, have been on strike because they have not been paid for more than 5 months. In the majority of Chad cities, the State being the principal employer, if these people are not paid, all of society suffers. In order to live and feed their many children the state employees borrow money at a 50% rate of interest, or they buy on credit and manage as well as they can. A more serious consequence of these recurrent strikes is a lower level of education; indeed not one year goes by without one or more months of strike. This year there were other difficulties: only 575 mm of rain fell, whereas the average is 800mm. Millet is rare and expensive, there was no beneficial flood, which helps to increase the fish. Consequently, there is little millet and no fish. It will be a very difficult year, especially for the poorest.

The gap between the rich and the poor gets continually wider. This topic, as well as other equally serious ones, was taken up by the bishops of Chad in their Christmas message. These various points summarize rather well the situation that we live every day:



“God gave Chadians a land, natural resources and riches. However, these riches have become the cause of division, conflicts and of war between the sons and daughters of Chad because some want to keep everything for themselves and exclude access to them by others. This applies to those who are in charge and who belong to the ethnic groups in power.”

“There is also a gap between the various communities. Intercommunity conflicts – often stirred up or badly resolved – create resentment and nurture hidden desires for revenge. The gap between peoples widens because certain groups are armed in order to subject their harmless fellow-citizens, whom they look upon as slaves or foreigners on their premises.” [...]

The bishops ask the civil and military authorities to assume their responsibilities: “to state the law and to apply it.” They call upon Christians “to work with others to build the nation.”

They finish with a word of hope: All is not lost. We are people of hope and we see “the signs of a new dawn” taking shape. The bishops are speaking about those citizens, both Christians and others, who individually or in associations work for peace and justice. They are many and are

supported by our radio broadcasts.

The bishops add: “We must underline the important role played by our community radio stations, which offer young people a place to express themselves and a pedagogy that enables them to enter each other’s culture.”

Experience has shown that the radio is a very important instrument of information. In time of conflict, if there is no information, rumours are rife and there is nothing worse to fan the flames of conflict. Radio has an irreplaceable role in reducing resentment and bringing about peace. Radio must educate, conscientize – in all the fields of development.

*Radio Terre Nouvelle* (New Earth) continues the work begun almost five years ago. Thanks to your assistance, which increased last year, our deficit has decreased significantly: it is currently about •10,000. It was four times higher last year. In the name of the 10 journalists, the volunteers, the 20 correspondents of RTN and its listeners, I thank you for your generosity. I cordially encourage you to continue your effort. (*From a letter of Joseph THEVENET, published in “OMI France”, March 2005.*)

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### OMIWORLD Interviews – Fr. Pippo Mammana, OMI 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Delegation of Uruguay

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This year the Oblates of Mary Immaculate celebrate 75 years of presence in Uruguay. On this occasion, Fr. Pippo MAMMANA, a missionary there for the past 25 years and currently superior of the Delegation, agreed to be interviewed by Omiworld via Internet. Uruguay is known in South America as a “secularist” country. We are happy to offer our readers a look at the history of the Oblates in that country and their work today.

#### **Could you tell us in a few words how the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate came to the Eastern Republic of Uruguay?**

Let us recall that in 1928, Fernando Damiani, Vicar General of the Diocese of Salto (Uruguay), travelled to Rome. He had with him, among other things, a request from Bishop Arrospeide, the first bishop of Melo, to have some religious Congregations come to help with the pastoral care in this new diocese. The Diocese of Melo included half of the Republic of Uruguay, with a million and half of inhabitants but only seven parishes. They were served by as many priests, some old or ill, each having to look after a department or a territory, never smaller than 9.000 square kilometres, with 40 or 50,000 inhabitants.

### **Did Monsignor Damiani get something?**

In Rome, Providence guided his steps to the General House of the Oblates. (One can read the manuscript of Fr. Álvaro Vallée, History of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Mary, San Esteban, Cordova, 1971, p 47.)

### **Can you tell us what happened then?**

In 1929 Fr. Theodore Labouré visited Uruguay to see firsthand the new foundation. Fr. Prieto accompanied him. It should be noted that Spain was then part of the Second Province of the United States (Texas). (Fr. Labouré later became Superior General of the Congregation.) He and Fr. Prieto were still in Uruguay, when José Batlle y Ordoñez fell sick. He was a brilliant man, but an enemy of the Church. He had founded modern Uruguay by giving birth to a State that in many ways was secularist. Batlle died on October 20, 1929, during Labouré's visit. It is said that before dying, he wanted make his confession and that the priest had to disguise himself as a doctor in order to get into his room. It is possibly true and meaningful, since a Capuchin nun had cared for him during his illness and was with the family at the funeral.

### **So for decades a secularist atmosphere reigned in Uruguay?**

The preceding indicates the climate in which the Oblates began their mission in Uruguay. The State often persecuted the Catholic Church in a subtle ways, without actually spilling blood. After a period of opposing the State, the Church adapted to reality and acquired an important place not only on the religious plane, but also on cultural, social and political.

### **We know that at the end of the 80's Pope John Paul II visited Uruguay. Did this visit have any repercussions?**

The visit of Jean-Paul II in 1987 and 1988 gave the Church the visibility and the recognition which it needed and which it had earned by its humble and serious work. The laity and many missionaries, including the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, contributed to bringing this about.

### **Thank you for this initial explanation, but we**

### **would like to return a little to the beginnings of the Oblate mission. How that did it occur?**

Fr. Prieto, the first Oblate intended for Uruguay, fell sick and was replaced by Frs. Centurioni, as superior, and E. Diez y Calleja. I will read you an extract of a letter from Fr. Centurioni: "Leaving New York on July 10, we arrived at Montevideo on August 3 and at Salto on the 6th. That same day we stayed at the Episcopal Palace, a recent construction, large enough and comfortable." (Letter from Fr. Centurioni to the provincial Superior, February 4, 1931, in *Missions*, December 1932, p. 665). August 27th, only 24 days after their arrival, they began their principal apostolate: preaching missions. "We did twelve missions, including five in the diocese of Salto, two in that of Melo and five in the Archdiocese of Montevideo." (Idem, p. 667)

### **And the first house founded by the Oblates?**

The house in Salto was opened on January 1, 1931 "a few days after the arrival of Brother Santiago Martinez, an invaluable Christmas gift brought to us by the child Jesus on December 24. The house is comfortable. If the Fathers of Texas could see us, they would be jealous." (See the written account by Fr. Centurioni to the provincial Superior, February 4, 1931, in *Missions*, December 1931, p. 674-675).

### **A few moments ago you made an allusion to secularization. Could you say a little more about that?**

All appeared to be going well, but the secularization led by an intelligent masonry, together with paternalistic social reforms, which were well received by the people, had the effect of undermining the popularity of the Church and of constantly posing problems for it. The work of the Oblates became more difficult than expected. They realized it little by little, becoming aware of their ignorance of what a secularized culture was.

### **Were their other foundations besides the Salto house?**

Yes. Towards the end of 1931, the Oblates took charge of a very big area that included Paso de los Toros, Achar, Curtina, Piedra Sol, and San Gregorio de Polanco. In 1932, they preached 32

missions “of 7 days each, performing 462 baptisms, 1242 confirmations, distributing nearly 3,000 communions and regularizing 49 marriages. This was the work of two Fathers who devoted themselves to preaching the rural missions.” (See Fr. Centurioni, June 1933, in *Missions*, December 19933, p. 503).

In 1939, they founded the parish of San Rafael in Cerro of Montevideo, an area populated by workers and immigrants. In 1976, they took over the parish of San Jose Obrero, in the diocese of San Jose, a working-class area on the outskirts, where many domestic workers also lived. In 2000, the Oblates came to Nuestra Señora de los Dolores parish in Libertad (Diocese of San Jose).

### **Are you satisfied with the work accomplished to date?**

The most important work of the Oblates in Uruguay has been the foundation many Christian communities. Noteworthy also are a strong presence in many marginal places, a good rapport with the local Church and many vocations: priests, men and women religious, laity. The first Uruguayan Oblate, Fr. Robert Berroa, was ordained in 1983 and the second in 1985.

### **Do you see a future for this mission?**

Of course! Although secularization has lasted for more than one hundred years in Uruguay, its results have been very negative: the loss of a sense of the family and the vacuum caused by the absence of the religious dimension in particular. There is an increasing demand for

religious things and the Church, instead of decreasing, has found an essential role in society, obviously more in quality than in quantity.

With a little patience the future could see an abundance of good vocations at all levels.

### **What is the present situation of the Oblate Delegation in Uruguay?**

There are fewer requests from non-Oblate parishes to preach parish missions. But we continue to proclaim the Good News among poorest in the marginalized areas like Cerro, Rincón de la Bolsa, San Gregorio, Achar, Curtina and Piedra Sola. We work a lot with teenagers and young people, we support the setting-up of informal educational centers for poor children, we are present in the Basic Christian Communities and are training lay people who wish to share the Oblate charism.

### **Do the Oblates in Uruguay have a special characteristic that is recognized by the others?**

Obviously, yes! The first is the intense community life of the three communities, which spend a day per week together for prayer, study, planning and sharing. The second is the capacity to be with the poorest and to build up communities in the most marginal areas. The third is love for the Church and very good relations with other Gospel workers.

Finally, I would like to note that Uruguay is the second Oblate foundation in Latin America after Paraguay.

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## **Anniversaries – July 2005**

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### **70<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Vows**

1935.07.21	06135	Fr. Fernand Lapalme	Manitoba
1935.07.21	06142	Fr. Jean Laperrière	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1935.07.21	06141	Fr. Alfred Lavoie	United States
1935.07.21	06136	Fr. Yvon Levaque	Grandin
1935.07.21	06132	Fr. Benoît Paris	Manitoba
1935.07.26	07579	Fr. Marcel Ayrinhac	France
1935.07.26	06913	Fr. Fernand Estève	France

**60<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Vows**

1945.07.01	07781	Fr. Jean Troncy	France
1945.07.16	07990	Fr. Normand Fillion	United States
1945.07.16	08485	Bro. Fernand Savard	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1945.07.25	08111	Fr. Francisco Martín	Spain

**60<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**

1945.07.01	07078	Fr. Régis Carret	France
1945.07.01	07260	Fr. Lucien Nicola	France
1945.07.08	07189	Fr. Charles Choque	Lacombe
1945.07.08	07187	Fr. Louis Van den Eynde	Holland-Flanders
1945.07.25	07203	Fr. Harrie As	Holland-Flanders
1945.07.25	07198	Fr. Jan Heemrood	United States
1945.07.25	07207	Fr. Piet Post	Holland-Flanders
1945.07.25	07191	Fr. Arnold ten Tusscher	Holland-Flanders

**50<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Vows**

1955.07.25	10454	Bro. Nicolás Fernández	Spain
1955.07.25	10455	Bro. Misaél Prado	Spain
1955.07.25	10108	Fr. Alejandro Villafaña	Argentina-Chile
1955.07.26	09964	Fr. Jean Gamache	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.26	09962	Fr. Jacques Léger	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.26	09973	Fr. Maurice Lesage	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.26	09969	Fr. Dominique Levasseur	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.26	09971	Fr. Jean-Marie Pépin	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.26	09968	Fr. Noël Poisson	Notre-Dame-du-Cap

**50<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**

1955.07.03	08704	Fr. Liguori Belzile	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
1955.07.03	08934	Fr. Jean Lambert	France
1955.07.03	09218	Fr. André Marion	France
1955.07.03	08953	Fr. François Péron	Thailand
1955.07.10	08662	Fr. William Clark	United States
1955.07.10	08899	Fr. Raphael Dekocker	Philippines
1955.07.10	08999	Fr. Rik Demol	Holland-Flanders
1955.07.10	08833	Fr. Waclaw Gorniak	Poland
1955.07.10	08659	Fr. Alcuin Henger	United States
1955.07.10	08749	Fr. George McLean	United States
1955.07.10	08898	Fr. Willy Staes	Holland-Flanders
1955.07.17	08985	Fr. Ignace Vermeersch	Cameroon

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**Suffrages for our Deceased**

	Province	Date of Birth	Place of Death	(No. 27-32) Date of Death
Fr. Leo Toland	Northern S.A.	03/07/1933	Randfontein	15/04/2005
Fr. Wiktor Krusze	Poland	22/03/1914	Lubliniec	17/04/2005
Fr. Alphonse Marchal	France	23/06/1913	Veckersviller	18/04/2005
Bro. Bernhard Heil	Namibia	25/01/1940	Windhoek	24/04/2005
Fr. Clifford Blackburn	United States	17/04/1921	San Antonio	05/05/2005
Fr. Henri du Halgouët	France	03/08/1915	Pontmain	06/05/2005

*“We will keep alive the memory of our deceased and not fail to pray for them,  
faithfully offering the suffrages prescribed on their behalf.” (Const. 43)*