

AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

Oblate Spirit



February 2012



*Fanning
the Flame*

They travelled to Vancouver from sea to sea to sea, from points near the equator, from other continents. It was the first time since 2006 that the Canadian Oblate family gathered for its Convocation, a gathering that offers the opportunity to refresh ideas, to share stories, to renew acquaintances.



We suspect they came to rediscover who they were and how they were fitting into this puzzle called OMI Lacombe Canada, a group of men and women maturing into the end of the first decade since the amalgamation of five provinces in 2003.

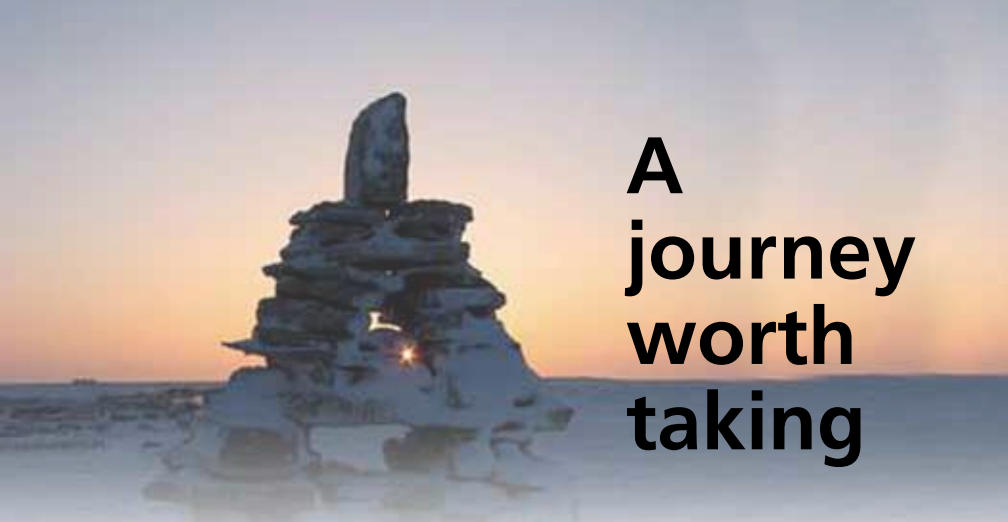
“Ministry isn’t about making us happy or feeling good,” said Louis Lougen, OMI, the Superior General from Rome. “Ministry is about washing feet. Ministry calls us beyond ourselves and our own fulfillment, to give freely, to give wholly for God’s glory.”

This issue shares some of the spirit generated at the Convocation and attempts to capture the flavour of the discussions shared during six days in a converted nightclub/bar/hotel that was used to host the gathering.

“An Oblate is like a piece of wood that can be shaped into many different things by God,” said Lougen.

And so the re-shaping continued during the week. They ate together, they met, they prayed together. And it became increasingly obvious the spirit of founder St. Eugene de Mazenod continues to unite them ... all these diverse members of the Canadian Oblate family.

John and Emily Cherneski
Communications Coordinators



A journey worth taking

BY TONY KROTKI, OMI

IGLOOLIK, NUNAVUT – The idea of travel from coast to coast to coast, changing planes four times, to attend Convocation in Vancouver took some time to decide. There were a few obstacles for me to consider that trip. But our new church construction had stopped at the end of September and because I had the time to travel and the opportunity to rest my tired body, I decided to be part of this gathering.

When you hear you will meet with 150 men and women, two things come to mind: how does one get to know them all, and how would this group come to an agreement on one direction for the future? It was a hopeful possibility to imagine.

From the very first moment the smiling faces of so many brought comfort and a family atmosphere to the group. The differences in age, ministry and experience did not matter when this group got together. What mattered was the one heart, one mind and one spirit that always brings this family of men and women together.

Hour after hour the purpose of this gathering became clearer, and the sense of the struggle with reality surfaced. Voices were heard and emotions expressed the need for a defined community, one that will share Oblate life, Oblate charism and Oblate spirituality. When you hear that, you wonder: is it the Oblates that raise voices for themselves, or is it the



Tony Krotki, OMI

world that is calling for change? The ideas were expressed, and the hope was revealed.

It was wonderful to hear and share in the wisdom of so many that drove the flow of this family reunion. Something became very clear. All that was said and planned together with so many people needs to happen within ourselves first. We need to clear

the water in the pond we are in to provide oxygen for ourselves as well as for others. We need to do our part to build a stronger, happier and holier life in this community. We have to give all we have as Oblates in order to attract others and to sustain our Oblate life.

As hopeful as it was leaving Vancouver in a very good spirit, my trip home was rather more complicated. But problems with my baggage and connections could not affect the spirit I carried home with me. The Oblates of the Arctic community quickly decided to continue working on ideas that emerged from the Vancouver Convocation.

It was wonderful to have this time together, to travel together and to get to know each other in a very personal way. There will be an opportunity to meet again to continue our growth. So long my sister and brother Oblates. My greetings to all from the dark and cold part of the Earth called Arctic, my temporary home.



No room at the inn

BY MARK BLOM, OMI

If you were at the recent convocation in Vancouver or heard about it you will know that we had many challenges as we prepared to reflect on our mission and ministries as a province.

Upon arriving at the hotel we found that the meeting room promised us was under construction. Many of the rooms did not have heat, only half the elevators were in service and we carried our meals on floppy boot trays.

Hotel staff continued to make promises that they did not keep. It was a disaster! We finally had to arrange the hotel bar to be our conference room.

As I retold this story over and over again I began to notice the similarities between our gathering and the difficulties Mary and Joseph experienced at Bethlehem. "There was no place for them in the inn ... she laid him in a manger." There was no conference room for them ... so they met in the bar.

The more I reflected on this fierce parallel between Bethlehem and Vancouver, I felt that this disaster was destined to be the gateway to something great.



Mark Blom,
OMI



The unpreparedness of our hotel mirrored the inhospitality of Bethlehem. Finding our refuge in a street level sports bar instead of a conference room on the second floor was our cattle shed. Boot trays instead of food trays became our manger box.

Personally I felt convicted to examine the ways that I have not kept my promises of prayer. As priest I was convicted about how I was not well prepared in my ministry to host God's people. And I felt convicted by the inhospitality of my Oblate life. This insight has become like a sword that has pierced me to the heart.



Mark Blom, OMI

This is what Advent was/is about ... a time to look into the world of our heart and see those places that we needed to prepare for the coming of the Lord. It was/is a season for waking up to what is most real and most important, a time for all of us to put God and people back into the right relationship.

Hope for the future

BY BISHOP SYLVAIN LAVOIE, OMI

Provincial Superior John Malezdrewich, OMI, set the tone with his opening presentation inviting us to take ownership of the process and have an old conversation in a new way. Sister Catherine Bertrand, SSND, an outstanding facilitator, set the environment, guided us through a carefully designed process, kept us on task, and drew out the best in each of us.

The leadership team and planning committee worked together well to plan a process that involved all of us to take responsibility for the task of exploring our mission and ministry in a new way that would lead us to a new place. The amazing talent, effort and dedication of both Oblates and laity made it all happen.

Fr. Louis Lougen's presentation on having the inner freedom to do God's will and live not just community but a more profound communion was a central piece of the whole process. For me, this was an experience of conversion to a deeper



Bishop Sylvain
Lavoie, OMI

Superior General
Louis Lougen, OMI



appreciation of the charism of our founder, the importance of living together as Oblates in community, and a deepening of community life as living out a spirituality of communion. The need for tools and skills to live in community, achieve communion, minister to the marginalized and evaluate our progress in realizing all this was an encouraging element.

I have the impression that this convocation helped us realize our identity as a new Province of Lacombe rather than as a composite of five former provinces. We were bishops, Oblates and lay associates together as one truly inclusive family for four days, all having an equal say and voice, moving forward together. I am left with the hope that there can be closer collaboration of Lacombe Canada with especially willing dioceses to develop new ways of Oblates living in community, achieving communion and ministering to the poor as teams with laity wherever possible.

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Short takes:

BY MIKE DECHANT, OMI

To share a providential moment: the hotel was not ready for us, even though this was organized many months in advance. We had rented the whole hotel – for over 100 people. The rooms had no heat, the elevator was broken, no proper eating arrangements. Big thing: the conference room was still under renovations. So...our gathering space was set up in the bar of the hotel. What an appropriate place for Oblates to meet – discussing evangelization “in the bars and streets, the by-ways and alley-ways”. It was a wonderful topic of reflection and delight. Another incident of God’s sense of Humour!!!



Mike Dechant, OMI

BY ELEANOR RABNETT, OBLATE ASSOCIATE

It was described by one associate as a province-wide Oblate family get-together. That’s exactly what it felt like.

As one of three associate delegates from our district, it felt like coming to a family reunion and meeting some of the members for the first time, talking with others who were known through e-mail or telephone calls, renewing friendships and listening to the stories. Associates met during our opportunity to gather in a focus group. With associates from most of the districts and along with a few religious Oblates, we spent most of our time introducing ourselves, telling a little of our “story”, and exploring the work being done by the association commission before returning to the ongoing conversation of Convocation.

Coming together we prayed, socialized, shared and discussed. The conversation began as we listened and shared our



Isabelle Gigault, Lucie Leduc and Eleanor Rabnett

joys and dreams as well as our fears and pain. It was about God's awesome call to love his cherished ones, those who are voiceless, the most abandoned. It was about the invitation to share a way of life centred on the Oblate charism and how we do that with each other, with and within our extended Oblate family. It was about community and communion. What wonderful conversations! What precious gifts!

Our Convocation started in Vancouver but it's not finished yet. We've just begun. Now back in our districts, in our parishes and missions and in our daily lives the conversation continues.

BY CHRIS RUSHTON, OMI

I have just returned from a marvellous experience in Vancouver. The weather was superb and the occasion of being

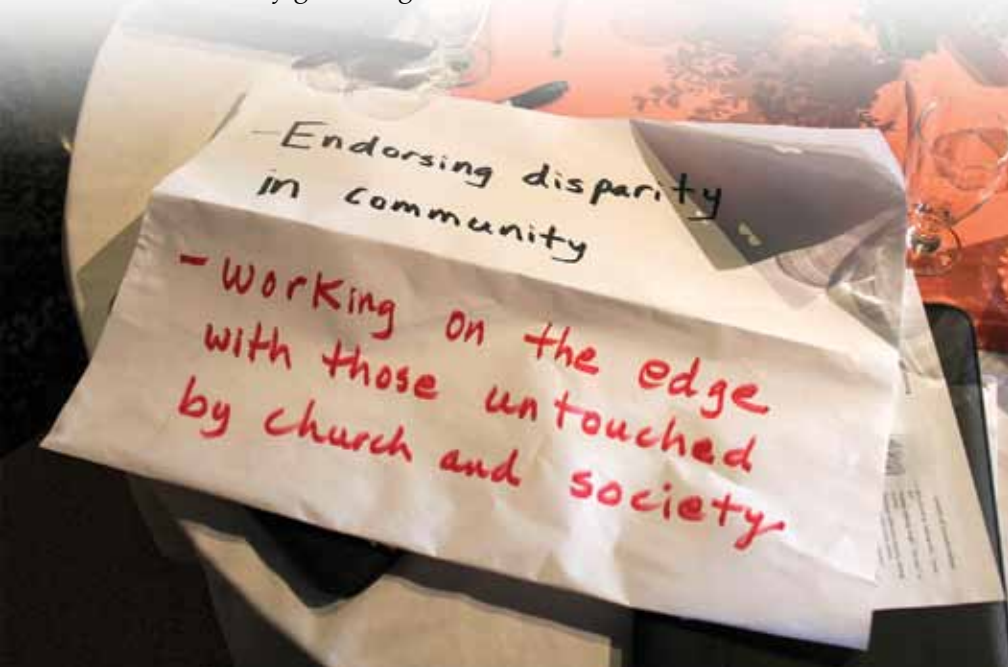
with other Oblates was very enriching. Vancouver is not the East. It has its own beauty - the mountains and the ocean. I was late (as usual) due to scheduling of planes and an almost 'crash' in Montreal. But God was looking after us and I arrived.

I found the Convocation a truly spiritual moment in our lives as Oblates. I thought, and felt that we listened and heard each other in a way that we have not done before. Yes, our two major issues, wanting to be in community with each other and wanting to minister to those who are most marginalized, have been stated before. But I believe that we said it in a very different way this time. It has given me much hope. As we diminish, we are not diminished. I really think there is a vibrant, strong wish to be Oblate and to respond to the Oblate charism.

BY TOM CAVANAUGH, OMI

I look back with much gratitude to OMI Lacombe 2011 Convocation.

It was obvious that we as Oblates and Associates know how to gather and celebrate with joy and commitment to the task at hand. This gave life and stability to our three days of community gathering.



- Endorsing disparity
in community

- Working on the edge
with those untouched
by church and society

Setting a new direction

BY JOHN M. MALAZDREWICH, OMI

As the Provincial Council reflected on the experience of the Vancouver Convocation, we echoed what many of you have



John M. Malazdrewich, OMI

said: “It was a great event”, “We took another important step in becoming OMI Lacombe Canada”, “We are in a different place as a Province”, “A most prayerful gathering, reflective, contemplative, less ‘head’, more ‘heart/spirit’”, “We heard the call to conversion in our Community life and in our Ministry”, “We heard the call to cross the border from ‘I to ‘We’”, “The themes that

emerged during the Convocation were themes that we have talked about many times, but this conversation helped us claim in a new way our commitment to community and ministry with the marginalized”, “We met in/transformed a bar; made it our own in a way that is truly Oblate”.

Our Convocation theme: “Fanning the Flame: Discerning Directions in Ministry” was chosen to enable us as a Province to name and choose directions for our present and future ministry. Two directions clearly emerged at the Convocation: “community” and “ministry among the marginalized”.

The Provincial Council endeavoured to hear what we are saying to one another through the Convocation. While there is some diversity around the “how”, there is no doubt that

through the Convocation we have articulated a clear direction for our Province Ministry. We have called and mandated one another to be intentional about how we live community and how we focus our ministry with the marginalized.

The Provincial Council is committed to this direction. In every decision and discussion we will ask: How does this support our commitment to community? How does this reflect our commitment to the poor and the marginalized?

How does one take the experience and directions of our Provincial Convocation and move ahead? One step at a time! We cannot do it all at once, but we can commit ourselves to taking one step at a time.

We all have an understanding of what community and ministry with the marginalized means. Our understanding may not be totally the same, and they need not be. We must walk the path we have set before us and not get caught up on having it all figured out, or being in total agreement before we move forward. To do so could stall us from taking the next steps.

(Malazdrewich is the Provincial Superior of OMI Lacombe Canada)

Carl Kelly, OMI and John Malazdrewich, OMI



Growth in Kenya

BY JIM FIORI, OMI

KENYA – My principle focus in Kenya is on the formation of our candidates. I live with six men who are journeying in the process of becoming Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and priests. Not unlike parenthood, which you know more about than do I, it is a full time job. I'm aware that I am no longer a young man. As the saying goes, "my future is behind me."

No doubt many of you have heard of the drought and famine that was experienced in this area. For the most part the drought was experienced in the northern parts of the country neighbouring Sudan and Somalia. I have the impression that Kenya was able to provide more assistance to its people than Sudan and Somalia. Many refugees seeking aid fled to Kenya from Somalia, forming one of the largest refugee camps in the world. Somalia is basically without a government and is caught up in armed conflict. The aid agencies were unable to provide aid within the country itself. The rains have come so the famine will be over at least until the next drought but the dire straights of the refugees remains.

Politically Kenya is stable and probably one of the most stable countries on the continent. They are in the process of inaugurating a new constitution that should go a long way to establishing a just society. That is the hope and dream. Corruption in my mind is probably the most significant cause of injustice and dysfunctional government at all levels.

Jim Fiori, OMI



Christmas is very different here. It has not been commercialized. There is no great flurry of Christmas shopping. The emphasis is on family. As in Canada, the schools are closed until early January and people take holidays to be at home. This is particularly true in Nairobi. There is little by way of Christmas decorations, no Christmas trees, no tinsel and lights.



Joseph Magambo, OMI

This past year has been a very significant one for the Oblate Kenya Mission. Last January two Kenyans made their final or perpetual vows, the first Kenyans to become professed Oblates. One of the newly professed is Brother Joseph Magambo and he is now in mission in our formation community in Méru. Brother Gideon Rimberia returned to the Scholasticate in Cedara, South

Africa to complete his studies. In September he became the first Kenyan Oblate to be ordained deacon. We are planning his ordination to the priesthood this coming April. At the moment we are busy preparing for the perpetual vows of two more Kenyans. These are days of rejoicing for us. Indeed God has favoured us.

(Jim Fiori is the Oblate Kenya Mission Superior)

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Challenges in the North

BY PABLO FEELEY, OMI

NUNAVUT – It was minus 48 when I stepped off the plane. That was my Nunavut novitiate. And that turned out to be the lesson of winter: the normal temperature is minus 30. The wind can take it anywhere. Christmas Eve it was minus 60; New Year's night was minus 53. You don't step outside during blizzards like those.

My next surprise was doubly surprising. I was met at the airport by Fabienne, a Swiss lay missionary running the parish alone during 2011; she's been there for 12 years. The second was a Philippine parishioner who drove us to the parish. And that turned out to be the beginning of the multicultural face of Rankin Inlet.

We were invited for Christmas dinner. The hosts were a family from India. (When I was in Iqaluit about five years ago, Nunavut imported 42 nurses. The hostess was one of the imported nurses.)

Also present was a nurse from Sta. Lucia, a social worker from Granada (her father is the governor general), a doctor from Australia, a figure skater coach from New Brunswick. Later I also met a Chinese born physiotherapist who had lived in Cambodia, and an artist from Iran. On the other hand, one Inuit girl went with Justin Trudeau's Youth Core to Bolivia and her sister went to Honduras (she'll be in training as a supervisor when she gets back from Peru). Three youth went to Germany for World Youth Day; and two went to the recent ecology summit in Durban, South Africa.

Now, let's dive into Nunavut.



Pablo Feeley, OMI

The Oblates have a great history of working in the Canadian northwest. But we never entered Eskimo territory until 1912 ... at Chesterfield Inlet.

The western part of Nunavut is mainly Catholic. Rankin Inlet is the largest Catholic community in the Diocese of Churchill-Hudson Bay. In 1962, there were 30 OMI working in the diocese. Today, there are

six. Rankin is served by the priesthood of the faithful, not by the ordained ministers.

And yet, in spite of all that, there were about 600 people at Mass Christmas Eve. Mind you, not all were Catholics. I met one Zoroastrian, one Evangelical, one United Church ... so I can presume others. And what a celebration we had on New Year's Eve with another 300 people.

Fabienne had suggested some type of reflection about 2011. Today, parents in Nunavut are angry, sad and scared when they see what is happening to their youth. Kids are angry, sad and scared by the bullying they experience. Everyone is sad and scared of the new diseases of addictions, cancer, obesity, Alzheimer's, etc. These are our 'heaviness of heart' today in Rankin.

This all leads to the big question: can we not find a new way to mission among these and other peoples? Or are we just going to let it all die out?

Prayers for the poor

BY BLAISE MACQUARRIE, OMI

PERU – It was a cold winter’s morning with a sky so dark and angry-looking clouds ready to drench the earth. A fine drizzle was falling and in spite of the bleakness of the day, the leaves had a beautiful shine of clearness that helped to make the morning a little brighter.

I noticed a very old man walking up the dirty street wearing an old, filthy blanket that had more holes in it than cloth. He walked slowly and looked as if he was carrying the world’s problems. I went to my room for a fairly new heavy bed blanket. Folding it, I proceeded to the other side of the street to meet this elderly person.

I asked if he wanted to trade blankets, but to my surprise he said no. He looked at me with sad, watery eyes and hesitated to speak in answer to my offer. I did not insist, but returned to my room with my blanket pondering his negative response.

After some reflection I came to the conclusion that “no” was not out of disrespect for my interest in helping him but rather to say “if I accept your new blanket, this very night it will be taken from me by thieves and drug addicts as I sleep in the street ... so my old, dirty and holey blanket helps me to keep warm.”

Amen!

One day I came across a fallen-down shack and knocked on the plywood door hanging from one hinge. A man, about 45 and the father of eight children, appeared at the door. I chatted with him for a few minutes and he invited me into his ‘home.’

I mentioned that we could help him build a little home but, being very poor, he did not have two cents to rub together. When I mentioned to him that he had to participate in the actual work in the construction of his new house, he said he couldn’t give the time “because I have no job and I am working



out in the streets for food for the family.”

Upon hearing his good logic I offered him something that the poor man did not expect. I said “during the construction of your new house you will work with my builders. While the work progresses and at the completion of the construction you will receive a decent wage to provide for your family.”

The man, with great surprise, began to cry. “No one does things like this ...”

Amen!

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Why did you choose us?

How did you hear about the Oblate missionary work?

How have the Oblates supported, inspired and encouraged you?

What are some of your best memories of Oblates and their missionary work?



Send your stories (and photos) to: lacombemami@sasktel.net

In Your Words

BY GAETANE PAUL

Joseph Zoller, OMI, passed away on Sunday, December 4

I first met Joseph Zoller, OMI, in 2004, but got to know him on a more personal level in 2009 when he moved from Fox Valley, SK, to Mazenod Residence in Saskatoon,

By then Fr. Joe was showing signs of dementia, which affects memory, thinking, language, judgment and behavior. With Fr. Joe as my teacher, I had the privilege of learning about dementia, which is such a frustrating condition for those afflicted.

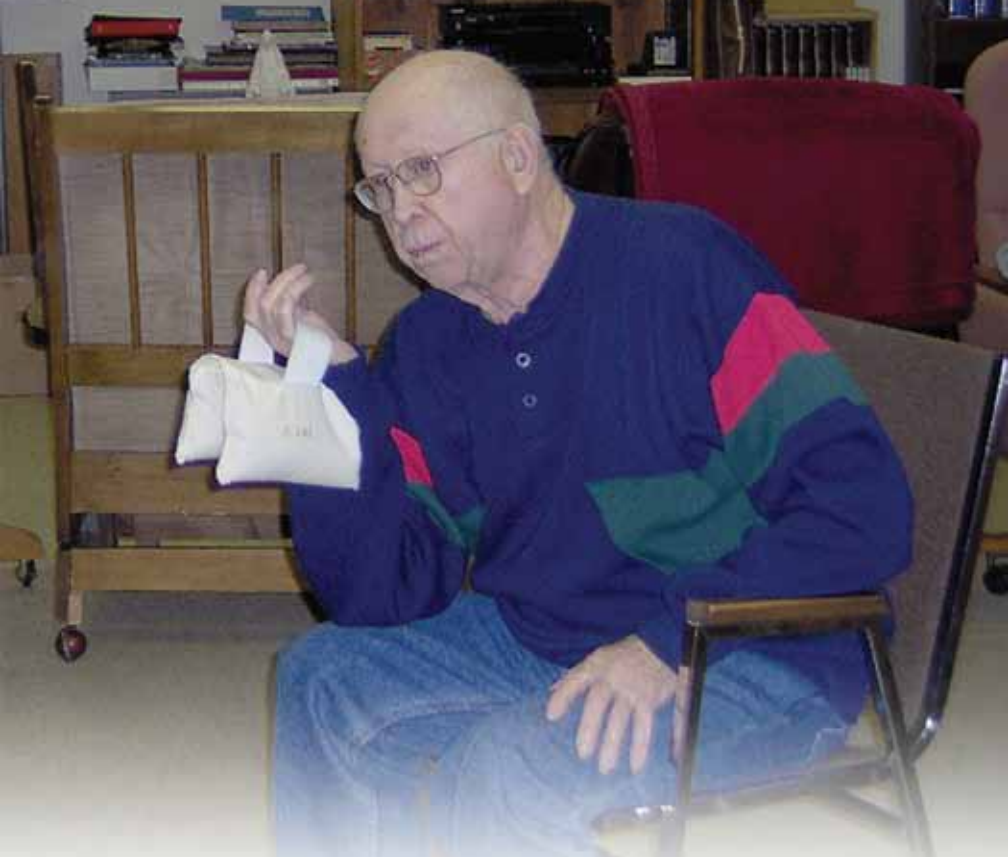
When Fr. Joe first arrived at Mazenod he would spend a lot of time in my office. He liked to sit and watch me as I worked. At first it was awkward having him watch my every move, but eventually I grew used to it and looked forward to his visits.

In the beginning I would ask him questions but soon learned that asking questions frustrated him because he couldn't always find the answers so I would just wait to see what he had on his agenda. He could be brutally honest, stubborn, mischievous ... and he was funny.

It was those rare glimpses of the 'man' that I found so enjoyable and fascinating. I loved his sarcastic humour, his teasing and his different take on life. He enjoyed reading everything that was on my desk or on my computer. I quickly learned to leave out only things he should be reading ... but he especially liked it if he thought he was sneaking something he shouldn't!

I would hide, somewhere he could easily find, various newsletters and the OMI Lacombe directory. He especially enjoyed looking at pictures of his brother Oblates ... spending great lengths of time staring at them. I often wondered what was going on in his brain when he looked at those photos.

I was not a nurse or care-aide, so I didn't have to make him do anything ... my office was free of rules, free of someone



Joseph Zoller, OMI, passed away on Sunday, December 4, 2011.

telling him what he could or couldn't do. In my office he was "the boss" and he loved to push that as far as he could with me protesting that he was going to "get me fired" ... and he relished having someone else in "trouble."

Fr. Joe loved when I gave him jobs. He wanted to help as much as he could. When I moved offices, he helped me move everything into my new office (the closet, he called it.)


He liked repetitive tasks. One day I watched him meticulously pick up all my paper clips and put them in a box with the clips all facing the same direction. So on most days when I heard him coming down the hall, I would spill a box of paper clips so he had a "job" to do. With those big blue eyes looking at me, he painstakingly picked up the paper clips and teased me about being so "darn messy." It was a ritual we did together

and I received great joy in seeing the look on his face when the task was completed.

I'm not sure what he enjoyed more ... the task or being able to tease me about how much "trouble" I was.

Fr. Joe's dementia progressed quickly, but there were times when he was "all there", times when he was lucid and you could see that he recognized you; times when you just couldn't pull anything over on him because he would call you on it!

As those times grew further and further apart they became more and more precious; a glimmer of recognition was like a special gift to cherish.



From the day Fr. Joe arrived at Mazenod he kept asking to "go home"; he didn't know where home was but he knew he longed to go there. The last time I saw him alive I whispered to him that he was finally going home.

Farewell Fr. Joe. Thank you for being a patient teacher, for the wonderful memories and for your wonderful gift of laughter.

(Gaetane Paul is the Administrative Assistant for the Saskatchewan District Community)

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Oblate Spirit

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