


AMMI *Lacombe* Canada MAMI

# Oblate Spirit



April 2013



*Kenya Insight*

# A journey of the soul



When the curtains opened and Pope Francis stepped forward, it seemed like a breath of fresh air had blown through the Vatican.

Even though he is a Jesuit, it sounds like he could well have been an Oblate. He eschews the trappings of the position (a bus ride instead of a limousine), cooks his own food and has a heart for those so very less fortunate in our world. The image of him washing the feet of an AIDS victim is enduring and endearing.

That is so much the picture of the Oblates we have come to know over the last century in Canada. That is also the story of the Canadian Oblates we hear coming out of countries like Africa, Peru, Guatemala and other far-reaching corners of the world.

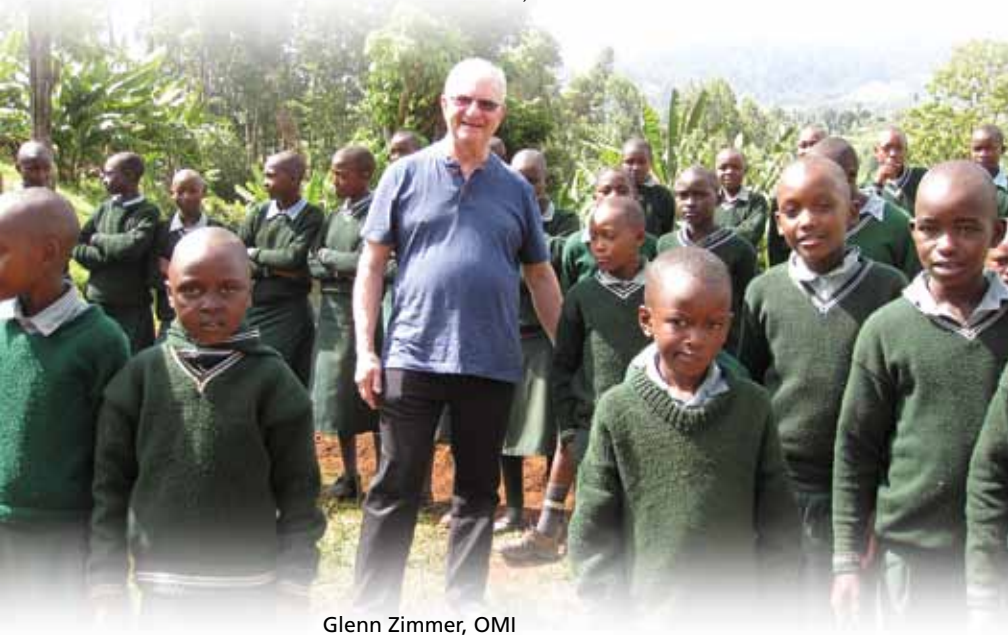
Some members of the MAMI team recently returned from their first trip to the OMI Lacombe mission in Africa. To say it was an eye-opening experience would be an understatement. You can read some of their profound observations in the pages that follow.

The poignant statement by Bishop Salesius of Kenya about the Oblates is so powerful. "The Oblates walk everywhere, just like most of the people. The people know that the Oblates will always be there with them. It is my impression that we have learned from this pastoral giant."

Pope Francis and the Oblates understand what it means to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. For them, it is a journey of the soul.

*John and Emily Cherneski*  
*Communications Coordinators*

*'Wherever I walk, an Oblate walks'*



Glenn Zimmer, OMI

## A bishop's impressions

BY GLENN ZIMMER, OMI

MÉRU – “It is my impression ...” was the oft-repeated phrase of the quiet, soft-spoken man at the head of the table. He was speaking about the Oblate missionary presence in the Diocese of Méru in Kenya. From the outset he spoke of the Oblate parish in the diocese (consisting of 11 prayer houses or faith communities) as being a model; in the same breath he praised the many Oblate initiatives to better the daily lives of the people through water projects, clinics and schools. This gentle, smiling man was Bishop Salesius

Bishop  
Salesius  
Mugambi



Mugambi, taking time to personally share a broad perspective of the work of the Oblates in the diocese for more than 15 years.

The day had begun with the Oblate community in St. Stephen's Parish, Kionyo (near Mount Kenya) about an hour away from the city of Méru. As usual, the community began the day just after 6 a.m. with silent meditation, common prayer and the Eucharist with several local people, followed by breakfast and cheerful conversation. It was Monday, Jan. 14, the beginning of the sixth day of an extensive mission tour graciously escorted throughout the 12 days by Kenya mission superior Jim Fiori, OMI.

Joined by Oblate Alfred Groleau from Canada and now serving in a formation house in Méru, we were warmly greeted by Sister Joyce, and then by Bishop Salesius who insisted that refreshments and something to eat first be served. No welcome anywhere in Kenya is ever complete without the hospitality of food and drink.



The total number of Oblates (not counting those in formation) now ministering in Kenya is 11, and of these, eight in the Diocese of Méru. The diocese by most Canadian standards is large: more than 900,000 Catholics, about 200 diocesan and religious priests, 12 deacons, 22 communities of sisters and more than 100 seminarians. Although we were impressed by what the Oblates are accomplishing, nevertheless, one could not help but wonder if this small group of Oblates from four diverse countries is really making much of a difference in the overall much larger church in Kenya.

And then the bishop began to speak.

The bishop spoke of the qualities that most mark the Oblate way. "It is my impression that you have a different pastoral approach ... it is my impression that you are very patient

John Malazdrewich, OMI, Bishop Salesius, Jim Fiori, OMI





Glenn Zimmer, OMI

with the people ... you are down to earth ... you are there to be one with the community and not to impose your way of thinking on the people ... you serve as a community ... you move the people beyond dependency ... you are undoing some of the former mission approaches of years ago ... you are partners with the people.”

Bishop Salesius spoke of the prevalence of secondary day schools, started by the Oblates, so that more children could go to school without being restricted to the former sole option of attending a boarding school, a limitation that kept many children from further schooling because of the cost. Today there are more secondary day schools than boarding schools, because of the vision of the Oblates working together with the people.

The bishop recalled the criticism of one man earlier directed to the Oblates. “Why did you bring us these wuzungu (white people) at the beginning? They will be the same as everyone

else who comes here: ‘Come, we’ll take the lead, we’ll show you how it is done, the people can just relax.’ Later the same man came back, and said: ‘I was wrong ... I judged too early. The Oblates are not like the others.’”

The bishop then softly concluded: “The Oblates walk everywhere, just like most of the people. The people know that the Oblates will always be there with them. It is my impression that we have learned from this pastoral giant.” These concluding impressions echoed what we had heard two days ago from Bernard, chairperson of St. Stephen’s parish council, who like countless others sees himself as an extension of the Missionary Oblates: “Wherever I walk, an Oblate walks.”

After an hour, the personal exchange came to an end; pictures were taken and grateful goodbyes spoken. And after repairing yet another flat tire, our group went into the nearby slums to meet more of our own people to whom we belong and who belong with us – and yes, to have something to eat with them.

*(Zimmer is co-director of the Qu’Appelle House of Prayer)*

## WANTED: YOUR STORIES!

*There are many charities and good causes that solicit your support. Yet for some reason you have chosen to offer the Oblates your prayers, friendship and assistance.*

### **We are curious:**

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](mailto:lacombemami@sasktel.net)**





Diane Lepage

# Looking into the eyes of God

BY DIANE LEPAGE







Have you ever had a moment in your life that literally brought you to your knees? A time that took your breath away and filled you with awe and deep soulful gratitude?

I was graced with such an event that caught me totally off guard. It took place at a school yard one morning in January, in the rural area of the Oblate mission in Kionyo, Kenya. I was visiting the mission for the first time, meeting many beautiful people, experiencing the culture and seeing as many places as possible where we have assisted in funding projects.

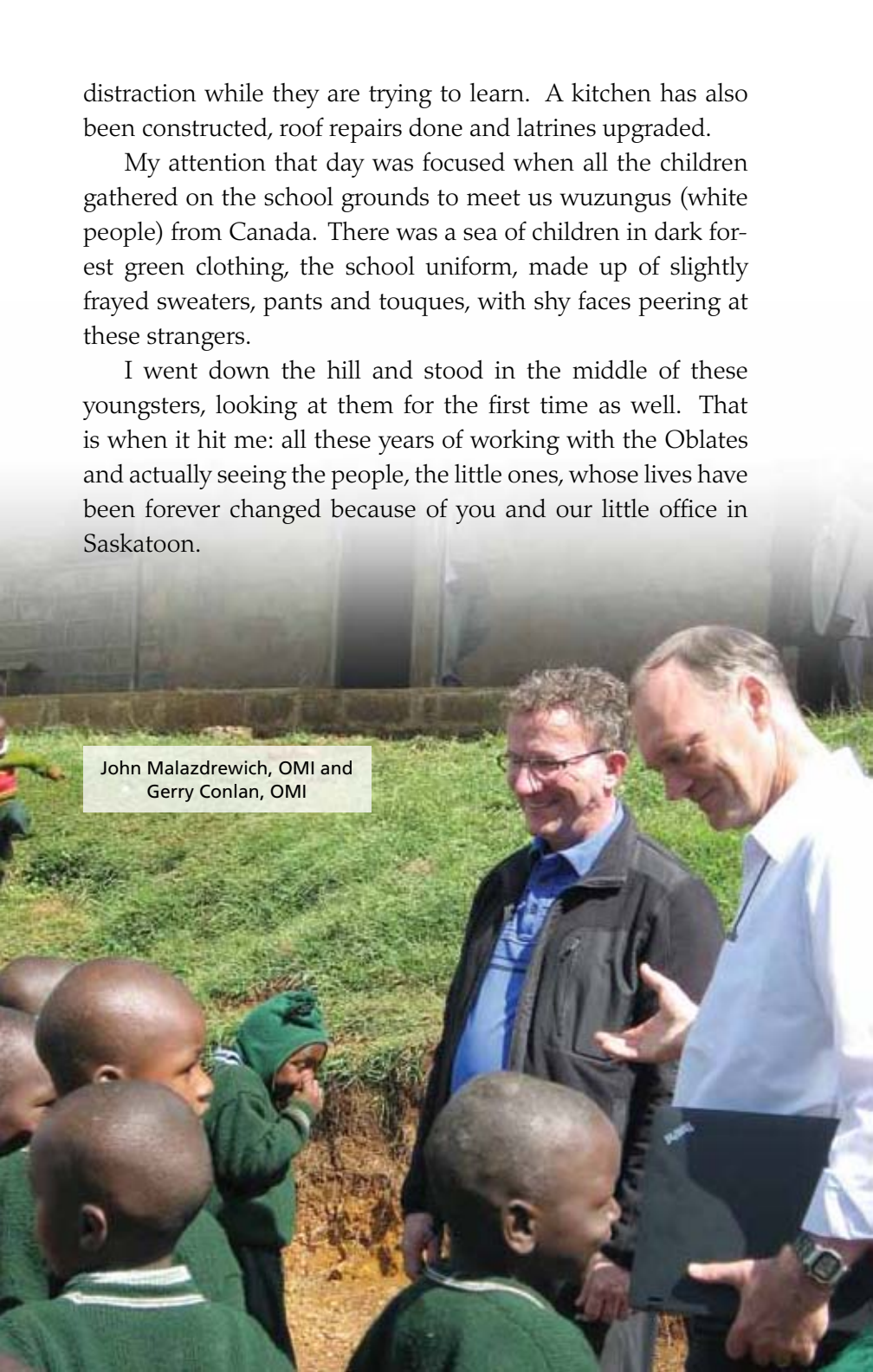
That Friday morning the Bubwi Primary School was on our list. Donations from Canadian MAMI donors have been used to help build the school a step at a time since 1999. Our funds would see to the building of one layer of bricks and then the local Kenyan people would hold a harambee (fund-raiser) selling their produce to raise money to build the next layer. And so it has continued in that fashion, a partnership between the people of Canada and the people of Kenya.

Most recently the Bubwi school has installed cement floors to prevent the jiggers (worms) from coming out of the dirt floors, climbing up the children's legs and causing great

distraction while they are trying to learn. A kitchen has also been constructed, roof repairs done and latrines upgraded.

My attention that day was focused when all the children gathered on the school grounds to meet us wuzungus (white people) from Canada. There was a sea of children in dark forest green clothing, the school uniform, made up of slightly frayed sweaters, pants and touques, with shy faces peering at these strangers.

I went down the hill and stood in the middle of these youngsters, looking at them for the first time as well. That is when it hit me: all these years of working with the Oblates and actually seeing the people, the little ones, whose lives have been forever changed because of you and our little office in Saskatoon.

A photograph showing two men, John Malazdrewich and Gerry Conlan, standing in a field with a group of children. The men are wearing jackets and are looking towards the children. The children are wearing green sweaters and are looking towards the men. The background shows a grassy field and some structures in the distance.

John Malazdrewich, OMI and  
Gerry Conlan, OMI

I fell to my knees, my heart filled with raw emotion as I looked around at these precious children. One small girl, probably not more than five years old, came closer to me and we shook hands. It was a moment I will never, ever forget. As I looked into her eyes, I saw a glimpse of the face of God, and it was breathtaking indeed.

*(Diane Lepage is the executive director of AMMI Lacombe MAMI)*

## Donating securities to Oblate missionary works

Do you have publicly traded securities that you would like to donate to the benefit of the Oblate missions?

With the tax law introduced in 2006, you can now directly donate your publicly traded securities (shares) to **AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI** and receive an official income tax receipt while avoiding the payment of capital gains tax.

To take advantage of this tax-saving offer, please call Diane Lepage (1-866-432-6264) at our office for further information. A minimum market value of \$5,000 is suggested. We would be happy to facilitate this exchange that benefits you and the poor of the Oblate missions.



Please keep us in your prayers as we look to take Oblate Mission Travel to a new location in South America in the fall of 2013.

If you are interested in receiving information or joining Oblate Mission Travel on their next Mission Trip, please contact Oblate Mission Travel at [nmfinnie@yahoo.com](mailto:nmfinnie@yahoo.com).

# Kenya Mission Awareness 2013

Gerry Conlan, OMI, is a man on a mission. He makes his way around Kenya on a motorcycle (pictured), but will use more conventional means of travel when he comes to Canada this spring.

*AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI* is pleased to welcome Fr. Gerry, who will be travelling across our country and sharing his mission experiences in Kenya. Having spent years at the Canadian mission in Kenya, he will emphasize how our support has made a tremendous difference in the lives of others. We invite you to come and meet Gerry as he makes his way across the country, and through his visual presentation meet the beautiful people of Kenya.

**Gerry Conlan, OMI**



Preparations are under way in your area for Gerry to meet with parishioners, organizations, schools and in small gatherings. If you are interested in hosting an event, please get in touch with the listed contact for each region to explore the possibilities. Or you can call the mission office in Saskatoon at 1-866-432-6264.

## **REGIONAL CONTACTS:**

### **Saskatchewan – April 26 to May 2**

- Eugene Warnke, OMI  
(306) 653-3113 ext. 121
- Roberta Edworthy (306) 653-6455

### **Alberta – May 3 to May 11**

- Ken Thorson, OMI  
(780) 460-4269

### **British Columbia – May 12 to May 26**

- Ken Forster, OMI (604) 254-3100
- Neysa Finnie (604) 736-3972

### **Manitoba – June 1 to June 6**

- Bernard Pinet, OMI  
(204) 284-9754

### **Ontario – June 7 to June 17**

- Ed MacNeil, OMI (613) 567-0371
- Paul Howard (905) 471-1103

### **Atlantic – June 18 to June 22**

- Chris Rushton, OMI  
(709) 896-3485



# Frannie and Simba - A Tale of Two Cats

BY GLENN ZIMMER, OMI

Those who come to the Qu'Appelle House of Prayer where I live know well the existence of Frannie who first arrived with me as a young kitten on the Feast of St Francis (hence, the name) in 1995. She, often considered by many except herself to be my cat, was soon after joined by her son Zoey, who arrived several months later with a few siblings. These two felines seemingly continue to live the life we humans often long to live, and above all, are a welcoming presence to all who come here.

During my recent trip to the Oblate missions in Kenya, given the long history Frannie and I share, quite naturally the cat who lives at our formation house in Méru caught my friendly eye. I was told that he keeps the mouse and rat situation in check, is nervous around humans, and didn't have a name. For my time there, I named him Simba, a Swahili word for lion from the great movie, "The Lion King." For all that, Simba's only response was running away as quickly as he could each time I approached.

Until the last evening, that is. After a community Eucharist, all of us gathered for a pre-dinner drink and appetizers. Suddenly the elusive cat appeared, and began to warm to me, thanks entirely to some of the appetizers stealthily shared beneath my chair.

Somewhat later in my room, I adjusted the mosquito netting and turned off the light for the night. Dark is very dark in Kenya. Drifting off to sleep, I not so much heard as sensed another presence in the darkness, seemingly on my bed. And so I turned on the light – and there was Simba, at the foot of the bed. I don't know who was more startled, but Simba



quickly escaped through a very small opening in the window. I then realized how hard it would have been to get from ground level, several feet below on the outside stone wall, to a very small window ledge, up the security grill, through the small opening, down the inside of the curtains, and onto the bed. And just how did he find his way to the far corner of the property into the small building in which I was staying? Cats.

Once again I turned off the light and began to fall asleep on this last night in the Oblate mission. And once again, an unmistakable sense of another presence. Simba was back. This time, he curled up next to me, and purred his way through much of the night.

We met again the next morning for the last time, when he led me from the breakfast table to his very empty bowl in the kitchen, pointedly looking at the fresh milk just brought from the cow on the Oblate grounds.

And in a quiet tender way, I at once knew that some sort of oneness existed between Frannie and Simba, that despite the distance between Southern Saskatchewan and Kenya, these two animals are kindred spirits. And if so for cats, how much more so between the people in Kenya and the people of Canada. We have so much precious and essential humanity in common.

# Barcaza update

BY JOHN CHERNESKI

The Barcaza is on the move ... sort of, with the help of a cement patch.

If you recall, we talked about the Barcaza in our Christmas issue of *Oblate Spirit*. Moe Schroeder, OMI, had requested funds to help restore the Barcaza, a boat used to move people up and down the Napo River in Peru. It is of extreme value in transporting ailing Peruvians to the hospital in St. Clotilde that is operated by Canadian Oblates.

It seems we Canadians were quite touched by the request and donated in excess of \$50,000, far more than the \$20,000 required. But the story gets better, and is best related by Fr. Schroeder.

“In December, Javier, our logistics manager, brought a shipwright/mechanic from the Iquitos dock yards to Santa







Clotilde to evaluate the Barcaza. He recommended the motor (a three-cylinder diesel Baudouin from the '50s) should be repaired but not replaced. He obtained a transmission and installed it very successfully with excellent results. He replaced the main drive-shaft and its coupling mechanism, obtaining parts from other motors. The motor is in good running condition."

But there were other problems. It became obvious the Barcaza required hull and body work.

"The steel sheeting and wooden parts of the structure must be replaced or repaired. All the materials are available in the dock yards in Iquitos, but prices are high. Javier obtained the estimates and quotes and including all the insurance policies necessary, registration of crew, refurbishing of the interior (toilets, beds, etc.) the total budget is \$48,000," explained Fr. Moe.

"You collectively have given \$53,000 for the Barcaza repair! So we can make it. (How did you know?) The money was transferred, so we are taking the boat to Iquitos and starting the work in the dry dock. They say it will take a month.

"We're all excited about the prospects," wrote Fr. Moe.

"AND GRATEFUL TO YOU ALL!!!"

The Barcaza made the trip to Iquitos on its own steam but the crew had to block holes in the hull with cement en route. It is now in dry dock and the repairs are well under way.

Well done Canada!

*(John is one of the communications coordinators for Oblate Spirit)*

# Help sought for medical clinic in Guatemala

BY GERRY LESTRAT, OMI

GUATEMALA – Our Oblate brothers in Guatemala have started a great and beautiful project to assist the low income and poor families in their parish on the outskirts of Guatemala City.

The parish is Santa Cecilia and it serves a population of about 30,000. About 80 per cent of that population live under the poverty line and do not have any medical insurance. When they get sick they do not have the means to see a doctor. They find low paying jobs and odd work that just helps them to survive.

There are two government hospitals in Guatemala City that are always full. Some poor will go there as a last resort but usually do not come out alive because they have waited too long. The common saying is, “We go there to die.”

Many desperate mothers will bring their sick children to heal what most often started as a simple illness, but ends up critical for lack of professional medical support.

The project is the construction of a medical clinic, which has been urgent already for many years. The Oblate superior, Fr. Jose Manuel Santiago, and the Oblate team have been working on plans with doctors, architects and business people and have come up with concrete designs in a lot about two blocks away from the church.

Lawyers and architects have donated their services to get the project off the ground, while medical personnel, doctors, nurses, dentists and eye specialists have offered their service to help their brothers and sisters and the more desperate of



the area once the clinic is established. They have now poured the foundation and are ready to go ahead with the rest of the building. They will have examination rooms, waiting room, kitchenette, washrooms and offices to attend to the needy. They want to have good equipment such as electro-cardio, ultra-sound machines, beds and all the smaller equipment used for medical examinations.

The Oblate team expects the building of the facility will be funded, but they do not have any promise for the equipment and furnishings for the clinic. They are seeking financial help to purchase that equipment in Guatemala.

With the good will and generosity of Canadians, we will be able to alleviate the pain of many suffering people in that part of Guatemala. As a Canadian Oblate, I am asking in the name of the Oblates of Guatemala to consider this very needy project and generously answer with donations to support the purchase of equipment. Tax receipts for donations will be issued by sending your donations to AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI at 601 Taylor St. W., Saskatoon, SK S7M 0C9.

*(Gerry LeStrat is a Canadian Oblate who served in Guatemala for many years)*

# In your words

BY ANDRÉ AND YVONNE GOSSELING

When we saw the article “Wanted Your Stories” in the Oblate Spirit some time ago we decided to contribute our story. We knew some wonderful Oblates of Mary Immaculate in our day.

In 1951, André was transferred to the air force base in

Picture taken July 6, 1958, St. Monica’s Church. L to R: Andy’s mother, Andy with Paul, Father Nolan, Yvonne with Valerie (baptism), Andy’s father



Whitehorse for three years. The military chaplain was alone and unable to look after the needs of the base and its two detachments. Being in OMI territory, a priest from the diocese was attached as a part-time chaplain. We cannot remember his name but he remains very clearly in memory because he was so devoted to us, keeping in touch with all the Catholics on the base. Many of the personnel had difficulty coping with life in such an isolated place. Our OMI priest was the man to consult.

We were married in Marcelin, SK, in 1956. Yvonne had just graduated as an x-ray technician and André was a navigator on several types of airplanes in the Canadian Air Force.

We settled in Middleton, NS, near the Greenwood forces base where he worked. We rented a big roomy house directly facing Saint Monica's Roman Catholic Church. This church was a mission served by the Oblates who came from Annapolis Royal, about 30 miles away.

The first priest we met was Father Miller. He baptized our first child in our house as it was simpler than heating the whole church for one baptism. That was fine with us. Father Miller, who was elderly, was replaced by Father Francis Nolan and shortly after, the newly ordained Father Jack Davis came as assistant.

We soon got to know them well. If they needed a hammer and nails or other tools for some repair work, we would help out. Sometimes we also shared a friendly cup of coffee. They were down-to-earth holy priests, just great.

We started a small choir that practised at our house. One lady played the piano and another led the group. This was for special feasts like Christmas and Easter.

When Yvonne was six months pregnant with our second child, she fell down a few steps on the stairs and consequently became ill, in danger of a miscarriage. Bedridden for some time, Father Nolan came to visit and was very encouraging, saying that he knew of some babies that were born at six

months and had survived. (In the 1950s they did not have today's technologies). Then he would pray for us. The baby came at nine months, a beautiful healthy girl we called Valerie.

On one occasion Fr. Davis actually babysat for us. He had celebrated midnight mass at Christmas and it was arranged that he would stay the rest of the night with us, as the mission had no living quarters. We left him in charge of our sleeping two-year old Paul while we went out briefly to a Christmas gathering with other air-force friends, as our own families were usually too far away to visit.

We were transferred to Halifax and years later to Ottawa. There we met Fr. Joseph Birch. We read his articles in the Oblate Mission news for many years. So we contacted him and we had the pleasure of receiving him at our house for a meal. It was a memorable meeting with this charming man of God.

Upon retirement we bought the family farm near Quebec City. We had seven wonderful children as we moved 12 times around Canada. We know Canada and love our country from coast to coast.

We are always interested in the Oblates and have added our support to the Oblates of the far North. The Oblates have always been fearless great missionaries, great human beings and great men of God.

We love you. Thank you. We pray for you.

## **NEW** Gift Payment Option

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