



# Oblate Connexions Oblates

Oblate Mission Associates

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## A Sunday in Karinde ~ Kenya

Alfred Groleau, OMI

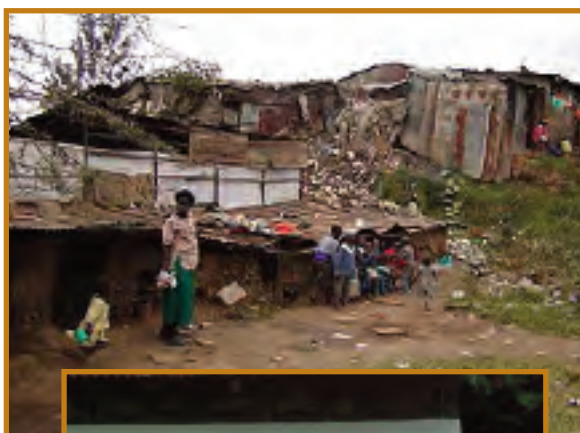
One Sunday I attended Mass at *St. John's Church* in Karinde, a church in the midst of the people's slum settlement outside of Nairobi, Kenya. I thus crossed over from upper class Karen to where the ordinary people live. Karinde is so called because it is at the end of Karen, a large affluent urban suburb of Nairobi inhabited traditionally by *masungu* (white people) and more recently by affluent Africans, as well as a host of Religious communities gathered around the *Catholic University of East Africa* and other Catholic institutions of higher learning: seminaries, scholasticates, convents of *Women Religious*, interspersed with churches from other Christian denominations and even the odd Muslim mosque. The district owes its name to Karen Blixen, author of *Out of Africa* and runner-up to Ernest Hemmingway for a Nobel prize in literature in the 1950's. A museum situated on the farm her husband established at the dawn of the 20th century is one of the many tourist sites in the district.

In contrast to Karen, Karinde features rows of 10x10 or 12x12 little houses walled with wood or metal panels and roofed with corrugated steel – one room houses a family of half a dozen or more. The houses have no running water, no power and no toilet facilities. The district is humane in comparison to huge slums found in Nairobi such as Kibera where one million people live in very tight quarters. The green gardens called shambas redeem

the environment of Karinde.

The small church of *St. John's* was proper and tidy. A couple hundred people sat elbow to elbow in solid pews. The benches along the walls were all full. The ambiance was warm. The polyphonic choir and the liturgical dancers were well rehearsed, making a two hour celebration in Kiswahili a feast for the eye, ear and heart.

After Mass I met Evelyn. She had recently come to visit me seeking assistance. She was later to exercise a competent role as the secretary of a small circle of women who gather once a month with me in Karen to discuss micro economic projects to improve their



living standard such as the purchase of a cow or chicken, the sale of fish or produce. After keeping minutes for a few months, one day Evelyn announced that she was leaving the group because she had found a job opportunity. When she thanked me, I was reminded of the Samaritan leper who came back to thank Jesus. This day, Evelyn led me to Freddie's place because she was living in the same compound as he. But I must tell you who Freddie is.

At 18 years old he is completing Form IV, equivalent to high school in Canada. Strong and sturdy, Freddie works relentlessly from 8 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m. pausing only for lunch when he comes to our house to work off the school fees we have paid for him. His father Joseph relies on assistance to complete the education of his children but also to support twenty orphan boys that he has adopted. I visited the dormitory where they share five double bunks. That day the boys were peeling potatoes outside in the usual joyful ambience. Joseph gives them love as he instructs them in faith. He teaches the boys how to manufacture marketable items from banana leaves of the shamba. His boys are successful in sports and drama competitions. Some are talented singers and artists.

Joseph is very poised and eloquent as he tells the story of the conversion experience that called him to his mission with these youth. In 1997 he was robbed and left half dead by thugs. After his broken arms and legs were mended, he marveled at his recovery from this beating and felt an urge to dedicate his life to a God-given mission. He began to take in orphan youths. For ten years he has been resourceful in developing means of sustenance and help.

At the end of the visit, in typical African-style hospitality Priscilla, Joseph's wife, offered me a plate of beans and maize. When I finally returned home hours later, Father Jim Jordan was curious of my whereabouts. I gladly shared the gifts of the encounters on that typical Sunday. Life in Kenya is an adventure when you're open to being led from encounter to encounter.



The boys living at Joseph and Priscilla's orphanage

## Visit to Peru

Bruce and Irene Finkel and André Boyer, OMI

*"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples ... you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."*  
(John 15: 8, 16)



"This celebration stands out as something special" ~ Andy Boyer, OMI

The trip to Peru last fall was truly a memorable event for each of us. There are many celebrations that one attends in a lifetime, but the celebration recognizing fifty years of ministry and presence of the Oblates in Peru certainly stands out as something special.

At the *Centre House* in Comas, we met several Canadian missionaries who had returned for the celebration, Paulo Feeley OMI and Otto Rollheiser OMI to name but a few. We toured the Oblate School called *Jesus Obrero (Jesus the Worker)*. The school is currently under the leadership of a Peruvian lay woman who maintains the Oblate charism in the administration of the school. The school is mainly for boys and has 682 day students who learn academics as well as taking vocational training. The school offers courses in woodworking, metal work and auto mechanics to name just a few. In Peru most school students wear school uniforms and it was an impressive sight to see all these students going about in uniforms which sport the Oblate crest on them. There is no mistaking that they are students of our Oblate school, a visible sign of the presence of the Oblates in Peru. There are some sewing courses at the school open to girls as well. We quickly learned that the school students have consistently won national academic and technical honors for accomplishments. In addition to the 600 plus day students, the school offers evening courses for young men who wish to return to school to get vocational training and adult education courses.

During the week-long anniversary celebrations, at the Oblate parish adjacent to the *Center House* compound, there



they were treated unjustly and repeatedly insulted. And still, they remained in Peru! There is a deep sense of pride in Peru – the country that had been their home for many years. It was wonderful to see the many local men who have become Oblates during the tenure of our Canadian Oblates. As Canadians we can indeed be proud of both the past and present contribution many of our brothers are making to the people of Peru. But greater still is the reality that those whom we have formed are now assuming responsible positions in the continuation of Oblate ministry. We are indeed thankful for the lives and sacrifices of all serving in Peru.

## Peru in Winnipeg

Thomas Novak, OMI

were Symposium talks each evening by clerics and lay people alike. We learned that the parish has responsibility for 125,000 people. The church was packed each evening for these symposium events. Speakers included Bishops, Fr. Jorge Caleron and P. Gregorio Iriarte OMI. For us, it was amazing to realize that many of the lay people attending the celebrations had studied and internalized the many previous documents from the *Conference of Latin American Bishops*. It was an eye opener to see so many people taking an interest in, and being knowledgeable about, Church documents.



More than 300 people filled a parish hall in St. Boniface last fall for the 45th annual supper of the French branch of *Oblate Mission Associates* (AMMI). This year's focus was on the 50th anniversary of the Oblate presence in Peru. Four students of a nearby university college had prepared an audio-visual presentation based on the two weeks spent in Peru by Sr. Norma McDonald, C.S.C. Then Paul (Pablo) Feeley, OMI, spoke of his more than 40 years of missionary work in Peru and Bolivia. With entertaining anecdotes and a great sense of humour, Fr. Paul took us on a tour through the rural missions in the highlands, the medical mission in the Amazon jungle and the large parishes in the urban sprawl of Lima.

After Mass, the entire congregation was treated to a light snack before an evening of cultural dancing exhibitions and yes, audience dancing as well. There were many opportunities for us to meet people and hear first-hand accounts of how the Oblate presence had impacted their lives. One of the evening talks was done by a Peruvian lay woman who gave an account that still greatly impresses me. She related with pride and deep feeling how during the Shining Path's reign of terror, officials told the Oblates in Peru that they could no longer be protected from harm; they should all return to Canada. Not one chose to follow the advice. In fact, in a bombing episode, one Canadian missionary was severely injured and became handicapped. Additionally, all the Oblates were forced to undergo severe, weekly interrogations. During these questionings,

We had the great pleasure of welcoming Glenn Zimmer, OMI, of the *AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI* Coordination Team. Glenn expressed his admiration for the faithful work of so many *AMMI* members and paid tribute to each local organization.



**Please remember the  
Oblate Missions  
in your will**




**Legal Name: AMMI Lacombe Canada MAMI**

**Addition:**

Our December 2007 *Connexions* carried a photo on page 4 featuring the *First Nations Diocesan Circle* in which the 5th person remained unidentified. This person is Sr. Yvette Perreault from Whitefish Reserve. Thank you to Roberta Simard-Huberdeau for providing us with this information!

# Oblates and Women

Darlene O'Leary



Darlene O'Leary

I began my work as director of *Galilee Centre*, an Oblate Retreat & Renewal Centre, in Arnprior, ON (near Ottawa) nearly two years ago. This ministry experience has launched me into a new phase in my relationship with the Oblates. During the many years of being a parishioner at St. Joseph's Oblate parish in Ottawa, I was impressed by the openness of that community to welcoming

lay leadership, to supporting those in need through various ministries such as the *Supper Table* and *Women's Centre*, and to encouraging dialogue on challenging issues in the church. I have also spent several years at *St. Paul University* working on a Ph.D in Theology in the area of Christian Ethics. Again, this Oblate institution provided me with an environment of openness and dialogue that is essential to my learning and to advancing theological thought in which women's voices have a strong presence.

In these contexts, I have seen efforts at partnership, where mutual respect and responsiveness are key. In my position at *Galilee Centre*, I have a different kind of relationship with the Oblates who put me in a leadership role. I have long been concerned about the issue of women's leadership in social and ecclesial contexts. I constantly struggle with the levels of exclusion that have been so deeply embedded in our institutions and the weak justifications for allowing this to continue. In my own working experiences with Oblates, I sense a high level of respect for the voices of women in various areas of decision and dialogue. While the broader ecclesial institution and tradition still has a long way to go, I am encouraged that the Oblates can play an important role in this prophetic task.

As director of a retreat centre, I am able to design and deliver programs that invite critical reflection on matters of spiritual and theological significance. For me, this emerges through a focus on social justice, peace, and ecological commitments. These commitments are shared by the Oblates *in living the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod*. I have felt very encouraged by the Board of Directors and Membership of the corporation of *Galilee* in pursuing this direction. All of us who are involved in Oblate ministries have a responsibility to ensure that diverse and representative voices are part of the dialogue about how we live our ministries. For instance, in our Membership, Board, and Staff, we are working toward increasing diversity, to ensure that our programs, services, and partnerships speak to the needs of the truly marginalized. Our new partnership with the *Tobacco Healing Centre* particularly identifies First Nations people and single mothers as the highly marginalized populations needing our support.

There is a need to support ministries to those who are socially excluded and to support *Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)* programs, as part of a new way of understanding parish and mission and other ministries. The voices of women and the leadership of women must be central to those conversations and transformations if the Oblates are going to be truly prophetic and relevant to a changing world.

I hope that the experience and voices of women will continue to inform the way ahead for Oblate ministries. Given the broader social and ecclesial barriers to women, I think that the Oblates will have to continue to be deliberate and persistent in developing real partnerships with women and acting as a prophetic model of inclusion for the church and the broader society.



Galilee House, Arnprior, ON

## Next in Mission Oblate - << Kenya Oblate Formation >>

What attracts young Africans  
to the Oblates?

How much does *Oblate Formation* cost?

How does the current turmoil in Kenya affect  
our Oblate candidates?

