

JPIC REPORT



A publication of the OMI Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

From the Director: Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI

“Servants! Farmhands! Peasants! Poor! Come and learn who you are in the eyes of God. You poor of Jesus Christ, you afflicted, unfortunate suffering, infirm, diseased: All you who are burdened with misery, Listen to me! You are the children of God, Brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, Co-heirs of His eternal kingdom, His cherished inheritance. Lift up your minds: You are the children of God. Look through the tatters that cover you.”

Saint Eugene de Mazenod, OMI

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A few years ago, I moved to Washington, DC to begin a new ministry and journey through a new experience. A new page in my Oblate life began and now, four years later, that page turns again as I prepare for another ministry in the U.S. Province. When I reflect on my time with the Justice Peace & Integrity of Creation office, I feel an overwhelming gratitude for all who walked and worked with me, especially the Oblates who entrusted me with this ministry, and the JPIC office staff who welcomed me as part of their team.

I have been an Oblate for ten years and ordained a priest for eight. My first assignment was at a parish in downtown Mexico City, called Our Lady of Guadalupe, also known as “La Guadalupita”. I was, at the same time, a part-time chaplain at a walk-in clinic attached to the parish. My second assignment was at an Oblate School, “Colegio Vista Hermosa”, also in Mexico City, where I worked as a spiritual director. Two years later, I was appointed associate pastor at a very busy Oblate parish, Santa Rosa Church in San Fernando, CA., where I served for over three years. These ministries helped me learn how to be a priest and live out my Oblate vocation. In each one, I faced many challenges, but also great opportunities to learn and grow.

While ministering at the clinic in Mexico City, it was difficult to watch people request to see a doctor only long after experiencing and suffering from symptoms, because they had no money. Working with our doctors, staff, and benefactors, we always tried to come up with ways to help so patients were not turned away. The purpose of the clinic was precisely that, to provide basic health services for low-income

patients and offer spiritual support. Though at times it was difficult to find the resources to pay the doctors, staff and bills.

When I was parochial vicar at the parish of Santa Rosa, one of the challenges I faced was the pace and emotional endurance needed to help parishioners celebrate important family events. We would preside at three consecutive hours of confessions, some weddings, marriage anniversaries, quinceañears, all that in addition to the morning and vigil Masses. Accompanying parishioners on different occasions, some



Fr. Antonio meets with JPIC staff

happy, some sad, was to some extent difficult.

On any given Saturday, I would walk down the aisle leading a funeral procession, then a short time later, walk down the same aisle leading a wedding celebration. Two very different events but the same challenge: being ready to emotionally respond to what the occasion called for, whether it was sharing parishioners’ grief or celebrating with them. Saint Paul reminds the community of Rome when he says: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

(Continued on p. 4)

The OMI Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office coordinates the advocacy efforts of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on behalf of the interests of the poor and abandoned in the U.S. and in more than 65 countries where the Oblates are in mission.

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News & Happenings...

Fr J. Antonio Ponce Appointed to a New Ministry



Rev. J. Antonio Ponce, OMI, was recently appointed formation director for the George Sexton House of Studies at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX, a position he will begin in 2019, after completing a one-year spiritual formation program at Chicago Theological Seminary. Fr. Antonio was also appointed to a three-year term as councilor within the U.S. Province.

Rev. J. Antonio Ponce, OMI, is originally from Jalisco, Mexico. Prior to joining the Missionary Oblates, he lived and worked in Los Angeles, CA. He made his First Profession at Santa Cecilia parish in Guatemala City, Guatemala in 2002 and his Final Profession in August of 2007 at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Mexico City.

His priestly ordination took place in July 2009, at San Eugenio de Mazenod parish in La Morita, Tijuana, Mexico. He holds a Bachelor of Theology from Instituto de Formacion Teologica Intercongregacional de Mexico, Mexico City.

Fr. Ponce joined the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office in Washington, DC, in June of 2013, and assumed the position of Director in January 2015.

In addition to directing the JPIC Office in Washington, Fr. Ponce served as JPIC animator for the North American Region (US and Canada) for the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates in Rome.

OMI JPIC Committee Gets a New Member: Fr. Ray Cook, OMI



Fr. Ray Cook, OMI, recently joined the JPIC Advisory Committee, replacing Fr. Jim Brobst, OMI. Fr. Jim was recently appointed Vicar Provincial to US Provincial, Fr. Lou Studer, OMI and is now based out of Washington, DC.

Fr. Ray hails from New Haven, Connecticut where he previously worked as a web developer and IT trainer for Microsoft. He became a Religious later in life, becoming an Oblate priest at the age of 44. His first assignment was at King's House Retreat and Renewal Center in Belleville, Illinois. He is now Director of Campus Ministry and Chaplain at St. Mary's at Rice University, Houston, where he also serves as president of the Joint Campus Ministry Association at Rice University in Houston, TX.

Fr. Cook received a M.Div. from Oblate School of Theology in 2012 and STB degree from St. Paul's University, Ottawa in 2012. He is currently pursuing a D.Min. in Homiletics.

The US JPIC Advisory Committee is a mix of Oblates and laypeople experienced in issues of justice, economic development and ecology. The committee serves as a sounding board and guiding body for the JPIC Office.

News & Happenings...

Fr. Séamus Finn on Panel at Georgetown University – Berkley Center



Faith and Money panel discussion at Berkley Center

Fr. Séamus Finn, in his role as ICCR Board Chair, recently spoke on Faith, Money, and Promoting Inclusive Development at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Joining him on the panel was Dr. Jo-Marie Griesgraber of New Rules for Global Finance, based in Washington, DC.

At this event, Fr. Séamus and Dr. Griesgraber explored the current challenges of inclusive and economically sustainable global development within a fragile and constrained ecosystem. They discussed how people of faith are contributing to these debates—both through the alignment of their investments with principles of their faith and by using their voice for advocacy in the public square. Dr. Griesgraber presented on the role of governments and global financial institutions and Fr. Seamus covered the role of the private sector.

OMI Lacombe and US Province Co-host Climate Symposium

On August 30th, 2017 the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) offices of Lacombe Oblate Province, Canada, and the U.S. Province co-hosted a symposium on climate change and the papal encyclical *Laudato Si* at St. Paul's University in Ottawa, Canada.

The event's theme was, "the Cry of the Earth is the Cry of the Poor," and the goal was to heighten awareness of the interconnectedness between care for the earth and concern for all of life, especially the poor in our midst.

Chief planners for the day were Br. Len Rego, OMI, Director of JPIC – OMI Lacombe Canada and Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI, Director of JPIC – USA.

Over 50 Oblates, Oblate Associates, professors, students, and interested parties from both Canada and the U.S. attended the one day event. Another 80 people followed the proceedings on-line.

Video presentations from the event can be found at this link: (<http://bit.ly/2m5dPkX>).



(L-R) Provincials Ken Forster and Lou Studer with Vicars Ken Thorson and Jim Bleackley.

New Solar Hot Water System Installed at Las Casa Memorias Hospice Vegetable Garden



Fr. Antonio and volunteers at Las Casa Memorias

This spring of 2017 OMI JPIC launched a "Hospice Vegetable Garden Initiative" at Albergue Las Memorias A.C., a residential hospice facility in Tijuana, Mexico. Because volunteers provided much of the labor for the garden, money was left over to install a solar water heater system at the residence.

So recently JPIC director Fr. Antonio Ponce, along with Oblate seminarians Erickson, Pascal, and Mr. Orosco (a resident at Casa Memorias and plumber by trade) worked on installing the system. The installation was a success and residents now have hot running water. Prior to this they used wood to heat water because they could not afford gas.

From the Director *(Continued from p. 1)*

Even during these moments of sacramental ministry, I found opportunities to promote issues related to Justice, Peace and Care for Creation, and consciously put into practice what Oblate Constitutions and Rules invites us to do: “*Action on behalf of justice, peace and integrity of creation is an integral part of evangelization*” (Oblate R. 9a).

Four and a half years ago when I was asked by my provincial to move to Washington, DC to lead the JPIC office, I felt challenged but also excited. I saw this as a great opportunity for me to learn more and work on JPIC issues as a full-time ministry.

As an Oblate, I have enjoyed working with people. And leading the JPIC office has afforded me the opportunity to meet and work with so many good, committed people from all religious, ethnic and economic backgrounds. In Washington, DC I have been privileged to meet and work with leaders of national organizations as well as other faiths and denominations. This has exposed me to new people, ideas and ways of doing JPIC ministry as we worked collaboratively on common issues. As an introvert, meeting new people does not come easily for me, but with some dedication and effort, it paid off in the end. This experience has greatly enriched my ministry and Oblate life.



Sorting clothes

The same can be said about my meetings outside of Washington, DC. In recent years, about 85 percent of my time was spent traveling around the country visiting Oblate ministries within the U.S. Province. Through this I have learned from other Oblates and the people they serve. Spending time at Oblate ministries helped me appreciate even more the work being done across the Province, and the opportunity to see, discern and find ways to collaborate more closely on JPIC ministry.

Reflecting on the importance of beginning by “seeing and analyzing,” Fr. Kennedy Katongo OMI, former director of JPIC ministry for the General Administration wrote: “*JPIC ministry begins with seeing, to ‘really see’ – to have a truthful and deeper look at, – to take a contemplative stance and a*



Fr. Antonio with parishioners at Immaculate Cathedral

prophetic reading, to be able to discern in light of the values of the Gospel what is happening in our world today, – our common home. JPIC ministry assists us in analyzing the present reality with a contemplative perspective in order to see more deeply the structures that generate poverty, devastation of the environment, which lead to conflict and violence. This also helps us to better appreciate fully the values of the Kingdom and make them more visible and functional. This is the reality and the world in which we as Oblates live and minister to the people”.

As I move on to a ministry of formation in the Province, I want to take this opportunity to thank all those, who during these years showed me in many ways their support. I encountered many challenges but with help from people, these became opportunities to learn and grow. Reflecting on my years as part of the JPIC team, I see nothing but blessings. I thank God for calling me to serve the Province for these years as JPIC director, and for the people with whom God allowed me to work. As a member of the JPIC team, I have grown in my Oblate vocation, which has prepared me for this ministry to which God is calling me. My new appointment as formation director will offer an opportunity for me to share my varied experiences with younger men who are preparing to assume the life and ministry of a missionary.

Fr. J. Antonio Ponce, OMI, is the outgoing director of Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation U.S. Province.

Prayer, Laughter and Friendship

by: Fr. Louis Studer, OMI, New U.S. Provincial

(Reprinted from the October 2017 issue of OblateWorld Magazine)

Father Louis Studer, O.M.I. believes there are three main ways to reach God: prayer, laughter and friendship. As the new Provincial of the Missionary Oblates in the United States, he wants to help others reach God in all three ways.



Laughter comes easily for Fr. Lou when he talks about his early journey to the Missionary Oblates. He grew up on a farm in Wesley, Iowa and had little interest in the family business. “My father always said I went to the seminary because I didn’t want to do farmwork,” jokes Fr. Studer. “But my parent’s example of making their religion important, having the family pray the rosary together every night and seeing them kneeling together in prayer in our dining room before I went to school, had quite an effect on my decision.”

At age 13, Fr. Studer moved 500 miles away to attend the Oblates’ minor seminary in Carthage, Missouri. He was ordained in 1976 at his home parish of St. Joseph. In his early ministries, Fr. Studer was an associate pastor at St. Patrick’s Parish in McCook, Nebraska, Principal of St. Henry’s Seminary in Belleville, Illinois and worked in vocation ministry.

Prayer became a focus of Fr. Studer’s ministry when in 1997 he became Director of the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. More than one million pilgrims visit the Shrine each year to strengthen their spirituality. “The Shrine stands as an example of the healing and hope of Christ for the world, a place where all people can proudly profess their faith,” said Fr. Studer. While serving as director of the Shrine, Fr. Studer was also director of the Missionary Association, a fundraising operation of the Oblates. Father Studer traveled throughout the world to gather information about Oblate ministries that were then shared with benefactors.

Friendship was everywhere Fr. Studer travelled. In Ukraine, an elderly woman named Paulina explained to Fr. Studer how she was born Catholic but couldn’t worship for decades under the Communists. Now she can, thanks to the Oblates. In Brazil, Fr. Studer sang “He’s got the whole world in his hands,” while holding the hands of former street children, now living in a safe home thanks to the Oblates. “God reveals Himself to us most clearly in the ordinary events and circumstances of our lives,” said Fr. Studer. “He uses these events to show us His love, to draw us closer to Himself.”

After his work at the Shrine and Missionary Association, Fr. Studer was Director of Christ the King Retreat Center in Buffalo, Minnesota. He then served six years as the Vicar-Provincial of the Oblates in the United States.

Now, Fr. Studer leads a province with more than 250 Oblate priests and brothers. The U.S. Oblates are also responsible for the foreign missions of Zambia and Tijuana, Mexico. The U.S. province also includes 450 Oblate Associates, 100 Oblate Partners, 25 Honorary Oblates and 800 employees, all committed to serving their less fortunate brothers and sisters.

“In our U.S. Province ministries and in our foreign missions, we are carrying forward the charism of our Oblate founder, St. Eugene De Mazenod, who challenged us to always be close to the poor,” said Fr. Studer. “We are carrying the charism forward in grand style, not always perfect, but grand. And we are carrying it forward with prayer, laughter and friendship.”

Fr. Lou Studer, O.M.I., is the newly-appointed Provincial of the Missionary Oblates United States Province



Immigration Reform and Support for Refugees

By: George Ngolwe

Engagements to Protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

In the aftermath of President Trump's executive orders to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Missionary Oblates JPIC joined its voice with other faith groups to express dismay and condemn this action. We quickly issued a statement opposing this decision and continue to provide additional advocacy resources to encourage people of faith to request support from their Members of Congress for the DREAM ACT of 2017.

JPIC is also supportive of Oblates, who in their ministry and witness boldly stand up for immigrants and refugees. This past August, Fr. Roy Snipes, OMI, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe church in the border city of Mission, TX, led a procession of local immigrant and environmental groups to La Lomita Mission to raise awareness and resist plans to build a border wall in the Rio Grande Valley. Several local and national news media reported on the procession.

In September, Frs. Antonio Ponce, OMI, and Daniel Ziegler, OMI, visited with groups holding a vigil at the White House. They were protesting the cancellation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act, which would place 800,000 young immigrants at risk of deportation. In the same month, Fr. Karl Davis, OMI, a chaplain at Yale University offered pastoral solidarity and risked arrest by participating in an act of civil disobedience at an Immigration Court in Hartford, CT in support of the Ramos, a couple facing deportation to their native Ecuador. He joined 200 protesters against this deportation order, including diverse clergy. The Judge granted the undocumented Connecticut couple a stay in their case.

Temporary Protected Status for Haitian Migrants

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate JPIC joined other faith communities, religious leaders and immigrant rights groups in expressing deep disappointment with the Administration's decision to terminate Temporary Protected Status for Haiti, effective July 2019. Ending Temporary Protected Status is devastating to tens of thousands of Haitian families and burden these families with impossible choices. JPIC in collaboration with Catholic and interfaith groups advocated for an additional 18-month extension for thousands of Haitians living in the U.S at risk of losing Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The current Haiti TPS designation extends through January 22, 2018. The Trump Administration will announce the decision on Temporary Protected Status for El Salvador, which expires in January 2018.

U.S Bishops recently made trips to assess the rebuilding process in Haiti after Hurricane Matthew and the humanitarian

situations in El Salvador and Honduras. Oblates are actively involved in missionary work in the northeastern part of Haiti and U.S Oblates, through parishes, continue to minister to diverse immigrants, including Haitians.

Culture of Welcome for Refugees

Missionary Oblates JPIC and other faith organizations are also disappointed to learn about the Trump Administration's plans for admitting only 45,000 refugees to the U.S in Fiscal Year 2018. This is the lowest commitment to refugees in the 37-year history of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Faith leaders are urging the White House Administration to set the goal for at least 75,000 refugees. This announcement comes when the world is facing its largest refugee crisis.

According to the UNHCR there are 65 million forcibly displaced people in the world and over 22 million refugees, with only 1.19 million of those refugees at-risk in host countries needing resettlement to a third country. Refugees are families, parents, and children forced from their homes and seeking safety and the chance to rebuild their lives. The Refugee crisis surpasses numbers; it is about human beings seeking safety. The U.S. has long been a leader in offering safety to refugees fleeing violence, tyranny, and persecution—safely resettling over 3 million refugees since the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act. The most powerful country on earth should help the world's most vulnerable people on earth - migrants and refugees.



Fr. Antonio at interfaith vigil for Dream Act of 2017

During his apostolic journey to the United State, Pope Francis spoke to Members of Congress, stating: 'We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (Mt 7:12). To this end, we believe that deporting exemplary young people who were brought here as children and who know only the United States as their home – or failing to do all we can to help refugees and their families, who are often driven to exile by war and (Continued on p. 7)

Immigration Reform and Support for Refugees *(Continued from p. 6)*

extreme exploitation – is not in our interests as a moral and generous people. Our country has the right and responsibility to regulate its border. We ask that it be done humanely.”

TAKE ACTION:

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop’s National Migration Week 2018, January 7-14, 2018, is an opportunity to recognize the contributions of immigrants, refugees, migrants and survivors of human trafficking in our communities as well as to highlight the work of the Church to serve and accompany newcomers. This year’s theme is Many Journeys, One Family.

Visit Justice for Immigrants’ website - www.justiceforimmigrants.org - to download advocacy materials in English and Spanish, including a toolkit.

George Kombe Ngolwe is Associate Director of the OMI JPIC office in Washington, DC.

Zambian Youth ‘Share the Journey’ with Local Migrants *by Samutumwa Nasilele*

On September 30, 2017, about 400 young people from the three deaneries (group of parishes) of Mongu Diocese in western Zambia gathered in Mayukwayukwa Refugee Camp with young people from that camp. The theme for the gathering was “Share the Journey in your Community.”

A few days earlier the Holy Father Pope Francis launched the Share the Journey campaign at St. Peter’s Square in Rome, Italy. He invited communities around the world to reach out to migrants and refugees who are their neighbors. ‘Share the Journey’ aims to bring migrants and refugees closer with local communities by encouraging them to gather and share stories and experiences. Through this campaign, Pope Francis invites us to combat the culture of indifference with the culture of encounter. Our event was in direct support of the Pope’s call and an opportunity to ensure that our communities are places where the culture of encounter thrives and where the dignity of migrants and refugees is fully recognized.

The gathering began with morning Mass at the Mayukwayukwa Refugee Camp. Mass was celebrated by the dean of Phelim O’Shea Deanery, Fr. Patrick Fumbelo together with the parish priest of St. Joseph (Mangango), Fr. John Nkonkaisha. The Mass went from 10:30am to 12:30pm. Afterwards, a young representative of the refugees spoke about their experiences and challenges. They thanked us for visiting. We then all posed for a group photo to symbolize unity and ate lunch together.



Mongu Diocese youth meet with local refugees

Samutumwa Nasilele participates in the youth group at Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral, Mongu Diocese, Western Zambia. Story first appeared in the Mongu Diocese October 2017 newsletter.

(Mayukwayukwa Refugee Camp, established in 1966, is one of the oldest in the world today hosting refugees from Zambia’s neighboring countries including Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo)

Visiting Raglan Mine and Local Communities in Nunavik *By: Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI*

In its Faith Consistent Investment (FCI) protocols the Oblate Investment Pastoral Trust (OIP) actively engages all the sectors and many specific companies. We have engaged commodities sector and more specifically, the mining industry for a number of years. This initiative came about through requests that we were receiving from Oblates and other missionaries in Latin America, West Papua, Zambia and in the Philippines and our awareness of the significant role that the exploitation of natural resources plays in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in South Africa.

This conversation followed the standard engagement process available to shareholders. This includes filing of resolutions for inclusion in company proxies, attendance at annual general meetings, speaking, and private meetings with company representatives. Nearly all this work was done in collaboration with other faith based institutional shareholders from different faith traditions. This engagement took an interesting turn in January 2013 when representatives of some very large companies asked for a meeting at the Vatican, specifically with the then Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace led by Cardinal Peter Turkson.

I was invited to help organize and speak at what eventually became a series of Days of Reflection organized at the Vatican in 2013 and 2015. Another is expected in 2018. These conversations were expanded to an ecumenical and interfaith framework through a series of sessions at Lambeth Palace, London, at Bishops court in Capetown, South Africa, in Lusaka, Zambia, Lima, Peru and Bogota, Colombia. The Lambeth Palace event took place in early November 2017.

The agenda for these conversations was organized in a roundtable framework that was multi stakeholder and with at least three different themes. The role and contribution of the industry to development and human progress, and accomplishing this while respecting and protecting the earth have been important themes with theological and cosmological perspectives occupying an important part. The broad scope addresses the responsibilities that governments and companies must demonstrate to local communities who bear a disproportionate share of the impact of large scale mining projects. This also includes compensation to those individuals and families whose livelihoods are disrupted, especially those occupying or owning the land that is included in the mining concession. Finally, the industry is large scale, intrusive and has huge impacts on the environment both immediate and far into the future. This brings with it responsibilities that can extend out for close to 100 years.

Recently, through the Community of Interest Advisory Panel from the Mining Association of Canada, I visited the Raglan mine region in Nunavik in northern Quebec.

The weather did not cooperate with our scheduled travel to visit the Kangirsujuag community but some in our group did visit the Kangirsujuag community. The former community



Jules Dion, OMI, receives the gold medal for exceptional merit from the Lt.-governor of Québec, J. Michel Doyon.

visit was replaced with a road trip to Deception Bay and smaller group conversations with workers at that shipping site. The map below details the area, including the surrounding local communities, the land area and the surrounding waterways, bays and inlets, including “Deception Bay”. Oblates from Notre Dame du Cap province served in the region of the mine and the Oblate Lacombe province maintains a

missionary presence in the Nunavut territory, west of Hudson Bay and in the Churchill diocese.

The Oblate presence in the area is rich and historic and detailed in different OMI archives and publications and recently in the biography of Fr. Jules Dion, OMI, “Fifty Years Below Zero.” Fr. Jules lives at the Oblate Richelieu residence in Quebec.



Rev. Séamus P. Finn, OMI, is JPIC's Chief of Faith Consistent Investing – OIP Investment Trust & Consultant

A Growing Partnership

By: Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND

La Vista Ecological Learning Center and the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows have come together in a new ecological venture.

On August 12th, we collaboratively hosted the first of what is to be a series of programs of reflection and action on the Papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*. "Our Common Home: The Environment" was a morning of presentations featuring Peter Raven, former director of the Missouri Botanical Garden and member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and Mike Roberts, a local meteorologist. They shared their unique perspectives on *Laudato Si'* and climate change.

Participants were sometimes shocked by new insights and facts our speakers raised; for example, climate catastrophes and climate refugees make unstable political situations worse and, in fact, climate change is making ALL crisis situations on our planet worse, like war, immigration, and trafficking. Another is that there are 12 million kinds of organisms on Earth, and 20% of plants are in danger of extinction, many due to climate change.



Fr. Jack Lau, OMI, and participants ready for a tour

We were also moved by both speakers' strong affirmation that, as Pope Francis states so clearly, climate change is a moral issue. Peter Raven said that the eighth commandment now includes the reality that, by the way we live and the decisions we make, we are stealing people's way of life, their water and livelihoods. If we don't change, we are committing the sin of genocide. He concluded that we must extend the kindness we have for family to the rest of the world and all species.

It was a challenging morning that reminded us to be grateful that *Laudato Si'* can be a sure guide for our difficult times.

The second event in our series, "Come, Experience La Vista: Oblates Caring for Our Common Home" was held on Saturday, October 7th. We invited participants to see how Oblates have connected spirituality and ecology in

caring for the 245 acres of bluffs, forest, meadows and fields they have called home for over 60 years. Jack Lau, OMI, introduced the morning by sharing his views on land as a refuge preserving biodiversity and animal species unique to the region as well as a place of beauty and peace for residents and visitors to experience. He commented that the nature of our times calls upon religious communities to make their lands a legacy to future generations.

Speakers also included four local experts who have a long history with us and who have each made a significant contribution to the health of the land and water along the Mississippi River. They reminded us that La Vista is in a key spot in the middle of the Great Rivers Scenic Byway, named one of the Seven Wonders of Illinois. Preserving and restoring this land contributes to the health of the watershed and protects threatened and endangered species. In addition, each one shared a sense of pride in being connected with Oblates who bring their faith-filled presence to ecological issues.

After the presentations Fr. Jack offered participants a guided tour of the far reaches of the land, many of whom were new to La Vista.



(L-R) Sr. Maxine Pohlman, Director of La Vista; Debbie Newman, Natural Areas Preservation Specialist with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission; Virginia Woulfe-Beile, Three Rivers Project Coordinator for the Sierra Club; Virginia Nesmith, former Executive Director of the National Farm Workers Ministry; Fr. Jack Lau, OMI, Novitiate Formation Team Member; Alley Ringhausen, Executive Director of the Great Rivers Land Trust.

As we ended our time together we heard many expressions of gratitude: to the Oblates for their ecological vision, to the presenters for their important work, and for the opportunity to spend time on the lovely land called La Vista.

This quote from Pope Francis is a fitting description of our hopes for the growing partnership between La Vista and Our Lady of the Snows: *May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.*

Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND is Program Director at La Vista Ecological Learning Center in Godfrey, IL

Centre for Society and Religion launches Peacebuilding program

By: Fr. Rohan Silva, OMI

Fr. Rohan Silva, OMI, the former Provincial Superior of the Colombo Province and former Director of the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) in Sri Lanka visited JPIC offices on September 8 and informally discussed with staff recent happenings in the Province and around Sri Lanka. The Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) is the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) arm of the OMI Colombo Province, established in 1972, by late Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI. The Centre's objective is to promote social justice and integral development, based on core religious values. CSR is very



much involved in working for peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka after 30 years of civil war. Since 2009, CSR has organized Citizen Forums in districts throughout the country to empower the grassroots to advocate on issues affecting their community. Fr. Rohan also elaborated on the Center's other programs: The Children and Youth Ministry runs several programs including a scholarship program, and an Alternative Media project, which conducts public workshops. Past ones have included writing for print, short filmmaking and street drama.

He shared information on a newer initiative, the 'Oblate Institute of Higher Learning' (OIHL), embarked on by the Colombo Province and inaugurated in 2016 to mark the 200th anniversary of the Oblate Congregation. OIHL operates at CSR to continue efforts made by Oblates towards lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

OIHL encompasses the following four components:

- Institute of National Reconciliation and Peace Building (INRPB): This offers a diploma course on peace building.

- Asian Institute of Theology (AIT): offers a program of 'contextual theology', especially for those in formation
- Asian Institute of Missiology (SAVANA) offers a program of 'contextual theology' for laity
- Oblate College of Philosophy: (OCP) offers courses on Philosophy

Both AIT and SAVANA have been in operation for quite some time. OCP, is being designed to offer courses on philosophy, soon to be launched.

The INRPB is also a new initiative taken on by the Oblates to contribute particularly to national reconciliation and peace building. INRPB has four components:

- (i). Conflict Transformation
- (ii). Social engagement for Peace-building and Reconciliation
- (iii). Psychological counseling (Trauma Counselling) for peace and reconciliation
- (iv). Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Integration for National Reconciliation.

The four components of INRPB will break-down into a series of lectures and home-work in the form of essay and final research paper. Each student will be required to engage in an Experiential Assessment related to the field chosen that will last for a period not less than six weeks. This engagement will take place on a voluntary basis in a recognized organization or institution actively involved in the specific field chosen by the student. Visit the Centre for Society and Religion's website (<http://csrsrilanka.org>)'s to read about the offerings.

Fr. Rohan Silva, OMI, is the former Provincial Superior of the Colombo Province and former Director of the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) in Sri Lanka.



Wisconsin Sister Wears Many Hats to End Human Trafficking

(Reprinted with permission from The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother)

By: Emily Anderson

Sister Celine Goessl's newest role in her quest to end human trafficking in Wisconsin is that of being an "on-call grandma."

She was recently asked to help mentor and guide victims of sex trafficking who will reside and heal at the Rose Home, a residential treatment program of Eye Heart World, based in Brown County, Wisconsin.

As always, her answer was "yes."

"I'll be a friend, a mentor, a guide... a shoulder to lean on," said Sister Celine. "I'll be there for them for whatever they need."

Sister Celine has been spreading awareness and educating the public about the realities of human trafficking in Wisconsin for nearly ten years. She has been instrumental in educating and training a wide range of professionals, including police, teachers, firemen, EMTs, and medical doctors, nurses and staff. She also speaks to civic groups, community clubs and other parties interested in becoming involved in the movement to eradicate this horrific crime.

"I heard the call of God deep within my heart to do this work," said Sister Celine. "Then, I hit the road." She has traveled thousands of miles, primarily across Wisconsin and surrounding states, but as far as St. Louis, Mo., and Baton Rouge, La.

In fact, she recently gave her 70th seminar on human trafficking.

And, she has eight more presentations lined up for 2017, with more requests coming in weekly.

Sister Celine began her ministry in human trafficking in 2008, when she heard one of her fellow Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross speak in Switzerland at their Motherhouse. The Italian Sister urged her fellow members of the Congregation to get out there and help spread awareness of this horrific crime. "During her talk, something sparked in my heart," said Sister Celine. "I came back to Wisconsin, and began my research immediately."

When she "retired" from her leadership position with the Holy Cross Sisters in 2012, she was appointed as the U.S. liaison of her Congregation's Anti Human Trafficking Committee, which

consists of 14 Sisters representing 14 different countries. This propelled her even further into her new ministry to spread awareness and educate the public about human trafficking, in particular, sex trafficking of children.

One of the pivotal points in her ministry was when she did a seminar at St. John the Baptist Church in Howard, Wis, in early 2016. There were more than 400 attendees from all denominations, and the audience was eager to learn and poised for action. "After that event, there was a swell of consciousness and activity about the issue in Green Bay and the surrounding areas."

At times, her ministry can be heartbreaking. "There is a deeper tragedy that is happening that is leading to this crime, and that is the breakdown of family life in our culture," she stated. "So

many of our children don't get the love and attention they need and deserve. This compels me to work even harder to save these children from becoming victims."

In June of this year, Sister Celine was honored by the Franciscan Federation in Buffalo, N.Y., for her work educating young and old about the dangers and consequences of human trafficking.

At 83 years young, there is nothing that will slow down this amazing Sister in her quest to put a stop to this violent crime against children. Next month, she will travel again to her Motherhouse in Switzerland to

meet with the Holy Cross Sisters' very active Anti Human Trafficking Committee to continue planning initiatives that will spread awareness and help victims and survivors worldwide.

"I've been blessed to have the time, energy and backing of my religious community to follow this calling," said Sister Celine.

Emily Anderson is Communications Director for the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother



Sr. Celine speaking with children

Visit the Sisters of Sorrowful Mother's website at: <http://www.sistersofthesorrowfulmother.org/>

This growing season at Three Part Harmony Farm (3PH)

By: Gail Taylor

The farm, located on the grounds of the Oblate residence in northeast in Washington, DC continues to grow in many ways. This year, the hired crew members were Cristina and Jon, both previous volunteers and now working three days a week planting, cultivating, running the volunteer days, organizing the farmer's market stand, and of course harvesting. We did a lot better this year in terms of systems, including learning how to plant using a grid so the vegetables are all in a straight line, making it easier to keep the weeds under control.

In November, our busiest harvest day was Thursday, when we worked from 8 am to 8 pm harvesting then distributing produce to our 100 CSA (community supported agriculture) members. There are about 80 members who pick up at a community center near Howard University, and 25 members who pick up at a Montessori school close to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. These 100 or so members financially sustain the farm by paying in advance for produce they receive weekly from the beginning of April until the week before Thanksgiving. The members pay for 23 weeks in the 33-week season, and we take to market or donate the leftover shares at a farmer's market on Saturdays or at the local Dorothy Day Catholic Worker house.

This season's total harvest needs to be added up, but an average week is roughly 600 bunches of cooking greens (swiss chard, kale, collards, mustard or bok choi), 100 heads of lettuce, 100 bags of salad mix, 200 bunches of root veggies (carrots, radishes, beets turnips), and 50 bunches of fresh herbs. We also cut flowers and offer bouquets to our members. The CSA members choose 6 items each week.

Our volunteer program reached full capacity this year! We have about 20 folks who signed up for three-hour shifts on Tuesdays, Fridays or Saturdays. Those volunteers are called "work shares" and they are able to harvest a share of veggies at the end of the shift. Up to twelve people come on Saturdays (that's our cap! more would come if we let them.) The best time at the farm is Monday morning when I do a field walk, make the harvest plan, and marvel at what Jon and the Saturday work shares have accomplished in a single day. The farm would be an overgrown mess without this dedicated team. For the first time this season, we had a special potluck event just with the staff and volunteers (work shares.) We used a grill that was so graciously donated by the Oblates, and served up veggie burgers and grilled vegetables. A grilling party with the farm family is always a chance to show off the amazing dishes we all make with the produce we take home. At that event in June, there were no less than six jars of homemade pickles, and four different kinds of Kim chi made with the gigantic

(oops!) 12-pound napa cabbages we grew this year.

In addition to signing up volunteers and work shares, I also signed up to be a training site for the Beginning Farmer Training Program organized by the Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (Future Harvest/ CASA.) This year two trainees came weekly to work at 3PH, and I invited both of them to spend an afternoon at my home office where I showed them the crop plans and spreadsheets. This month, I'll sit down with both of them to read their business plans as they both pursue a dream of starting their own farms. One of the trainees is actually a very good friend of mine, Xavier, who bought land in Peru (his home country) with his wife Libby who is from the U.S. My husband and I will spend two weeks at their farm this winter planting coffee trees and learning about coffee and cacao production.

Three Part Harmony Farm continues to serve as a hub for many important urban agriculture-based communities in and around DC. As a contributor to the 2014 Farm Bill, I continue to consult with the Food Policy Council as they work to implement that bill. I'm also a member of an Afroecology group that meets twice a year. I'm a member of a group called EcoHermanas, which is made up of women doing healing work related to the environment. I keep up my membership in Future Harvest/ CASA and serve as their only training site located in Washington, DC. I am also part of a group called Sunkissed Syndicate, which is a group of Black urban farmers and food justice folks in DC who organize monthly potlucks to create more intentional space for the various groups in our city to collaborate instead of working in silos. *(Continued on p. 13)*



(Photo courtesy of Tyler Grigsby Photography.)

This growing season *(Continued from p. 12)*

And finally, the CSA is actually a multi-farm CSA so we buy produce, eggs, micro greens, cheese, and fruit from six local farms that are owned either by Women and/ or People of Color. The unique urban/ rural partnership is a model in an era where the CSA movement is on a decline, so I've been invited to present a workshop in January 2018 about this enterprise to a group of farmers in the Washington region.

When I give voice to the vision in my head and put pen to paper to write down these ideas, sometimes it seems like we're doing too much and I wonder when I'm supposed to sleep! Somehow, it's not just enough to show up every day and put my hands in the soil, although six years ago when I set out on this journey that was my stated goal. Growing vegetables for a living gives me the opportunity to unplug from things that are a daily part of many people's lives, including, but not limited to technology! Isn't it great that I don't have to turn on a computer every day?! But of course, the deeper calling of caring for the earth and doing that with an undergirding of social justice values is what pulls me in all of these other directions. People say farming is a lifestyle not a job, and it is certainly true with Three Part Harmony Farm. The work is at the farm and also everywhere the vegetables travel and also everywhere that the community blossoms.

We have slowly added row feet to the farm each year as we "conquer" the grass. Next season Cristina and Jon will return on

staff, and we have an ambitious goal of extending the vegetable beds by 40 feet. That could potentially add an additional 50% to the harvest numbers listed above, though not right away since it will take us a couple of years to build up the soil in the new sections. Meanwhile, the relationships at Lee Montessori School continue to grow, and we hope next year to expand that CSA and network into the surrounding Brookland/ Edgewood neighborhoods in northeast Washington, DC.

But first: it's time for rest. Our last official work day was the Saturday before Thanksgiving. We require (and the farm requires) a rest period before things start up again in March 2018.

As we say enthusiastically in the farming world: *have a great winter!*

Gail Taylor is the owner/ operator of Three Part Harmony Farm, in Washington, DC.

Our Sacred Earth, Our Common Home

An Afternoon of Reflection and Action on Laudato Si'

Saturday, April 21
1:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Venue: Visitors Center, National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, 442 South De Mazenod Drive, Belleville, IL 62223-1023

Keynote speaker: *Mary Evelyn Tucker*, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale Divinity School.

This event is the second in a series devoted to the study and implementation of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*. Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, who collaborated for many years with eco-theologian and Earth scholar Fr. Thomas Berry, will deliver the keynote address. The participants will then take part in a series of "hands-on" break-out sessions. The afternoon will conclude with a feedback and takeaway session. This event is intended for individuals and parish groups looking for practical ways to care for our common home, our sacred Earth.

Cost: \$25 for adults, \$15 for students

For those who are able, we suggest a payment of \$40 to cover the fee of a student who cannot afford to pay.

For more information, or to register, please call **618-394-6270**; or email metling@snows.org



(Photo courtesy of Tyler Grigsby Photography.)

L'Obscurite Sous le Soleil: the Darkness under the Sun

By: Bayor Chantal Ngoltoingar

For the second consecutive time, I was invited to present my book "L'Obscurite Sous le Soleil" ("the Darkness under the Sun") and give reasons why FGM (Female Genital Mutilation also known as female circumcision), something I personally experienced, is one of the most atrocious forms of child abuse in the modern world.

The event took place at the *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy*, founded by the late Professor and Oblate, Fr. George F. McLean, OMI, located on the campus of The Catholic University of America. The topic for the five-week seminar was "Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times: Structure and Role of Compassion and Mercy," focused on issues of love and compassion, gratitude and responsibility. This was the 33rd annual seminar held in Washington, DC. Participants represented several countries, including Austria, China, Ethiopia/India, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam, and Chad in Central Africa, where I am from.



The seminar was an opportunity for me to continue speaking out against the practice of FGM and for participants to hear from a survivor. Proponents view FGM as an important rite of passage that prepares young girls for womanhood and marriage. It is still actively practiced in about 30 countries, mostly in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. It cuts across religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. During my presentation, I shared with the audience my own understanding of women, where we come from, and the reason why God created 'woman,' according to the book of Genesis in the Bible.

I also expressed my support for the approach that FGM is as much a 'child' issue as a 'woman' issue, and should be categorized as child abuse. FGM is usually performed on girls between the ages of 0 to 12 (70% of cases). Over 200 million girls and women in the world today are victims.

Also the procedure is often performed by people with no medical training and without proper sterilization. FGM creates immediate and lifelong problems for its victims, including infections, chronic pain, depression, urinary problems, complications during childbirth and even death.

As global migration increases, the U.S. and countries in

Europe are seeing more survivors of FGM. There is now some awareness that girls from cultures that practice FGM, are still at risk, even while living abroad, making it necessary to enact laws banning the practice. In 2012 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging countries to ban the practice, calling it an "irreparable and irreversible abuse."

In my book, "L'Obscurite Sous le Soleil," I detail the practice in Chad, based on my own experience. In addition to cutting girls, communities carry on other rituals to instill fear and keep girls forever silent about their experience. The practice is upheld as a cultural norm and mandatory for females without weighing the long-term consequences of brain, soul and body.

Concluding my presentation, I shared with the audience how painful the experience has been for me both physically and emotionally. I attribute my healing to my strong faith in God, a lot of prayers, and therapy. Families and friends in Chad and the U.S. have also supported me to break the silence and advocate for girls still at risk, and survivors that need the same care I have received. And finally, I ask, who are people to change what God has created, for what and whom?

Bayor Chantal Ngoltoingar is from Chad, Central Africa and OMI JPIC's 2017-2018 volunteer. She is working on her Masters in social work at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

Currently published in French, an English language version of the book is in the works.



Black Caucus Hosts Africa Policy Event

By: Rowena Gono

In 1970 African-American lawmakers hosted their first legislative gathering that continues today under the auspices of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. This annual multiday conference was held in Washington, DC from September 20-24, 2017. Past events have drawn over 9000 people. The conference provides space for dialogue on the many complex issues affecting people of color in the U.S. and the world. Over 70+ workshops were offered under the theme 'And Still I Rise.'

As part of the conference and for the 7th year, an Africa-specific session, the Africa Braintrust, was held on Friday, September 22. Several hundred U.S. and African government officials, private sector leaders, academics, NGO staff and regular citizens attended the all-day event organized by Congresswoman Karen Bass (D-CA). Presenters spoke eloquently but also invited audience input on three broad areas critical to the continent's growth: security/insecurity, economics & the path to prosperity, and meaningful partnerships between foreign actors and African communities.

On security and insecurity, speakers examined how African countries are faring since a wave of democracy in the 90s. They delivered the good news, that fewer coup d'états occur today. Still, at least one occurs every year somewhere on the continent. Intimidation and harassment of voters at polling places are also fairly commonplace. In the age of global extremism, terror groups are enlisting African youth at an alarming rate. Panelists and the audience discussed some preventive measures, for example encouraging better parental involvement, inviting former combatants to share their testimonies, strengthening partnerships between Africans on the ground and those overseas, and appropriately labeling objectionable behaviors as what they are.



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 2nd from left. (Photo Courtesy of Jerolinmek Matthew Piah)

The morning's highlight was a keynote address by 2011 Nobel Peace Prize co-recipient and Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. She was greeted with a standing ovation as she arrived on stage. President Sirleaf spoke of successes and challenges during her 11 years in

office and thanked Members of Congress who advocated for Liberia during and after the country's long civil war. She cited the struggle to revitalize the country's weak economy and 2014 Ebola outbreak that left 11,000 people dead in Liberia, and neighboring countries of Guinea and Sierra Leone as the lowest points of her administration.

Afternoon speakers addressed economic trends and paths to prosperity across the continent. At only 3%, Africa's low share of global trade is a significant impediment, partly due to its heavy trade in raw commodities and not the value-added goods that fetch higher prices on the global market. African countries also trade less with each other compared to other world regions. But speakers laid out some promising trends. Apparel and footwear (value-added goods) are today being produced at an accelerated rate, stock markets are on the rise (there are currently 8 to 10 active ones on the continent), and an African Trade bill is in the works. Known as the Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), the bill's expected implementation is the end of 2017.



(Photo Courtesy of Jerolinmek Matthew Piah, Liberia Executive Mansion)

In the final session, the group focused on how vital it is for foreign actors to understand African people and culture if they want to succeed. Establishing Sister City Initiatives and obtaining pre-travel cultural orientation were among the recommendations for fostering understanding and good partnerships with African communities.

Delivering the closing keynote was distinguished U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, whose foreign service career included assignments in Switzerland, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, The Gambia and Liberia. She connected the dots from the day's conversation and highlighted Africa's large youth population and people living in the diaspora as resources that could be better tapped. Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield thanked the audience for their engagement and insight. She said meeting notes and audience recommendations will be considered when drafting future legislation and resolutions to benefit Africa.

Rowena Gono is Communications Coordinator for the Missionary Oblates JPIC Office.

Resources

Sewing Hope: How One Factory Challenges the Apparel Industry's Sweatshops, was published on October 3, 2017. It examines the origin, evolution, impacts and significance of this unique apparel factory.

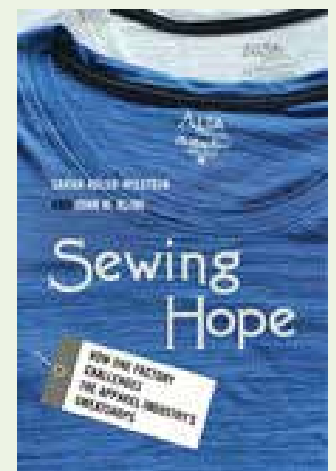
Sewing Hope offers the first account of a bold challenge to apparel-industry sweatshops. The Alta Gracia factory in the Dominican Republic is the anti-sweatshop. It boasts a living wage three times the legal minimum, high health and safety standards, and a legitimate union—all verified by an independent monitor. It is the only apparel factory in the global south to meet these criteria.

The book's authors are Sarah Adler-Milstein and Professor John M. Kline. Sarah Adler-Milstein is a worker-rights advocate and has served as Field Director for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Worker Rights Consortium. Professor Kline is Professor of International Business Diplomacy at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He is the author of four books, including the textbook *Ethics for International Business*.

The Alta Gracia Research Project at the Landegger Program in International Business Diplomacy at Georgetown University is a multi-year effort to document the development and eventual success or failure of Alta Gracia, the only apparel factory in the developing world to:

- pay workers a “living wage” (over 300% more than the legal minimum wage);
- recognize a legitimate union and negotiate a collective bargaining agreement;
- maintain high safety and health standards;
- all verified by an independent labor rights organization.

Orders for the book may be placed from the University of California press' website (www.ucpress.edu) or from your favorite local book seller.



Still in the Storm: Reflections for Engaging Spirituality in times like these

Written by Joseph Grant

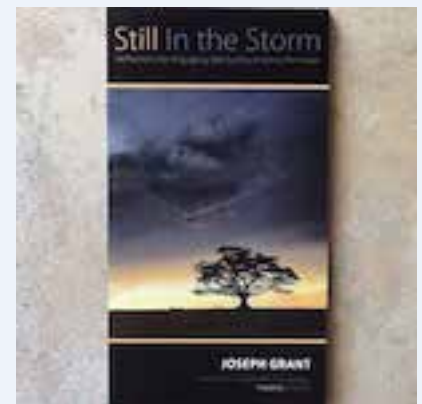
Carefully crafted reflections that accompany you in your practice of ‘engaged presence,’ as you draw the world of crying need and awesome complexity into your heart and center.

A resource for engaging spirituality in times like these. “Still In the Storm is not a book for sissies. It calls out a challenge to live vibrantly the contemplative journey in community and the quest for justice. It is poetry that touches the heart, quickens the spirit, and changes lives if we but open to the discipleship of NOW!”

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK

“Here is a book to remind you: of things that matter and things that don’t, of choices that can fill you up and those that will leave you empty, of miracles that delight and mirages that disappoint. Read, reflect, reconsider and recommit — it’s all here. My colleague and good friend, Joe, has a way to seeing and saying that will draw you in and make you different — consider this a warning and an invitation.” -

Jack Jezreel, President and Founder of JustFaith Ministries



The book can be purchased from Just Faith Ministries (<https://justfaith.org>) for \$20.00.