

On the Eve of Christmas

Dear Brother Oblates,

We join all of humanity in welcoming the Birth of Jesus Christ. The end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 are also just around the corner.

As a small Delegation in the congregation, let us pause to meditate on the word "Birth." Where there is Birth, there must be Life and where there is Life, there is God. Let us also be aware that the antithesis of Birth is Death. The Delegation does not have the numbers to boast about but even in our smallness, we are part of the Immense Hope and Grace that God has bestowed on the congregation in its 200 years of history. Our newly ordained Korean Oblate, Fr. Samuel, used St Paul's words as a theme for his ordination. They are the same words that we too can use: "The only thing I can boast about is the Cross of Jesus Christ... Gal 6:14."

The General Administration has invited us to spend the next 3 years (Triennium) in spiritual preparation and active reflection on the future of the congregation that is about to commemorate its 200 years since Birth. It is not a time to "boast" about our 200 years of existence but perhaps to celebrate our smallness and sinfulness in the face of God's grace.

-Where and how can we sow the seeds that will give Birth to new vocations in the Delegation of Japan-Korea (particularly for us here in Japan)?

-How can we sow the seeds that will bring Birth to our Apostolic Communities?

-What are the factors that hinder Birth in us individually and as a community?

-"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..." says St. John. Are we ready to die to our old self so that a "new Oblate" will be born in us?

Together, let us work in areas where there will be Birth.

May Jesus be born again in our hearts and in our communities.

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Christmas 2014

Dear Brother Oblates,

When the phone rings in the middle of the night, it can either be, that someone failed to check the time-zone of the party they are calling OR it can be some bad news. Last Dec. 18th, I was awakened around 3AM by a call from the Superior of the Kenyan Delegation Fr. Jim Fiori and I knew that it was some bad news about Samuel HONG. “Fr. Sam has been kidnapped!” I waited a while before calling Maurizio but there was an eerie feeling that the perpetrators might be some religious fanatics and the TV footages of the beheading of hostages crossed my mind. There was the dilemma whether to tell Sam’s family or not until the Kenyan Superior urged us to notify the family ASAP since the Korean Embassy and the Korean community in Nairobi have already been notified and it would not be good for the news to reach the family from a third source. Things unfolded fast and Sam has already been freed when the parents were notified, and the mother just shrugged it off and said: “He might had been at a place he wasn’t supposed to be and she even apologized for the bother that the incident has caused.” “All’s well that ends well,” and we are happy that Sam is safe after a terrifying ordeal.

Jack DEELY, in his recent email, says: “In response to my Feast Day greeting, a couple of guys apologized for not coming to see me.” Jack adds that there is no need to apologize and that, with the constant flow of helpers, nurses and volunteers, it might be best to wait a while maybe until he goes into the hospital/home or hospice. "It is very difficult to work out a visitor’s time, with the time a home helper or nurse would be here. They would have to be here whenever the visitor is here (to administer medicine, etc.)" he adds. Jack cannot answer the door, so do not try to make an unannounced visit. Your visit has to be coordinated with the help of the

care manager. Thanks for your understanding. Incidentally, Jack will undergo a very delicate operation to fit permanent feeding tube into his stomach on February 10th. It should be a minor procedure with local anesthesia if everything goes well but can turn into a major one with a little mistake. Jack remains in fine spirits and please continue to pray for him.

With Jack last Dec 9th at the Tama Medical Center, Tokyo. The red cap he's wearing is a Christmas gift from all of us.



ITAMI, December 18th. An early celebration of Mike YAMASAKI's 80th birthday (Dec. 23rd)



VISIT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL: We are still waiting for the confirmation regarding the dates. We made our schedule based on the dates that he has given more than a year ago. I will let you know once the dates are confirmed but in the meantime, please leave open the dates March 16-22 (Japan) and March 24-27, 2015 (Korea) in your calendar. We will have our Spring Meeting while we are in Korea and the theme is VOCATION (our own vocation and vocation recruitment). We will also join the Korean Mission as they celebrate their 25th year of being established as a mission.

We received some news from Tewksbury that Eddie WILLIAMS has not been feeling very well lately. They are still trying to find out what's wrong. He is still finding it difficult to adjust to his new environment, this, after more than 50 years of living in Japan. Please include Eddie in your prayers.

AS 2014 COMES TO A CLOSE... We look back and realize that time has gone by very fast as usual. It happens to many of us, how work to be done pile up on our desk waiting for action. We have

barely scratched the surface of the areas and challenges that we came up with during our CONGRESS this year. The set of FIVE PROPOSITIONS each for Japan and Korea are waiting to be acted upon.

I am sure that the letter of the Superior General last Dec. 8th has been received differently in different parts of the Oblate World. I have mixed feelings about the categorization into "stagnant," "non-stagnant" units in the congregation that was made. It is a reality that is experienced by all religious congregations in the Church so that the move of the Holy Father to proclaim the Year of Consecrated Life is very timely and appropriate. The whole religious life is in crisis and we just have to look at the mirror, look at our lifestyle, the values we embrace, etc. We who are missionaries in affluent societies like Japan and Korea even face more difficult challenges. The letter of the Holy Father is all-embracing and perhaps we also need the stern warning like the Superior General's letter to wake us up from our comfortable lives. The two letters can be very good materials for discussions on the district level.



SEASON OF HOPE: People of my generation and above will remember the Cuban Missile Crisis circa 1961-62. I remember my father glued to a small radio all the time trying to listen to the

news (TV was a rarity where we lived). My father would sigh that the crisis might lead to World War III and I never understood what the worry was. But I remember the Bay of Pigs and the stand-off between JF Kennedy and Cuba's Fidel Castro who was backed by Nikita Khrushchev of the former USSR.

The recent news on the normalization of diplomatic relationship between Cuba and the USA is an end of another chapter in history. It is edifying to hear that the peace pact has been brokered by Pope FRANCIS. Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled in our midst. This indeed is a priceless Christmas gift to the whole of humanity.

I wish you all a Blessed Christmas and may Christ be born again in our hearts. See you all at the Christmas Party in Kochi on the 26th.

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