

# PROVINCIAL DELEGATION OF JAPAN-KOREA

*(This report only covers Japan)*

## Highlights of Oblate History

At the end of the World War II, the Japanese Troops surrendered on August 15, 1945. Immediately after that there came a flurry of activity on the political as well as on the religious scene. Politically, the focus of attention was the 'democratization' of Japan. Gradually, the country returned to a normal way of life, politically and economically, and the American military authorities granted permission from December 25, 1946 onwards, for missionaries to enter Japan.

Protestant groups were the first to come over and join the ones that had been there before the war. The Catholic hierarchy too responded positively and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome contacted the major superiors of the Mission Institutes, Orders and Congregations to send missionaries to Japan.

In view of this demand for missionaries to Japan, Most Rev. Fr. Leo Deschatelets, O.M.I. the then Superior General sent a letter to all Oblates on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1948, the 132<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation to positively respond to the request made by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome.

Although Father General is said to have resisted for a good length of time, it is the persistence of Bishop Paul Yoshigoro Taguchi, ordinary of Osaka, that won his approval by complaining that no other missionary institute was willing to enter into this poor area. Until then the whole island was under the care of the Dominican Fathers, who had 'inherited' it from the French Foreign Missionaries in 1904. Father Deschatelets is reported to have said: ***"If no one else will go then we must"***.

Thus, at the invitation of His Excellency Paul Yoshigoro Taguchi, Bishop of Osaka, Apostolic Administrator of Shikoku, Oblates being known as specialists in the most difficult mission, the first missionaries from Eastern American Province, Frs. Robert Gill OMI, Leonard Robitaille OMI, Charles McBennett OMI, and Almeria Lykes arrived in Japan, the land of the Rising Sun, on November 29, 1948. Thereafter the second group of missionaries, Timothy Mulvey OMI, Leonard Scannell OMI, and William McLaughlin OMI, joined the Japan mission team on January 14, 1949. They were entrusted to a quasi-parish Shin Itami and a small Kindergarten. Thereafter the Oblate apostolate spread out to Aki (1952), Kochi (1953), Koga (1955), Naruto (1959), Tokyo (1961), Awa Ikeda (1962) but this mission was handed over to the diocese in 2006. Oblates took a parish in Akaoka (1963), Anan (1966), Nakamura (1970), Yoshizuka & Minami-Kasuya (1998), and Toyohashi (2006).

Historical juridical background of the Unit After 20 years a major step was taken as the Mission became a Vice-Province in 1968. The General Administration, deeming it proper for future "ad gentes" mission work, that the Korean Mission be started, decided to open a Mission there and entrust to the Japan Vice-Province in 1990. After restructuring began in the Congregation, a General Delegation of Japan was duly established with its particular statutes by the Superior General in Council for a period of six years, in 2003. This was an *interim* solution in view of a future restructuring

with definitive status. Thereafter Japan-Korea General Delegation was transferred to the Provincial Delegation of Colombo Province, Sri Lanka on April 10, 2010.

### Church of Japan Today

The church in Japan continues to remain a minority. The old way of thinking that the more dioceses you have the more the church is present, makes that we have 16 dioceses for a population of 434,054. Of course, because of the immigration of Brazilians, Peruvians and Filipinos, that population has doubled and that's the bone the Church in Japan has to chew and realize a whole new structure and vision and now the Bishops are realizing that these immigrants are their responsibility. Some dioceses have more foreigners than Japanese. The Bishops want the missionaries to respond to this situation and help them.

The Church continues to struggle to find its proper place in the wider Japanese society. It is very inward looking and has hardly made a dent in the society as a whole. The following statistics give an overall picture of the Japanese Church. It must be underlined that a big number of overstaying foreigners are not included in the "Total Population" and the "Total Catholic Population" does not include a sizable number of foreigners estimated at several millions.

### Statistics of the Japanese Church

<b>Table 1</b>	
TOTAL POPULATION	128,066,211 million
TOTAL CATHOLIC POPULATION	434,054 (as of end of 2017)
NO. OF DIOCESES	16
NO. OF PARISHES	779
NO. OF BISHOPS	23
NO. OF DIOCESAN PRIESTS	495
NO. OF RELIGIOUS PRIESTS	831
NO. OF REL. BROTHERS	179
NO. OF SISTERS	5,018
NO. OF SEMINARIANS (in Theology)	66 (diocesan/religious/native and foreign combined)
SOURCE: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ) Yearbook 2018	

### Oblate Presence in Japan

The Oblates co-exist with the struggling Japanese Church. We came to Japan to answer a need at the time, and we continue to be present and to be of service to the local Church especially in areas where we think we are needed most.

### Ministry

#### Parishes Entrusted to the Oblates

From the time of arrival of the first Oblate missionaries, parish work has been a major involvement of the Oblates along with kindergarten work. At present, there are six parishes and six mission stations (sub-stations) entrusted to the Oblates in four Dioceses. There are eleven Oblates involved in parish ministry.

TAKAMATSU DIOCESE: Total Number of Catholics 4,629
Parishes entrusted to the Oblates: 2 (two) and 3 (three) Mission Stations

Total Number of Oblates in Parish Work: 4 (four) Priests and 1 (one) Brother
FUKUOKA DIOCESE: Total Number of Catholics 29,898
Parishes Entrusted to the Oblates: 2 (two) and 1 (one) Mission Station
Total Number of Oblates in Parish Work: 3 (three)
NAGOYA DIOCESE: Total Number of Catholics 25,961
Total Number of Oblates in Parish Work: 1 (one)
OSAKA ARCHDIOCESE: Total Number of Catholics 52,644
Total Number of Oblates in Parish Work: 2 (two)
Total Number of Oblates in Specialized Apostolate 1 (one)

Almost 100% of the children who attend our kindergartens are from non-Christian families. Hence, kindergartens became the main contact with the non-Christian populace. There have been a few number of baptisms or conversions of parents attending our kindergartens. However, almost all of the teachers at our kindergartens are non-Christians. In the early days of the mission, kindergarten halls were used as the chapel for Sunday masses. There are 6 (six) "Oblate kindergartens" but should also be clarified that all six kindergartens are now part of a school corporation hence they are not directly run by the Oblates although the principals of the kindergartens are all Oblates and the Board of Directors of the school corporation is composed mostly of Oblates. The kindergartens became a school corporation in 1978. There are FOUR Oblates who work as kindergarten Principals fulltime while other Oblates are members of the Board of Directors of the school corporation.

#### Where the Kindergartens Are

TAKAMATSU DIOCESE: In Kochi, Aki, Anan and Naruto = 4 (four) kindergartens
FUKUOKA DIOCESE: In Koga = 1 (one) kindergarten
OSAKA ARCHDIOCESE: In Itami = 1 (one) kindergarten

#### Specialized Apostolate

As years went by, Oblates got involved in other specialized apostolates. The aftermath of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 1964 saw a national interest in learning foreign languages, particularly English. Oblates became involved in teaching English, individually or at different churches or institutions such as universities. At one time, we had our own language school in Kochi offering English and French courses.

Other involvements: Prison apostolate, Pro-Life apostolate and the vast area of apostolate to foreign migrant workers who have flooded Japan's labor market as a result of the acute shortage especially in what is considered the "unskilled" sector. The surge of foreign migrant workers reached its peak during the height of the bubble economy in the late 80's.

In this part of Asia when things were booming economically, many migrant workers came to Japan. Many are from the Philippines, but you also encounter Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Peruvians, Brazilians and a good number from African nations. There is a great number of workers, but society treats most of them like they owned them. They are happy to see them work on projects they find too difficult or dirty to do themselves, but when the project is finished they look down on them. For this reason, some Oblates have been ministering to the migrant workers, as a special apostolate, at different levels of involvement.

At present time Oblates are starting to get a better picture of how the unit will look in the future. Rather than staying in the same rut that we have been in for quite a few years. There is now an influx of a younger generation with new ideas. With the new vision the priorities have been identified as Youth Ministry, Advocacy Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and so on. Moreover, with the restructuring of the Delegation, we see that the greater portion of the members of the mission will be from the third world with new visions and ways of approaching problems. More lay people will most probably get involved, because finally some are recognizing the fact that we can't do it all.

In one small diocese, a young Oblate is in-charge for Apostolate to the Migrants, Apostolate of the Sea, Caritas-Japan all wrapped-up into one desk. In the same diocese, the Youth Coordinator is another young Oblate.

### **Formation**

Lack of vocation is big problem being experienced by all dioceses as well as almost all religious (women and men) congregations in Japan. Dioceses still rely heavily on the manpower that foreign religious orders can provide. Enterprising dioceses have started attracting candidates from places like Vietnam, Philippines and Korea. Religious congregations are also relying heavily on manpower "donations" from other Provinces within their ranks that are rich in vocations.

The Oblates in Japan are on the same footing as other groups in terms of vocation. For the last 20 – 25 years the mission has received missionaries from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India and Brazil. During the past 30 years, two Japanese were ordained to the Priesthood and one has become a brother. One of the two Japanese priest decided to leave and join the diocesan clergy.

The Delegation is burdened by the aging of its members and will continue to depend on other units especially in the Asian region to shore up its dwindling manpower resources. However, Japan being a rich country, is not a very attractive destination for missionaries. The difficulty of learning the language along with the loneliness and isolation that are characteristic features of the Japanese mission even add to the "unpopularity" of Japan as destination for starting missionaries. The crisis of vocation however does not exempt us from continuing to search for meaningful ways to attract young people to our lifestyle. Prayer for vocation is also a major component in vocation recruitment.

### **Oblate Personnel**

At present, there are six Japanese Oblates (5 priests and 1 Oblate brother) and there are no seminarians.

The last American who joined the unit arrived more than 40 years ago. Of the seven Belgians who came, the last remaining Belgian has died while others have either returned to Belgium or have left for various reasons. Recently two Brazilians who worked in this mission have gone back to their Province of origin.

### **The Delegation According to Nationality and Age**

<b>TABLE II</b>		Breakdown according to Nationality:	
American		2	
Japanese		6	
Sri Lankan (Colombo + Jaffna)		4	

Filipino	2	
Indian	2	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	
<b>TABLE III</b>	<b>Breakdown according to Age:</b>	
90 – 80 Years Old	5	reduced ministry
79 – 70	2	active
69 – 60		
59 – 50	3	active
49 – 40	3	active
39 – 30	3	active
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	

## Conclusion

Delegation's Response to the last General Chapter – *“Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me Pauperes Evangelizantur”*:

For the Delegation's Annual Spring Meeting held in April 2017, we invited Fr. Claudio BERTUCCIO to facilitate our three-day session in the light of the document **“Acts of the 36<sup>th</sup> General Chapter”**. Our discussions and sharing were mainly based on the *new faces of the poor; youth; formation for mission; interculturality; social media and finances*. Although according to our specific context we could see the new faces of the poor, youth etc. the challenge for us is how to put into practice what we have come up with. Looking back at our past resolutions/decisions taken as a Delegation, we feel that we have failed to implement them, because there is a certain amount of fear of change and insecurity in moving forward. I think our conversion as a Delegation starts with having the courage to 'let go' of the past and put into practice our decisions.

Although the Oblates arrived in Japan in 1948 the mission began the following year. Therefore, this year we celebrate seventy years of our Oblate presence here in Japan. We were very happy to come together during the Extraordinary Missionary Month not only to celebrate a thanksgiving mass but also to have a study session with the Auxiliary Bishop of Osaka Bishop ABELLA, the former Superior General of the Claretian Missionaries. The purpose of this session was to begin a process of reflection, evaluation and future planning of our presence and mission in Japan.

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