

Dear Brothers of the Japan-Korea Delegation,

Dear Father Bradly,

I would like to express my gratitude for the short time spent among you in various places in Japan.

My visit was very well prepared by the Superior of the Delegation and by the members of your Council. Thank you very much for planning well all my meetings with the Oblates and communities. Thank you very much for taking care of my accommodation, travels, and for introducing me to the Japanese culture (and food).

I experienced a very good welcome in every place I visited. All of you were very kind and collaborative. I see this kindness as a sign of good fraternal relations among you. Thank you for each community meeting and a generous and open sharing about your life, ministry, your hopes, your joys and challenges. In Koga I was welcomed and introduced to your past and present ministry. Fr. Jude shared with me about your concerns for the numerous immigrants in Japan. Fr. Brad gave me a little taste of the Japanese history in Kyoto. The community of Itami gave me a chance to better understand the various stages of the history of the Delegation and different groups of Oblate personnel serving this Oblate Unit. I learned many things in Naruto from Fr. Leonard and Bro. Nobu about the Japanese culture and the history of the kindergarten ministry. Kochi was for me a place to learn about various ministries and social initiatives started and carried on by many American and Belgian Oblates. I'm very grateful to Fr. Iru who offered me the possibility to visit a group of hard working and poor Filipino immigrants, and many "stations" attesting to a former vitality of the Province.

The following observations are made by a perfect newcomer to your complex reality. Please see and judge for yourself if any of them are worthy to reflect on and could be useful for the better mission and Oblate future in Japan:

1. Your Delegation has an amazing history of a very generous work done by many Oblates in favor of creating Christian communities, founding or developing the local Church, and helping the Japanese society with many social and justice-oriented initiatives. I would like to see that this wonderful work be somehow described and shared with the whole Congregation. The present anniversary of the Oblates' work in Japan could be a good occasion to think about a historical study of your Vice-Province and Delegation, and to help Fr. Jun in keeping the archives.
2. It seems to me that for various reasons most of the above-mentioned works were accomplished as personal ministries of many generous Oblates, and not as community projects endorsed by the Vice-Province/Delegation. The sad consequence of this is that with the retirement or death of the Oblates their often amazing work was not carried on by the community. Many of the former "parishes" of social-

oriented ministries seem to be minimally accompanied by your present reduced Personnel and are destined to be phased out. The multiplicity of those involvements is also a serious obstacle in choosing and actively embracing a small number of priorities.

3. With some exceptions, the parish ministry seems to be addressed to the traditional shrinking Japanese Christian communities. Listening to many of you involved in this ministry I could see your generosity and, at the same time, a serious concern for not having any solution for these slowly dying communities. It seems that this concern is a heavy burden to the Japanese Bishops who struggle to find ways for a “new evangelization”. Some of you used the expression of the “ministry of presence”, and the most common word I heard related to your ministry in Japan was “patience”. From the point of view of an Oblate who is by all the means ignorant about your struggle I tried to ask a number of questions: is your present parish ministry to be carried on as it used to be in the past; do our present parishes have a missionary character and outreach to the immigrants; are we exploring all the possibilities for non-sacramentally related work and presence in the society?

4. I was surprised to learn that in Japan there could be more Catholic immigrants than those native to the country. I could see your efforts to reach out to them and was sorry to learn that one of your main projects i.e. the work with the immigrants in the Toyohashi area couldn't be carried on due to the departure of our Brothers from Brazil. I was very touched by the poverty and difficult situation of the Filipino trainee-workers visited by Fr. Iru. Some of you shared with me the difficulties of reaching the immigrants related also to their temporary status in Japan, and the lack of a well-developed Church program for ministry among them. It was my conviction that this ministry could be the most important call coming from the present “new poor” living in Japan. I would hope for the Oblates in Japan to become the real pioneers in organizing this ministry and endorsing it as the first and most important priority of the Delegation.

5. Fr. Bradley shared with me about your efforts to evaluate and improve the present ministry done in the light of the last General Chapter, and involving your annual retreat and study days' programs. I would encourage you to continue this discernment, and to evaluate your present and future mission. Taking into consideration your limited personnel resources (17 members, and with 10 people in full active ministry) I don't think that the Delegation can afford to carry on its various present ministries and would need to focus on 1-2 priorities actively embraced by the whole community. Having a clear vision of what could be the future of our presence in Japan, might help you to formulate a clear mission statement, to have a feasible mission project, and to attract new members to your Delegation.

As I wrote at the beginning of this letter, please read my observations with your experience and wisdom. If any of them are commendable to be reflected on then I might hope that my visit was worthy of your time and resources. I wish that one day I

could come back to spend more time with you. I will keep fond memories of your kindness and generosity and promise to remember you in my prayer.

Fraternally yours,

Marek Jazgier OMI