



Far East Star

Spring 2021



From the Desk of the Delegation Superior...



Brad Rozairo, OMI

“No matter how long the winter, spring is sure to follow” goes the English proverb. After the cold, long and dark days of winter, a cherry blossom tree that I see every morning through the window of my room is all set to bloom. During winter, this tree does not call my attention as it goes through a period of transformation which sometimes might not be very pleasant to see. It looks almost lifeless, but suddenly one day in early spring explodes into brilliant beauty. Different seasons in the order of nature remind us that there is time for everything.

As we move from winter to spring, the liturgical calendar invites us to celebrate Easter, the greatest event in history that brought transformation, new life and a new beginning to humanity. The Easter story in the gospel of John 20:11-18 does not end with Mary Magdalene in grief. Her encounter with the Risen Lord gives her strength and courage to start again. Her sorrow turns into joy, and with renewed hope she goes to proclaim the Good News of the Resurrection.

As the present pandemic continues to bring pain, fear and anxiety to all of us, the story of Jesus’ resurrection comes to show the way forward by giving us an opportunity to begin new. In my daily conversations with people and sometimes also with religious, I hear them say that they pray for an end to the pandemic so that they could get back to their “normal” business as usual. This might sound like the weeping Mary of Magdala in front of the tomb! We mourn over the old ways of being ourselves, religious or church. When the Risen Christ shows us the way forward, we prefer to remain in the past. This might be an indi-

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cation that we are not ready to let go of what we have been clinging onto for years. Perhaps they might be our security, possessions, good friends, old habits, comfort zones, etc.



A crisis is an opportunity for us to let go of our past and to take a step forward while trusting in the providence of God. In the midst of despair and uncertainty, we need to hear the words of our Lord, "*Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid*" (Mark 6:50). God's ways often involve the pain of letting go, of beginning again, of going forward with hope and trust. I think, if we live the *dying and rising of Christ* in all aspects of our lives, then we can be certain that God will bring about renewal and transformation as He brought Jesus Christ to life from the dead.

Michael YAMASAKI SOICHIRO, 1934-2021

Jun Ikeda & Wency Laguidao

When I die, have a party in my honor! Mike would always say those words so the Oblates present during his funeral did just that, have some choice sushi for lunch after coming home from the crematorium. Because of travel restrictions due to the pandemic, there were only 7 Oblates present for the funeral mass held in Itami on January 29th. (He expired on the 26th at Gracia Hospital in Mino, Osaka.)

Mike or *Sou-chan* as he was fondly called by his family and the early Oblates in Japan, was born on December 24, 1934, in Kochi to Mr. Yamasaki of Kagawa Pref. and Ms. Chono of Kochi. There were four siblings and Mike was the oldest. Mike also would recall that his grandfather was a village chief in the mountainous area of Kochi known today as Oboke-Koboake where he also spent part of his childhood. The parents divorced and Mike was the only one who carried the name Yamasaki, his father's name. The mother and the rest of the siblings took the name Chono, the mother's maiden name. The younger brother who became a doctor (deceased) later married and was adopted by a family from Fukuyama named Yamanaka. Dr. Yamanaka, Mike's younger brother, was married to Keiko Yamanaka who is known to some Oblates. The Yamanakas have two children and both live in the Kansai area. The son is an ENT doctor and the daughter a housewife. Both came to Mike's vigil and funeral with some of their children.



One high school classmate of Mike that is known to Oblates in Japan is Ms. Hisae Kido, wife of the late Joseph Akihiko Kido, HOMI. Ms. Kido and Mike studied at the same high school in Kochi. Ms. Kido has some fond memories of their high school days together. In fact, the two were in the same grade school together.

After high school, Robert Gill, OMI encouraged Mike to become an Oblate priest. Mike and Leonard Inui Morio from Naruto started their pre-novitiate in Aki under the guidance of Leonard Robitaille, OMI. After Aki, the two studied Philosophy in Fukuoka under the Sulpicians of Canada. It will be recalled that our Founder Eugene De Mazenod also studied Philosophy under the Sulpicians.



After Philosophy, Mike and Len left for the USA to do their novitiate in Tewksbury. It is the same property that is now an OMI retirement home and where some of the Oblates who were in Japan spent their last days and are buried in the nearby cemetery.

After taking their First Vows, Mike and Len went to the scholasticate then Eastern Province of the USA. Len came back to Japan early to finish his Theology at Sophia (Jochi) University in Tokyo. Mike came back to Japan in 1962 after his theological studies in Washington DC.

On June 24, 1962, Mike was ordained to the Priesthood in Nakajimacho parish in Kochi. His home parish which was Enokuchi was not big enough for the big crowd.

Ordaining bishop was Paul Taguchi Yoshigoro. Shikoku was then part of the Osaka Diocese and it was before the erection of Takamatsu as a diocese. A reception was held at the orphanage run by the Aishikai sisters.

Mike was close to his aunt, a medical doctor and a member of the Aishikai congregation. The same aunt took in Mike when he went through a vocational crisis. Mike spent a couple of years in Akita where he did some teaching at a public school. He finally came back to the fold of the Oblates in the summer of 1975.

Ikeda Jun (nee Ray Bourgoïn) shares a few important interactions with Mike as a young priest (Ray was then a scholastic studying in Tokyo): "Since Mike did not finish a degree while in the U.S., he tried to get a degree in American Literature at Sophia University in Tokyo. I helped finish in typing up his thesis." according to Jun. Jun also went to visit Mike in Akita when he was going through a difficult time.

Any account of Mike's history will not be complete without mentioning the very sad problem that happened in Koga parish around the early 1970s. Jun recalls what could be the darkest moment in the history of the Japanese mission when a big problem created by a Belgian Oblate after unjustly firing kindergarten teachers and replacing them with his own favorites and with the backing of one influential family in the parish. All hell broke loose! Red flags of the communist-inspired labor union were hoisted all around the Koga parish and kindergarten amidst a media frenzy, etc. Mike Yamasaki was called to be the pastor at that crucial moment. It was an Oblate against the Oblate Vice-Province. The rectory was divided into two "warring factions" (Belgian Oblate and his supporters) and Mike aided by the late Lei Simons, another Belgian Oblate. Then Provincial Ron LaFramboise, OMI spent most of his two terms consulting with lawyers and answering accusations in court. The Vice-Province was left fractured and the rest is history!

To conclude, Wency Laguidao has this to add: I have known Mike since I was a language student in 1976. We were together in Fukuoka for 9 years and then moved to Itami together, a total of more than 40 years of friendship. His battle with cancer started about 7 years ago and

was at his side through his struggle. He loved to eat and I learned how to bake turkey because of him. He was a big brother to me and was a big support for me especially when I was the national chaplain of Filipinos in Japan. Rest in Peace, Mike!



Superior General with Mike in Itami, Japan, 2015

[My experience during pandemic holiday](#)

Sobuj Simsang

After two years in South Korea, last year 2020, I had an opportunity (holiday) to pay a visit to my family members and the Oblate Fathers in Bangladesh, my home country. The year 2020 was a shocking but a memorable year for the whole world because of the covid-19 pandemic which is still going strong. The coronavirus spread from China to all over the world, and hundreds of thousands of people have been infected with it and as we know that many have already succumbed to it. I could do nothing but pray for them. This short article is nothing about coronavirus or deep spirituality, but a sharing of my dramatic stories while visiting my family and the Oblate community in Bangladesh. I had quality time with my parents and family members during the pandemic lockdown!

My stories began from Korea itself where I had already spent two years! I was informed by the Mission Superior that I could visit my home country and family members. After returning from my visit, I would be assigned for parish experience at one of the Korean parishes for additional practice and study of the Korean language. I looked forward to this new plan! A few days later, I was told that the priest-in-charge of the Suwon Diocese Migrant Office asked if I could join them. I had already been offering mass in one of the migrant centers for one year but had not joined the Mi-

grant Office. Consequently, I was asked to come and stay for two weeks. I was at first, annoyed a little, but then agreed. Later, this was updated to two months. With joy in my heart and soul, I prepared for these upcoming days. Meanwhile, the news was spreading of a contagious coronavirus that had originated in China. People were being infected in many countries in the world!



Anyway, in the middle of the second week of February when Fr. Sebastian Nokrek returned to Korea after his vacation, I left Korea for Bangladesh. My trip home was prolonged from two weeks to two months, and then later to ten months! At that time, restrictions were gradually tightened in the airports and lockdown was imposed strictly everywhere. In China and in several European countries, like Italy, Spain and France, coronavirus was spreading rapidly. The continent of America was also being hit hard! I remember that coronavirus was also

infecting people in Korea and Japan. There were risk and fear among the people! Everybody was encouraged to wear masks!

Arriving in Bangladesh, I found that people did not know much about coronavirus. They only heard the news of it. I was the only person wearing a mask! No one was yet infected in Bangladesh! Fr. Ripon Rosario picked me up at the airport. I was taken to the Oblate Delegation House in Dhaka. I met several Oblates there, and among them were Fr. Ajit Costa, the Delegation Superior, Fr. Monohor Corraya, the most senior Oblate, Fr. Henry Rebeiro, first native Oblate, Fr. Lintu Areng, newly ordained priest, the Oblate seminarians and their Director. Two days later, Fr. Lintu and I left for my parents' house for my younger brother's marriage ceremony. Fr. Lintu presided over the mass and I blessed the marriage. On the occasion, we had a joyful moment together with my parents, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives!

But later the same day, I received sad news from Fr. Ajit Costa that Fr. Henry Rebeiro had died. At night, we left for Lokkhipur, one of the Oblate parishes where Fr. Henry's remains were laid out. His Excellency Bp. Bejoy D'Cruz OMI, many Oblate fathers, representatives of religious congregations, Fr. Henry's relatives and hundreds of faithful were present at the funeral.

Afterwards, I visited all the Oblate parishes in Bangladesh. I also had a very good chance to visit Fr. Sebastian's mother and family members. I received an opportunity to visit North-East India for the first time and meet some of the Oblates there. After I left India on the next day, the Indian government declared lockdown all over India.



My allotted time home of two months was nearing the end. A week before my departure, the Bangladesh government also announced a lockdown and social distancing for one month. Transportation was restricted. Flights, national and international both were limited. I communicated with my Superior regarding the circumstances. I was asked to see and wait till the situations were normalized. I was, at that time, at my parents' residence. One month passed and nothing changed; the lockdown continued. 2 and 3 months also passed, no change; the condition became worse.

After entering the seminary, I was not able to go home for a long period of time. Since there were restrictions during the lockdown, I had to stay at home and look after my younger brother's goat-



project with my nephew. He was already involved there. Both of us looked after thirty goats and also cultivated a lot of vegetables during the lockdown. We produced various kinds of vegetables, such as pumpkin, gourd, red spinach, okra, jute, eggplant, bitter gourd and tomato. Sometimes, we shared our cultivated vegetables with our neighbors.

In the beginning, people followed the government's instructions regarding lockdown and stayed at home. Even, people would inform the police or government officials if anyone refused to follow warnings, especially, if anyone would come in from another area. Because of this, sometimes there was shouting at each other and angry word-conversations among the people. Our house is near a parish church, 8-minute walking distance. Early in the morning, I would go to the church for mass. Only priests, nuns and a few faithful came for daily mass. Because of the government directions, the Bishop asked all the parishes in the diocese not to have public mass

for the time being. Instead, he encouraged people to have family prayers at home. We would have benediction every evening in the small chapel of the parish. I had a good relationship with two kind priests there. Sometimes I would also join them in the evening prayer. Then after three and half months at home, I came back to the Oblate Delegation House, Dhaka. I was very privileged also to participate in the installation ceremony of Archbishop Bejoy D'Cruz OMI, at the Cathedral in Dhaka. Archbishop Bejoy is the first Oblate Archbishop in Bangladesh. Afterwards, all the Oblate fathers in Dhaka, the scholastics and seminarians had a gathering to greet him and celebrate mass with him.

Ten months seemed to be a very long period to be away from Korea, but it passed very quickly!



2021 Asia-Oceania Regional Conference (AORC)

Brad Rozairo

"Call for a reinterpretation of ongoing formation for the Oblates in the 21st century" was the theme of the online Asia-Oceania Regional Conference, held from March 1 - 5. The resource person was Fr. S. M. Selvaratnam OMI. Below are a few thoughts and questions from his sharing for our reflection.

- Invitation for a spiritual journey: Spiritual journey of a religious can be seen as a second conversion, which leads a person from being a believer to be a seeker. This search will lead him/her to contemplation in action and eventually journey towards being a contemplative prophetic evangelizer which is the essence of religious life.

- The Oblate of the future is called to be a mystic: A religious is called to be a friend of the Lord as mentioned in John 15:15, and it is out of this friendship the mission of the religious needs to flow. This call to friendship is a call to intimacy, which eventually becomes a call to mysticism. It is a call to wholeness (Mt. 5:48); a call to fullness (Jn 10:10); a call to completeness (Jn 15:11) and finally it's a call to oneness (Jn 17:21).

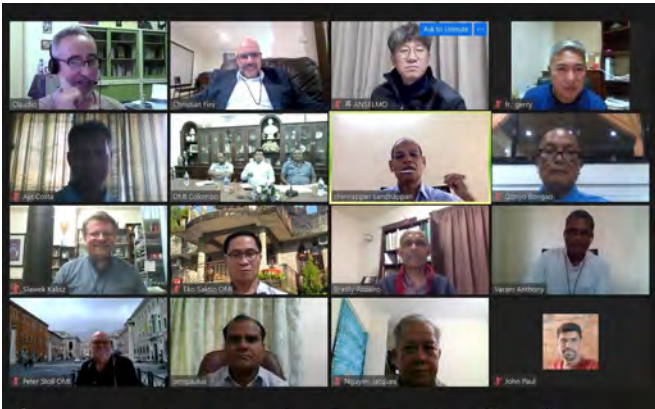
- A call to contemplation: This is the need of the time. It is a universal call to all human beings. All the more important for the Oblates of the future.

- Questions for reflection:

1. Reinterpretation of ongoing formation for the Oblates of the future, seen as a continuous journey of a seeker. How it will influence our day to day life?

2. A call to consciousness is also seen as a way to reinterpret the ongoing formation of the Oblates of the future. How will a call to consciousness become ongoing formation?

Apart from the talks and discussion, we also had time for prayers conducted by the different units of our region and the sharing of unit reports. Thanks to the Province of Colombo for hosting the conference of the Major Superiors.



AORC participants



From left: Fr. James (Vicar-Provincial, Colombo), Fr. Eugene (Provincial, Jaffna), Fr. Roshan (Provincial, Colombo) & Fr. Selvaratnam (Resource person)

YEAR 2020 IN REVIEW...

OMI JAPAN: OCTOBER 2020 STUDY SESSION with Bishop Abella CMF



OMI Japan come together to continue a process of reflection, evaluation and future planning of presence and mission in Japan

25th Anniversary of Canonization of Saint Eugene de Mazenod in 1995



Online prayer service: December 3, 2020

Song: *God's Spirit is in my heart*

Sharing: *Bro. Yagi*

Reading: *Letter on the occasion of the beatification of St. Eugene*

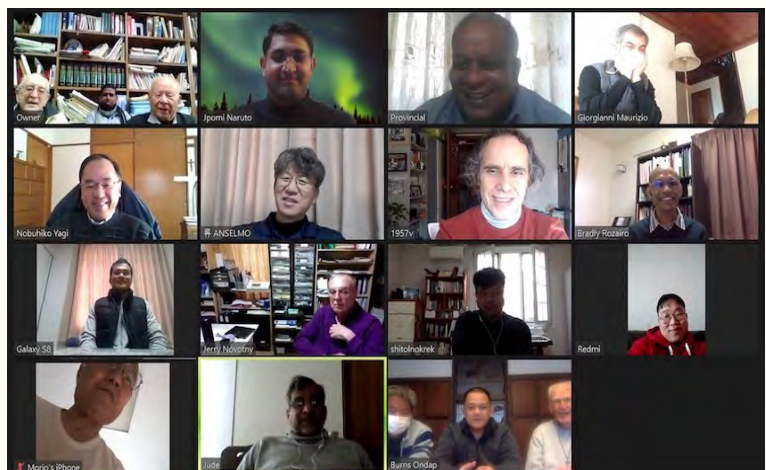
Questions for reflection & sharing: *By members*

Final song: *We are Oblates...*

Evening thanksgiving prayer: OMI Japan-Korea



ONLINE CHRISTMAS GATHERING: DEC.28, 2020



Christmas prayer service: OMI Japan-Korea