

Volume 20, Issue 2

Summer 2018

# JPIC REPORT



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

...let us place our confidence in the Lord. Keep on going forward, the Lord is guiding your footsteps.

**St. Eugene De Mazenod  
1847 letter to Fr. Leonard**

The ones who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless.

**Blessed Archbishop Oscar Romero**

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## From the Office

**D**ear Readers, Supporters & Friends:

We are excited to share with you the latest edition of the Missionary Oblates JPIC Report — Summer 2018! This report follows the spring unveiling of our website as a multilingual platform, now providing translation for the 14 languages spoken around the Oblate world. Visit the site at — [www.omiusajpic.org](http://www.omiusajpic.org) — and tell us what you think.

Every JPIC Report highlights the work of the office, the impact of your support on our advocacy efforts and reflections from Oblates involved in their own ministries. In this issue, in addition to regular updates on corporate responsibility, immigration, human trafficking, and the ecological work of Lavista (Godfrey, IL) and Three Part Harmony Farm (OMI 391, Washington, DC), you will hear from contributors like Fr. Jim Brobst, OMI, who commends JPIC Committee board chair Gary Huelsmann for his many years contributing to the work of OMI JPIC and his role advocating for children and families as CEO of Caritas Family Solutions in Belleville, IL. For many years, Gary has effectively chaired the U.S. Missionary Oblates JPIC Committee, an advisory body that serves as a resource for the Provincial Council and the JPIC Office.

We are grateful for the wisdom of Mr. John Lasseigne, who in a recent Earth Day talk channeled the spirit of our late friend, Fr. Darrell Rupiper, OMI, passionate advocate of God’s creation and care of the Earth. Fr. Lasseigne writes about his talk on April 22 at St. Paul’s Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada, where he shared on Fr. Darrell’s travels around the U.S. as an ecological missionary, conducting workshops and prayer services through the Eco-Mission project. Fr. Darrell

was influential in the establishment of several eco ministries, including the award-winning Greens of Guadalupe environmental group at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Laredo, Texas.

We hear from Oblate brothers in Africa and Asia engaged in justice and peace ministry within their own cultural situations. After attending a memorial event on April 2 for Ms. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, South African Oblate Fr. Zweli Mlotshwa, OMI, insightfully reflects on her death and legacy as a freedom fighter and former wife of Nelson Mandela. Fr. Valentine Talang, OMI, shares a heart-felt piece about his 12-day pilgrimage to remote mountainous areas in Chittagong Hills Tracts, Bangladesh to minister and celebrate Easter Mass with marginalized indigenous communities who, due to government regulations, are deprived of regular pastoral visits. Fr. Scott Hill, OMI, participated in a local *March for Our Lives* rally in support of tighter gun laws and discovered his financial institution Wells Fargo supports the National Rifle Association (NRA). Given this knowledge, he parts ways with Wells Fargo and decides to bank instead with a local credit union, although this could mean limited access to banking services.

We thank you, our readers, supporters and friends for your continued commitment and passion for Oblate JPIC ministry. We want to collaborate and support your efforts as you are frontline advocates in your own communities and ministries.

Please enjoy this issue and email us — [jplic@omiusa.org](mailto:jplic@omiusa.org) — to let us know what you think.

From all of us at OMI JPIC- Thank You.

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...

### OMI 391 Bids Farewell to Meghan Gieske



(From left to right) George Ngolwe, Associate Director; Meghan Gieske, honoree

Meghan Gieske began working as part time office coordinator in the JPIC office in September 2015. That same year she moved to the Washington, DC area from St. Paul, MN to attend Catholic University of America, and in May 2018 she completed a Master's Degree in Piano Performance. After recently graduating Meghan was offered a position at the university, which she accepted.



OMI 391 Staff at Meghan's farewell party

## News & Happenings...

### New OMI JPIC Committee Board Chair Named



Dr. Victor Carmona was appointed the new chair of the JPIC Committee effective June 2018, replacing long-time chair, Gary Huelsmann, Chief Executive Officer of Caritas Family Solutions. Gary will continue on the committee as a member. Dr. Carmona is an Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego (Ph.D. Moral Theology and Christian Ethics, Notre Dame). He is a former assistant professor at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX.

Before becoming a moral theologian, he served migrants and urban communities with the Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops (CEM-Movilidad Humana) and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Those experiences, he said, have influenced his research on immigration ethics and theologies of migration, which he pursues with a global perspective grounded in a Latino point of view.

### OMI JPIC Welcomes Bayor Chantal Ngoltoingar as New Office Coordinator



Bayor was born in Chad, Central Africa. Her work experience includes finance and marketing, having worked with the United Bank of Africa and Airtel mobile company in Chad. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in social work at the Catholic University of America.

Before coming to Washington, DC, Bayor studied English at a community college in Sanford, North Carolina. She also spent six months working as a volunteer at Haven Lee County, a shelter offering care to adult women and children.

Bayor has published a book about the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Africa called "Lobscurite sous le soleil" translated as "Darkness under the sun." The book was published in France. She is working on the English version, soon to be published.

Prior to officially joining the Missionary Oblates JPIC staff in May 2018, Bayor completed a one-year volunteer position with the office in 2017.

### The Sharifs Purchase a New Home!

Congratulations to the Sharifs on their purchase of a new home! Amir Sharif, a university professor back home in Pakistan and his wife, Saira, a high school math teacher and their two sons, Unss and Runaan, with the help of the Missionary Oblates in Pakistan and Sri Lanka came to the U.S. in 2015 to escape religious persecution.



Amir was targeted by an al-Qaida-related group in Pakistan and told he and his family needed to convert from Christianity to Islam. When he refused, the family became targets of violence.

It has been a long hard road of faith and perseverance, but with support from the Oblates, working through Fr. Séamus Finn, OMI, the Sharifs today lead normal lives working, attending school and actively engaged with their local parish in Chicago where Unss and Runaan are altar servers.

## Gary Huelsman: Compassionate Leader & Family Advocate

By: Fr. Jim Brobst, OMI

**G**ary Huelsmann comes from a family who farmed in southwestern Illinois lands near Trenton, IL, for generations. From his earliest days, he's been connected to the land and has seen how different living things interact to create larger living ecosystems.

As CEO of Caritas Family Solutions, Gary has been an innovator and effective facilitator in the face of difficult challenges. In 2011, while the agency was still known as Catholic Social Services, the state of Illinois passed the Civil Union Act. It became obvious that they must either stop having the Catholic name or stop giving excellent foster care to abused and neglected children. Gary's skillful and compassionate leadership not only preserved care for foster children but led to the expansion of the agency, which today serves over 42 counties in the state of Illinois. He introduced the concept of Community Integrated Living Arrangements where adults with developmental disabilities live together in neighborhood homes. Gary also added the Multi-Systems Therapy Program, aimed to break the cycle of criminal behavior by keeping teens at home, in school, and out of the juvenile justice system. Again, we see the organic vision of someone who understands healthy systems!

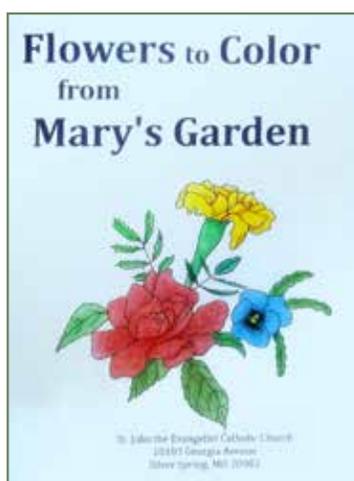
In addition to Gary's leadership in providing dignity and direct service to individuals, he works to change systems that help people realize their own dignity. Along with his brilliantly talented family — wife Christine and daughters Mariah and Chloe — Gary's whole family were founding members of La Vista Community Supported Farm in Godfrey, IL. Their faces and presence are all quite familiar at La Vista. He has used this "organic family system" vision to change how hundreds of households in our region get their food — from locally and organically grown methods. His work has also created a system where the farmers involved find greater dignity and compensation for their work. The system he has helped create is built on relationships—farmers to consumers as well as a better relationship with Earth for everyone.



Gary Huelsmann

After working with Gary in creating LaVista Farm, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate tapped him to serve and eventually chair the Justice, Peace, and Integrity (JPIC) Committee, comprised of Oblates and lay people experienced in issues of justice, economic development and ecology. They act as an advisory body for the JPIC Office.

With all that Gary does, one would think he would be a pretty intimidating person to be around. Quite the contrary! People who know Gary say he is one of the kindest people they know. His employees say he is quick to give them credit for the success of Caritas Family Solutions and is tireless in his efforts to make sure they are treated fairly. He has given bonuses and provides staff training opportunities to help them advance and succeed in their jobs. Gary will say that all these things I just mentioned are 'no big deal,' that he is only doing what God is calling him to do.



**J**ust outside the Kennedy Room of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, across Woodland Drive from the parish school, there is a carefully landscaped sliver of land, in the center of which is a large statue of the Blessed Mother. Many types of flowers and small shrubs lie on each side of the statue. This place is Mary's Garden. *Flowers to Color from Mary's Garden* is a 16-pg booklet that contains outlines of some of the plants in the garden. The outlines are meant to be a sort of spiritual coloring book, drawing on art, science, and prayer to honor the Blessed Mother, and give us an opportunity to deepen our relationship to her.

The booklet is the creation of Mary O'Herron, former OMI JPIC staff who retired in 2016 after 30 years of employment with the Missionary Oblates. Mary is an artist/illustrator and author of a children's book. She resides in the Washington, DC metro area. Copies of the book can be purchased for \$10 by emailing Mary O'Herron at: [tomol427@starpower.net](mailto:tomol427@starpower.net).

## A Culture of Welcome for Migrants and Refugees

By: *George Kombe Ngolwe*

**O**ur faith calls us to welcome the stranger and offer hospitality and justice to migrants and refugees regardless of status. God's concern for the migrant is recalled in Exodus and is a core issue for Judeo-Christian tradition. As members of a Church that has been called to offer hospitality to strangers and welcome migrants, we are constantly reminded to participate in God's mission of love, community and friendship by welcoming others. The basic question to ask about migrants and refugees in our community or nation is not, "Who are they?" but: "who are we?"

It is not surprising that hospitality for the poor and abandoned are key themes for Saint Eugene, patron Saint for the Missionary Oblates who said—"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."

Guided by Catholic Social Teaching and inspired by Oblate values for justice, JPIC will continue to advocate for humane, compassionate and comprehensive immigration policies that respect the right to migrate that is enshrined in international law and affirm the responsibility to welcome immigrants and refugees. In accordance with the U.S. Province's 2016 Convocation theme, "Rooted in the Christ Crucified, Growing in Witness to His Kingdom," Oblate JPIC works to re-affirm the importance of ministry and mission with migrants and refugees."

With the cancellation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), almost 700,000 dreamers—young migrants—risk deportation from the United States. In collaboration with other faith-based organizations, we continue to urge Members of Congress to enact the DREAM Act, which could provide legal protections to immigrant youth. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals has allowed young migrants to thrive and contribute to society without fear of deportation. Enforcement-only immigration policies drive migrants deeper into isolation. These deterrent strategies have failed to address the flow of immigrants, are extremely costly to U.S. taxpayers and divert resources away from building safer local communities. As workers and consumers, these young migrants currently contribute to the U.S. economy. They also serve this country's military. As Catholics, we will continue to stand in solidarity with these young migrants who are hardworking, enterprising and law-abiding members of our communities.

Missionary Oblates JPIC is also appalled by the standing executive order to dramatically lower the cap for refugee admissions in fiscal year 2018.

In addition, it is disheartening to see other executive orders that end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for migrants from Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, El Salvador, South Sudan, Syria and recipients from other countries. Ending Temporary Protected Status impacts millions of families and burdens them with impossible choices. More advocacy is needed to persuade Congress to enact laws that provide a permanent legislative solution for TPS recipients.

Today our world is facing a crisis of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Global leadership is needed to provide humanitarian assistance, which helps to meet the basic needs of refugees and vulnerable migrants and addresses the root causes of migration and displacement. It is a fact that once fully integrated into local communities, refugees contribute to their new home as taxpayers and business owners.

We invite you to learn what Catholic Social Teaching says about immigration and become familiar with current U.S. immigration policies. Visit Justice for Immigrants' website: [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org) to learn more. Educate people in your community and parish about our current immigration system and Church teachings related to this. Advocate for immigration reform by urging your law makers to uphold family unity and protect vulnerable migrant and refugees. Pray for the protection of all migrants and for elected leaders to have the moral courage and wisdom to pass humane immigration laws.

## 2018 Earth Day Talk Highlights Work of the late Fr. Darrell Rupiper, OMI

*By: Mr. John Lasseigne*

**F**r. Darrell Rupiper was a friend of Earth. He was an Oblate priest and missionary. In the 1970s, his religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, sent him to work in poor communities in Brazil. This was during the era that a military junta governed the country. The junta's disrespect for human rights and use of violence to achieve its goals opened the eyes of the rural boy from Iowa. His experience in Brazil gave him a lifelong zeal for social justice and the defense of human rights.

After working in Brazil for more than a decade, Fr. Darrell returned to the United States. He served as a parish priest in various places throughout the Midwest. For a long while he was pastor of a predominately African American parish in Chicago. Later, he served as the director of the novitiate (seminary) of his religious order, where he helped in the training and preparation of future priests. He taught his parishioners and seminarians to see religion as more than the happenings inside the walls of a church. He taught them by example to be active in their communities. He spoke out and acted against the death penalty, racism, and nuclear weapons and on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and minorities.



Fr. Darrell Rupiper, OMI (1937 – 2009)

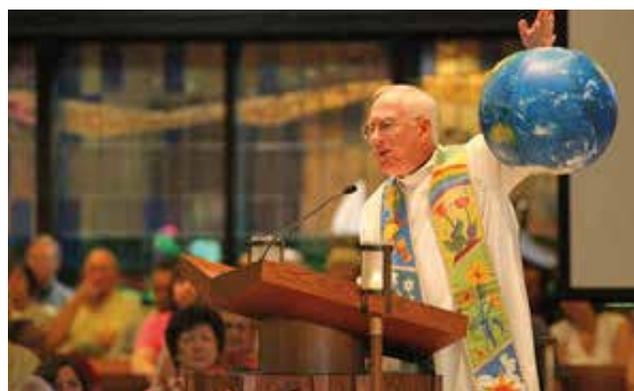
Priesthood according to Fr. Darrell's style is difficult to live in any age. But it came to seem especially difficult in the later years of John Paul II's papacy. In that time the Catholic Church seemed to turn inward, focusing more on matters of doctrinal purity and sexual ethics. Thus, there came a time when Fr. Darrell grew discouraged, so discouraged that he thought about leaving the priesthood.

But he did not leave. Instead, he discovered another cause that inspired him and sustained his priesthood right up until his death in 2009. Discovering that passion was like undergoing a

second—or maybe a third or fourth—conversion. That passion was care for Earth and God's creation. I don't recall exactly, but I am pretty sure that this conversion came through his reading of the author Thomas Berry. Berry was also a Catholic priest who wrote about creation, culture, science, the history of the cosmos, and humankind's ongoing destruction of the planet. It was reading Thomas Berry, I believe, that gave Darrell a new sense of urgency to his priesthood. He realized that we humans have a tremendous need to change the way we relate to the other animals and to the planet. He also came to believe that he could do more for Earth's cause by remaining in the priesthood than he could outside, as a layperson.

So, Fr. Darrell asked his superiors for permission to be free from all institutional ministries, like parishes and seminaries. He asked to be free to travel around the country as an ecological missionary—giving talks, workshops, prayer services, and retreats in whatever parishes or communities would be willing to listen to him. And many parishes and communities did invite him. It helped that Fr. Darrell belonged to a religious order that had a network of parishes throughout the United States. It also helped that he was naturally sociable with a great gift for telling jokes and stories and putting people at ease. He also had a vast store of life experiences to draw from.

In his presentations, he taught his listeners to call the earth "Earth," with a capital letter E, and dropping the article "the". Calling Earth by its own proper name, as we call our friends Cameron, or Joan, or Pamela, was to recognize Earth's integrity, dignity, and sacredness. He invited people to remember their most powerful experiences of nature from their past, most often from their childhood or youth. These memories triggered a sense of tenderness toward Earth that many of us lose in later years.



Fr. Darrell Rupiper, OMI, during a workshop

*(Continued on p. 7)*

## Earth Day Talk *(Continued from p. 6)*

He taught people to beware of falling prey to the 3 C's: comfort, cost, and convenience. Many of our worst and most destructive habits toward Earth come from our constantly striving to increase our comfort and convenience and reduce our costs. He taught people songs, which were more like chants or ditties, which expressed appreciation for the simple beauty of creation. The songs were composed by a teacher that Fr. Darrell knew in Illinois.

When he spoke, Fr. Darrell often carried an inflatable earth with him. He would lead people in a reflection about how we humans misuse the earth—through pollution, overconsumption, and development—and with each example, he would invite someone to come forward and smear the earth with a muddy paste until the ball was completely covered in slime. Then he would lead the group in another reflection on how we can live respectfully and compassionately on Earth, and as he spoke, he poured water over the ball and washed it clean.

He ended his retreats by asking parishioners to make a commitment to change: stop using plastic bags and bottles; recycle; reduce consumption of water, electricity, and meat; walk more, drive less. He formed groups within these larger communities who would carry on promoting the messages of creation and Earth care. The group leaders would communicate with Fr. Darrell about their groups' progress.

I share Fr. Darrell's story with you because today is Earth Day, April 22. Fr. Darrell's life shows me that it is never too late to make a change, to find a new reason to live, a new project to inspire us. His life also has taught me that appreciation of Earth is a spiritual act. Indeed, I believe it is the primordial spiritual act. It is no accident that the earliest humans declared the sun, the moon and other features of creation to be gods in their own right. Indeed, I am convinced that creation and humanity's relationship to it are at the root of all that is spiritual and holy. They are deeper than every theology, doctrine, and religion. For proof, we may refer to another great spiritual leader that we are all familiar with, who said that our guidance in life should come from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.



United Nations

### UN CORNER: Solidarity for Oblates in the Congo (DRC)

*By: Fr. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI*

**T**he Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) most recent crisis is partly fueled by President Joseph Kabila's refusal to step down at the end of 2017 after a 2-term limit as mandated by the constitution. This situation continues despite mediation by the UN, civil society and the Catholic Church. The government has clamped down on the opposition and peaceful protests. Violence against civilians has intensified leading to loss of life and the displacement of over 1 million people.



Fr. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI, Oblate representative at the United Nations and the JPIC office recently supported efforts to bring about lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Fr. Dan drafted a letter addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which was signed by several religious communities including the Catholic Task Force on Africa (CTFA).

The letter demands actions from the UN to protect Catholic civilians in the DRC who are peacefully calling for rule of law and respect for human life. Another letter was sent to Catholic Bishops in the Congo to express our solidarity and prayers for their courageous actions denouncing the situation. President Joseph Kabila has been in power since 2001.

## Bangladesh: A Glimpse of Missionary Experience in the Hills

By: Fr. Valentine Talang, OMI

Chittagong Hill Tracts has a long political history in Bangladesh. It covers 3 districts (Rangamati, Khakrachory and Bandarban) and most of these areas are mountainous. There are 13 indigenous tribes and Bengali people who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Oblates are working in two parishes namely Lama and Alikodom, under Bandarban district. I am working at Alikodom parish as an assistant priest and a member of the JPIC team in the Bangladesh Delegation.

Being a Khasi, an indigenous Oblate priest myself, it is always a privilege for me to share my experiences of working in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. We have 12 villages under Alikodom parish, which falls under the government reserved forest area and these are controlled by the army. These villages are in very remote areas without good communications, schools for the children, pure drinking water and basic health care. The only way to reach the people is to go on foot and in certain areas, by boat.

This year during Holy Week in Easter I had the privilege of visiting 11 Tripura villages over 12 days. Since the area is restricted due to government regulations, I needed permission from the army, and after waiting three years I thank God I finally got permission to have a pastoral visit and



Fr. Valentine celebrates Easter Mass with Indigenous host community

give the people a chance to celebrate the Holy Mass. The village where I had my Easter Mass was the first one they ever had. It was touching to see people's thirst for the Eucharist and their anticipation of participating in an Easter service. They were waiting to meet and talk with me, and it was so interesting to see the genuine faith of these humble people. Many of them did not know the traditional prayers and rituals of the church. But their enthusiasm in expressing their faith really challenged



Fr. Valentine Talang, OMI receives a warm welcome

my faith as a priest. I admired their faith and trust in the Lord.

After becoming a priest, it was my first time being away from the parish and visiting villages for 12 days. There were no toilets, bathrooms, personal rooms and purified drinking water. I just followed the way people did things. Having a toilet in the jungle, taking a bath in the Jhiry ( a small river), sleeping in a common room with them and drinking the water of the river gave me great missionary experiences. I walked for 35 hours over 12 days and one of those days, for the first time in my life, 9 hours at a stretch. At night I was tired but went to bed late as I listened to people's stories of their life struggles in the hills. In my mind, the only strength I received was from the people. After all, if they could stay and thrive in this place, why couldn't I? It was really a missionary journey, an adventurous one shared with simple indigenous people. Their cordiality and concern for me made my visit a pleasant and enriching experience. The cute faces of children still imprinted on my heart, I was sad to see so many children unable to attend school because most villages had none. We were helpless and even

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## Fr. Scott Hill, OMI, Takes a Stand Against Gun Violence

By: Fr. Scott Hill, OMI

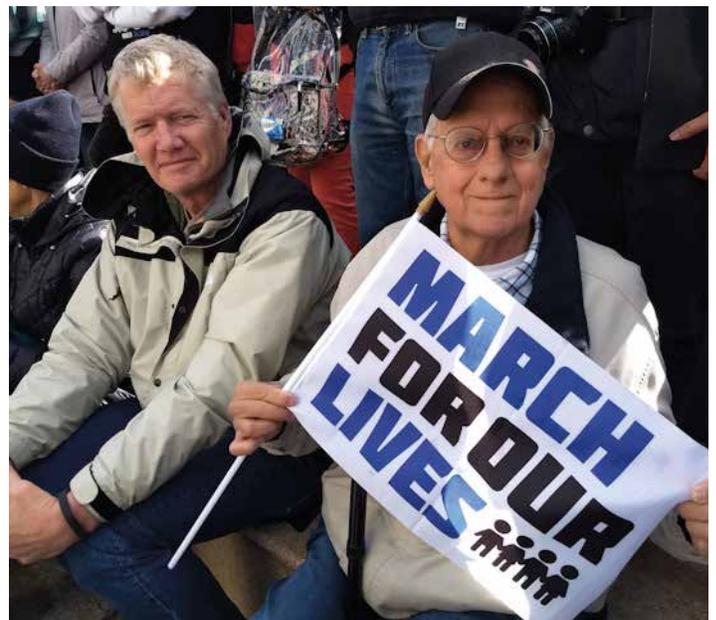
Assault rifles continue to be the weapon of choice in our American culture, especially when perpetrating violence on the innocent, the youth and children of America. The students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, are saying, “Enough is enough.” The *March for Our Lives* rally on March 24 galvanized the youth of this country and many of their supporters, demanding sensible gun laws and the closure of the many NRA-supported loopholes. The youth of America continue to raise their voices, demanding a change in gun laws and some assurance that gun violence will not burden them anymore. So far politicians give lip service or take ineffective legislative action. The cry of “enough is enough” by our young people goes unheeded.

Recently, I learned Wells Fargo Bank does business with the National Rifle Association (NRA) and manufacturers of assault rifles. When I wrote requesting Wells Fargo distances itself from these purveyors of violence, the bank CEO, Randi Weingarten, side-stepped the corporation’s civic responsibilities (unlike Walmart, Dick’s Sports, Delta and United Airlines, First National Bank of Omaha, Enterprise and Hertz Rental, MetLife, etc.) with the following, dismissive response: “Wells Fargo takes extraordinary pride in supporting teachers and their families, and in 2017 alone, we provided nearly \$70 million in education-related contributions across the nation. We remain deeply committed to the financial success of teachers and all our customers. Wells Fargo wants schools and communities to be safe from gun violence, but changes to laws and regulations should be determined through a legislative process that gives the American public an opportunity to participate. We remain firm in our belief that the American public does not want banks to decide which legal products consumers can and cannot buy.”

It sounds to me like another way of saying: “Our condolences and prayers...” Enough is Enough! In my small way, I decided to do something. So, I moved my paltry accounts from Wells Fargo to a local credit union with no ties to the NRA and a stronger commitment to the community it serves.”

This was not an easy decision for me. I depend on the availability of local Wells Fargo branches (“stores”). I usually bank when Fr. Philip Singarayar, OMI, and I do the weekly community grocery shopping. There are a good number of local Wells Fargo ATMs, also the account I held provided me

with some free banking services. Deciding to move my account to a credit union was inconvenient, but from my viewpoint, greater values were at stake and this influenced my decision-making. Finally, finding a credit union seemed daunting to me because many of them are affiliated with specific occupations or institutions. Googling ‘local credit union’ I found one whose membership required living within a specific geographical area (check!); worshipping in a community of faith (check and check!!); attending a local school; or affiliation with a partner company. It appears some credit unions have a wide definition of membership. The one I joined offers many of the same services as a traditional bank. If you are wondering how accessible their ATM’s are, I learned that many credit unions are linked nationally. This network allows free of charge withdrawals, but it may be possible to bank with a local credit union without having to move an account from location to another location. Yes, credit unions have online banking features and without some of the limitations imposed by larger banks. As I mentioned, credit unions invest in the local community, while the shareholders of larger banks make decisions focused on increasing their dividends. With a credit union, members have voting rights, as well as a say in the services the bank offers to local communities.



Fr. Scott Hill (right) holds up sign at *March for Our Lives* rally

(Continued on p. 10)

## Experience in the Hills *(Continued from p. 8)*

though my heart was willing 'the purse was weak'. We could not address their basic educational needs because of the lack of funds.

I listened attentively to their financial struggles; not getting just prices for their products in the market, the cry over ownership of their land and whether in the near future they would be able to keep and use the lands they now possess; as their movements are restricted by the army, their stories of injustice, done to them by the mainstream majority ethnic group (Bengalis), and sometimes by their own people; the political games in the hills. All this made my heart cry. I know I cannot address all of these harsh realities, but I am sure that as an Oblate, my presence, listening to them and visiting with them, gave them some moral support. It made me feel proud to be one of them. This Easter was special for me, as I saw the risen Lord in the faces of these people, and a new hope dawning in their hearts as they felt perhaps at least one person showed them empathy, and through me the whole Oblate world and the people of God, through this article. Truly Christ has come to redeem all human beings. My presence with them gave me and them that assurance. I thank the Lord for giving me this most enriching Easter experience.



Fr. Valentine with some of the Indigenous children.



Fr. Valentine crossing a river on his visit to Chittagong Hill Tracts.

## Gun Violence *(Continued from p. 9)*

I would like to share a couple of lines from a local high school student who suffered sleepless nights following the Parkland, FL shooting. He recited his poem (Poem to Assault Rifles) at a recent school walkout:

*"While the defenseless minors of America are put to pressure, the only number going up is our body counts...."* And he concludes:

*"And the number after that: bullets counted. And the number after that: caskets made."*

**Alex Torres, 18**, Pittsburg, CA, High School

Finally, there is a theory in science called the "Butterfly Effect." If I understand it correctly, the theory suggests that when a small, locally organized energy is applied, the impact of that energy may be felt far and wide.

## South African Oblate Priest Reflects on the Legacy of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela

*By: Fr. Zweli Mlotshwa, OMI*

**O**n April 2, 2018, Easter Monday, South Africa received the sad news that Ms. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela passed away. I attended one of the many memorial services held in her honor in Orlando stadium in Soweto on April 11. Here are my thoughts on this experience and Ms. Mandela's legacy.

On April 11 I attended Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's memorial service held in Orlando stadium in the famed township of Soweto outside of Johannesburg. I entered the stadium and walked through the Orlando West/Phefeni viewing area. From this area I could see the Ms. Madikizela-Mandela's house and the famous Vilakazi street; also Archbishop Tutu's house, as well as the original home of Nelson and Winnie Mandela. What really caught my attention though was the sight of the huge Hector Peterson Museum, which tells the story of the Soweto Uprisings, especially the 1976 student riots. These uprisings were by black school children standing up against the might of the apartheid government and protesting an educational policy that would allow their already inferior education to be further lowered by being taught in Afrikaans; a language many were not familiar with. Many of the young people who participated in these uprisings perished from police bullets while others died in police detention.

This led me to think of the present South Africa that I live in, the thought that the very spot and inch of land on which I stood was won by the blood of countless people who fought so that all inches and spots of this country are free. I thought of the spots and inches of the country which are still not free. Just a few weeks ago a White South African woman was sentenced to three years in jail for hurling racial slurs at a Black policeman who was trying to help her after she was the victim of a crime.

I was led to think of the spots and inches of land in this country that are not free especially for the women and children of our land. I remember stories of how the young Winnie, or Nomzamo as she is known in her home village, stood up against forces and forms of dominance against children and females by challenging boys in the traditional male game of stick fighting. This is the story of a woman who knew her self-worth and dignity and was prepared to challenge whatever stood in her path. A social worker by profession, she used every opportunity granted to fight for the voiceless and meek.

I attended Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's memorial service today, not really to listen to the long speeches but to be in the presence of the large, colorful and loud crowd that was anticipated. Indeed, the crowd did not disappoint — it was large, it was colorful with people clad in different African-style attire and African National Congress (ANC) regalia of bright yellow t-shirts, and it was loud almost chaotic with songs sprouting out from different corners of the stadium, especially when a new group entered the stadium greeting the crowds with their special song and dance.

Interesting for me was young school-age children singing their brand of revolutionary songs. I thought of how a few yards away (Hector Peterson Museum) and a few years ago, the sight of school children chanting was an invitation for police to attack, not just with tear gas and rubber bullets but also live ammunition. I thought of this present South Africa, where school children can sing freely as children should do; this is the South Africa which Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and countless others like her sacrificed their lives, their homes, families, innocence, and dare I say morality.

I attended the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela memorial service today, not to listen to the speeches but to honor a village girl who became the mother of a nation. As the speeches went on and the singing got louder there was a voice which refused to be drowned.

I attended Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's memorial service not to listen to the speeches but to sing, to dance a bit to the struggle songs because South Africa is still not free; the struggle still has to be waged for the dignity of the poor who cannot get out of the poverty trap. To remind myself that even when they have no voice the poor still sing and by singing they challenge all of us with a voice to speak up for them. May we realize that the struggle is still very much alive because there are spots and inches of this beautiful country that are not free. ALUTA CONTINUA, AMANDLA!!!

## The Promise of *Laudato Si'* for Integral Ecology

By: Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND

On Saturday, April 21, Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker gave the keynote address at a conference held at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois entitled *Our Sacred Earth, Our Common Home*. Dr. Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies.

Over 100 participants were inspired by Dr. Tucker's enthusiasm as she shared her appreciation of papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*. She helped us to wake up to its importance in the Catholic tradition of social encyclicals as well as its worldwide influence and impact beyond Catholicism. Being a leader in the emerging field of Religion and Ecology, she was able to unite the two as she led us through the content of the document.

After the keynote, the attendees split up for break-out sessions, one by Sr. Cheryl Kemner, OSF and Nicole Heerlein of Franciscans for Earth: "*The Challenge of Technology and Simple Lifestyle*," another featuring Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND, Director of La Vista Ecological Learning Center: "*Backyard Revolution*," "*Care for the Earth; Care for the Poor*" by Sr. Connie Probst, OSF — Co-Director, St. Anthony's Food Pantry, and "*What Can My Parish and Family Do?*" by Jamie Hasemeier of Holy Redeemer Parish. In addition, Dr. Tucker held a break out-session for religious sisters.

The day was co-sponsored by: *The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows; La Vista Ecological Learning Center; the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and the School Sisters of Notre Dame*

A YouTube video of of the presentation can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/KTyY9rvRlfg>



"Our Sacred Earth", "Our Common Home: Reflection and Action on Laudato Si'"  
Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, Speaker

## This Growing Season at Three Part Harmony Farm (3PH)

By: Cristina Flores

Every year brings with it new challenges, both in the field and otherwise, and as the 2018 growing season begins to unfold, we find ourselves feeling grateful to be back. Despite the season having just started, it feels like we've experienced winter, spring and summer in such a short window of time. The snowfall on March 21 came as a blow to us, as well as other farmers in the community. As a result, we find ourselves anxiously anticipating what the weather may bring, while doing all we can to nurture what we've seeded, in the hopes that our plants show us their resiliency.

Although we aren't strangers to the challenges of being an urban farmer, we hope to deepen our strength on and off the field. This February, Gail Taylor, Three Part Harmony's head farmer worked many tireless hours to complete an application for a USDA Grant that, if awarded, will help us with marketing efforts and farm infrastructure. The USDA Value-Added Producer Grant is awarded to over 300 applicants, and we hope to be one of the few.

While some things have changed, others have remained the same. Last season we initiated work on a garden bed expansion project that has led to the biggest footprint this farm has seen. The western side of the farm (the side we call Trinity) now measures 95 ft. As we begin planting into the longer beds, we are simultaneously working to expand the eastern side (the side we call the Street Side) of the farm. Planting into 95 ft rows is no joke! Especially when you're talking about a teeny little leek plant. Luckily, the same farm crew is back this season, so although this is a big change, it's good to be a part of it as a team.

Another change this season is the addition of a 5th CSA pick up site at the Love and Solidarity Collective in the Park View area of Washington, DC. We have returned to Lee Montessori this school year, making it our fastest-growing CSA pick up yet. Providing food for families right across the street from us is a beautiful thing! Additionally, we will host pick up sites at the Matri House in Takoma Park, MD, as well as a porch pick up right here in NE Washington—Brookland. Not to mention our mainstay pick up at the Emergence Community Arts Center. So far in 2018, we have increased our CSA membership to 155 members and aim to have 215 members by season's end—which will be double the amount we had last year! Our CSA is unique in that we not only grow a large variety of greens and veggies, but we also collaborate with other farmers of color in the area to provide a well-rounded variety of produce for our members. These partnerships are beneficial to both member and farmers in that we are able to aggregate resources from one another, as opposed to depending on a third party. Talk about tightening up the food chain! We look onward with a little uncertainty, but we are at peace knowing that we are doing the best we can.

Three Part Harmony Farm Crew—  
Gail Taylor, Cristina Flores, Jon Berger



## Faith Groups Step Up To Combat Human Trafficking on a Global Scale

**H**uman trafficking or modern-day slavery is global, persistent, and tragic despite best efforts to eradicate it being done by governments, organizations and faith groups. Most countries have anti-trafficking laws, yet an estimated 27 million people around the world are victims of this complex crime. Human trafficking takes on different forms including sexual exploitation and forced labor, but also forced marriages, sale of children, human organ extraction, child soldiers and debt bondage. The Walk Free Foundation, publisher of the annual Global Slavery Index reports that slavery exists in every country not only impoverished places or conflict zones.

As traumatic and dangerous as human trafficking is for victims, it is a profitable billion-dollar enterprise for perpetrators. Pope Francis calls human trafficking “An open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ...a crime against humanity.” He urges all people “to join forces to prevent the slave trade and guarantee protection and assistance to victims.” Governments, international organizations, civil society and faith groups are all working to combat this scourge. Faith groups are actively working at the community level to create awareness, educate people, and assist victims. Following are reports from Missionary Oblates in the United Kingdom and Ireland who write about their project helping trafficked women in Birmingham, a densely populated city in the UK. Washington, D.C., based Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) reports on their ongoing work providing counseling and training for trafficking victims in southern Nigeria.



### United Kingdom/Ireland: Friends of St. Eugene Respond to the Reality of Human Trafficking

*By: James Omunson*

**T**his article outlines one of the projects undertaken by the Friends of St Eugene to help poor and marginalized people in Birmingham. It also sheds light on the prevalence of human trafficking among women refugees and how it affects their integration into the wider UK society and the trauma they face.

At St Anne’s Catholic Parish in Birmingham, the Friends of St Eugene are deeply rooted in the principles and values to support each other and especially the poor and marginalized through Friendship, Prayer and Service as particular projects have been taken on during Lent and Advent. During the last years, we have reached out to help many vulnerable refugees and migrants, including homeless and rough sleepers and victims of trafficking to settle and integrate into the UK after their perilous journeys.

Based on our commitment to the Oblate charism, as Friends... we have individually and collectively tried to live out the vision of St. Eugene by making a difference to the lives of people who live in our local area through volunteering in the local projects – the seasonal homeless night shelter in St. Anne’s church; the permanent, adjacent Tabor House shelter for the homeless and also at Fatima House.

This latter project, which is again on St Anne’s premises, entails working with Fr. Hudson’s Care within the

Archdiocese of Birmingham to provide accommodations for destitute female asylum seekers in Birmingham.

As we seek to deepen our relationship with Christ, we do our best to meet regularly to develop our spiritual resolve by imitating the pattern of St Eugene’s life. In so doing, we have committed ourselves to not only helping to improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum through social and political change, we also strive to share good practice with and between various organizations such as: St Chads Sanctuary in Birmingham, the Carmelite Monastery in Wolverhampton, Victims of Torture, The Haven, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) and The Salvation Army. The objective of these initiatives is to provide victims of human trafficking with safe, secure accommodation and culturally sensitive support, with counselling tailored to their individual needs.

The present challenge is urgent and immense. Hundreds and thousands of migrants, young and old, lonely or in groups, or as families, have made perilous journeys, risking their lives and leaving their motherland, crossing into Europe and becoming refugees, migrants and homeless people, facing all of the dangers and consequences at their peril.

These migrants, many of whom are victims of human trafficking, social injustice and violence, speak of desperately fleeing the devastation, poverty and wars in their own

*(Continued on p. 15)*

## United Kingdom/Ireland: *(Continued from p. 14)*

countries. They have encountered countless hindrances and obstructions to their freedom and hardly receive any assistance or protection throughout their journey. One of the many challenges facing trafficked woman, as one person relates her experience whilst being trafficked in Europe, is her dependence on human traffickers or other illegitimate means of crossing borders. Recent research by the EU's law enforcement body found that 90 percent of refugees have had to pay a criminal gang up to \$6,000 to enable them to reach Europe.

Consequently this not only brings suffering, abuse and exploitation to trafficked women and families, but forces many vulnerable women to perform 'survival sex' in order to pay traffickers to smuggle them across Europe's borders when they have no other option because they cannot afford the unreasonable fees being charged by the traffickers.

In discussions and listening to stories from victims of human trafficking at a local charity drop-in center in Wolverhampton, it is believed that there is significant crossover between gangs smuggling refugees and trafficker gangs preying on unaccompanied young women for exploitative sex, work and slavery whilst crossing to Europe. Some refugee camps in Europe leave women completely unprotected, providing a perfect opportunity for traffickers to exploit these women and force them into the sex industry for their own profitable gain.

Adding to their distress, a charity supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Birmingham has recognized that women

who are both victims of trafficking and claiming asylum in the UK have experienced significant difficulty in accessing the protection they are entitled to.

### STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In dealing with questions of abuse and sexual violence that the women may have received as part of being trafficked insensitively, treating any gaps in their story may be down to trauma or unwillingness to share this information as reasons to disprove their claim to having been trafficked. If their asylum claim is also initially refused the victim may be left without access to housing, medical care and safety.

With the recent surge in refugee crisis leading to an increase in the trafficking of women it is vitally important that the UK and European governments enforce a fair and effective system to help and support these vulnerable victims. Currently female refugees are left at the mercy of human traffickers whose sole business is only to exploit, abuse, and charge them unreasonably. The injustices build up against women refugees in Europe, as they face ever-increasing dangers and exploitation, a far cry from the protection guaranteed by the UK and European governments and Our Father's will... Please God that we can help and we pray to and with St. Eugene for this need.

*- James Omunson - on behalf of the Birmingham Friends of St. Eugene*

## Nigeria: AFJN Works with Partners to Tackle Human Trafficking



**A**frica Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) traveled to Nigeria several times over the past year to continue our Women Empowerment Project. AFJN-Nigeria, an independent sister organization was incorporated in the country to legally enable the sisters to work unhindered. They are using their collective moral voice to confront human trafficking, particularly in Edo State in southern Nigeria, a human trafficking hub. The Sisters visited government officials, church leaders, rural communities, traditional rulers, youth groups and conducted town hall meetings and awareness programs to educate communities on the ills of human trafficking.

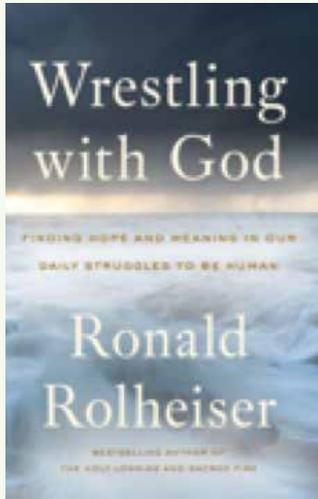
The Sisters also identified and confronted a feared and "untouchable" brothel owner and sex trafficking site in the state. His case is still with the Edo state police. Further, the sisters' work with the community of Ogwa village in Esan West led the chief to issue a decisive social and economic isolation decree prohibiting buying, selling or conducting any transactions with the brothel owner and his family, forcing him to close down his brothel and flee the village. In addition, the sisters' enlightenment campaign in Edo State prompted the state governor to create a Task Force on human trafficking headed by the state attorney general and includes one of the sisters as a member, and also led to the introduction of a bill in the state assembly for stiff penalties against human traffickers. The sisters have been requested to mobilize for the passage of the bill.

Visit [-AFJN.org-](http://AFJN.org) to read more about their women empowerment work in Africa.

## Resources

### ***Wrestling with God: Finding Hope and Meaning in Our Daily Struggles to Be Human***

By: Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI



The bestselling author of *The Holy Longing* provides an inspiring message of hope and perseverance for all of us struggling with our faith in tumultuous times.

The last few decades have rapidly birthed a modern world that would have been unrecognizable fifty years ago. As long-held beliefs on love, faith, and God are challenged by the aggregate of changes that have overhauled our world, many of us are left feeling confused and uncertain while old norms are challenged and redefined at breakneck speed.

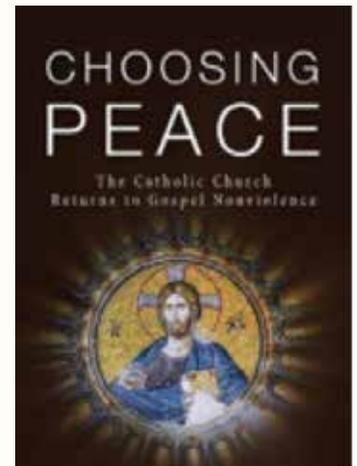
In *Wrestling with God*, Ronald Rolheiser offers a steady and inspiring voice to help us avow and understand our faith in a world where nothing seems solid or permanent. Drawing from his own life experience, as well as a storehouse of literary, psychological, and theological insights, the beloved author of *Sacred Fire* examines the fears and doubts that challenge us. It is in these struggles to find meaning, that Rolheiser lays out a path for faith in a world struggling to find faith, but perhaps more important, he helps us find our own rhythm within which to walk that path. The book can be purchased from Amazon.com and several publishing houses including Crown Publishing Group: <http://crownpublishing.com/>.

### ***Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Nonviolence***

Edited by: Marie Dennis

In recent years the Catholic Church's approach to issues of war and peace has refocused on the tradition of nonviolence and peacebuilding in place of the traditional framework of Just War teaching. Among the milestones was an historic conference hosted at the Vatican in 2016, which gathered 80 peacemakers from around the world.

Drawn from the conference and presented here are contributions by many of the participants, including Lisa Sowle Cahill, Terrence J. Rynne, John Dear, Ken Butigan, Rose Marie Berger, and Maria J. Stephan, among others. Together they advance the conversation about the practice of nonviolence in a violent world, Jesus and nonviolence, traditional Catholic teaching on nonviolence, and reflections on the future of Catholic teaching. The book concludes with Pope Francis's historic Message for World Peace Day in 2017. The book is available for purchase at Orbis books – [www.orbisbooks.com](http://www.orbisbooks.com) – or at Amazon.com.



### ***The Challenge of Reducing Waste A Parish Guide A reporting series***

By: Brian Roewe

The problem of single-use plastics and other quickly disposable items isn't an easy one to solve. At times it can seem impossible to escape the products, so prevalent they are in daily life in what Pope Francis has termed the "throwaway culture," from plastic foam cups and plastic-lined coffee cups, to straws and paper sacks and leftover food, to plastic lids, plastic wrappers, plastic wrapping and plastic bags.

This three-part series looks at the challenge posed by plastic pollution — the theme of Earth Day 2018 — and how Catholic parishes and communities are taking steps to reduce the waste and change life-styles. Download the report from the National Catholic Reporter: <https://www.ncronline.org/challenge>