

# News Letter

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Oblates of Mary Immaculate,  
Colombo Province, Sri Lanka

CONSTITUTIONS  
et  
REGLES  
De la Société  
des  
MISSIONNAIRES  
dits  
De Provence =

## Father Provincial's Message

Dear Brother Oblates,

**R**ight at the outset, let me wish you all, 'A Very Happy and Prosperous Year 2020.' The New Year begins with the Universal Church celebrating the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Thus, the Church openly invites us to reflect on the unwavering faith of Blessed Virgin Mary manifested in the midst of challenges, trials, and disappointments, and on her great desire to fulfill the will of the Heavenly Father.

The image of Mary as Queen and Mother is directly related to the first official Marian dogma, defined by the Church: "Mary's Status as Mother of God." This title is one of the oldest and most commonly used titles for Mary with Christians using it in the very first centuries of the Church. The title also appears in one of the oldest known Christian prayers, the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* ('Beneath your Protection'), as an early form of the *Memorare* that dates back to the third century.

### **Unwavering faith of Blessed Virgin Mary manifested in the midst of challenges, trials, and disappointments...**

In the month of January, the Catholics in Sri Lanka celebrate the feast of St. Sebastian, the warrior saint (256-288 A.D.), as well. He is a Saint and Martyr. According to the traditional belief he was killed during the Roman Emperor

Diocletian's persecution of Christians; was initially tied to a post or a tree and pierced with arrows. Yet, this did not kill him at once. Hence, he was clubbed to death as the second resort.

The details of St. Sebastian's martyrdom were first spoken of by Bishop Ambrose of Milan (St. Ambrose) in 4<sup>th</sup> century in his sermon on Psalm 118. St. Ambrose states that Sebastian was from Milan, and that he was already venerated there at the time of 4<sup>th</sup> century. St. Sebastian is a popular saint today, especially among athletes. He is also regarded as a saint with a special ability to intercede to protect people from plagues. Devotions to him increase naturally when a plague is active.

## Congrats! - New Provincial Superior

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The members of the OMI Province of Colombo, Sri Lanka, extend their hearty Congratulations to Very Rev. Fr. Roshan Silva OMI, the newly appointed Provincial Superior of the Province.



The members of his new Council will be appointed in May 2020. Thereafter, the installation of the new Provincial Administration will be held on the **21<sup>st</sup> of May 2020**, on the Feast day of our Saintly Founder. You are kindly requested to keep that day free for your participation in the ceremony.

## Proceeds from the Provincial in Council

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- The Council approved the revised text of the Statutes of the Delegation of Bangladesh.
- **On Annual Events:**
  - ▶ **Annual Retreats**
    - 1<sup>st</sup> Retreat: 02<sup>nd</sup> to the 08<sup>th</sup> of August at the Scholasticate in Kandy
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> Retreat: 09<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of August at St. Vincent's Home, Maggona
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> Retreat: 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of November at St. Vincent's Home, Maggona.
  - ▶ **Jubilee Celebrations**
    - 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 at De Mazenod House, Mattakkuliya
  - ▶ **Mass for the Deceased Oblates**
    - 09<sup>th</sup> November at 4.00 pm at Kanatta, Borella
- **The Priestly Ordination** - The Priestly Ordination of deacon, Jude Shalinda OMI was fixed for the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February at 9.00 am at Fatima Church, Maradana.
- **Fr. Angelo Martyn OMI** was appointed as the second assessor of the Scholasticate Community in Kandy.
- **AORC meeting** will be held from the 01<sup>st</sup> of March to the 07<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020 in Jaffna.

## Ordained and Consecrated to proclaim the merciful and forgiving God even to persecutors

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Some of us Christians might argue that we are justified in expressing our anger on behalf of the innocent churchgoers who were brutally killed in the Easter attacks but any semblance of hatred which makes us demand the State to bring about retributive justice on the perpetrators seems to be a rejection of what Jesus taught us by word and example as well as

ignoring what Pope Francis has been insistently proclaiming as the authentic Christian response to persecution. Specially those of us who are called to shepherd the flock must bear this in mind.

One is ordained and consecrated in the Catholic Church to make known, by word and deed, the

true image of God, which Jesus was born to reveal. It is said in the Sacred Scriptures that God loved the humans so much that He sent Jesus to save them – to make them flourish, and not to punish or to condemn them (cf. Jn 10.10).

Jesus, who wanted His disciples to love one another as He has loved them, also preached publicly, “You have heard how it was said, you will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...” (Mt 5: 43-45).

Before he died on the Cross, Jesus, the merciful Judge passed a verdict of “not guilty” on the soldiers who were sent to kill Him. He said, “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23: 34). Note, however, that it was Jewish High Priest and the Elders who forced the hand of Roman Ruler to kill Jesus! After his resurrection and ascension to His

**Pope Francis invites the Christians to abandon the language of condemnation and embrace the language of mercy ...**

Father, Jesus told his Apostles that “In His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations” (Lk 24: 47). When we read the Sacred Scriptures, we come to know Jesus’ non-confrontational disposition and attitude towards enemies and killers. His disposition was gentle and caringly friendly.

When we listen attentively to Pope Francis’ proclamations – his teaching, preaching and acting- we rejoice, because his pastoral approach in the face of persecutions and murder of Christians is one of mercy and gentleness, not only inviting the Christians to abandon the language of condemnation and embrace the language of mercy but also inviting both the religious and the political leaders to proclaim by word and deed, that “to kill in the name of God is a great sacrilege”. Pope Francis’ merciful approach to murderers should not be construed as condoning murder. For in this Pope’s way of speaking and acting, I see a gentle and caringly friendly pastoral approach, which leads to the creation of a fraternal world, affirming the innate dignity of every human person, which is inviolable and inalienable, and solidarity among all people.

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI

## **New Comers to the OMI Juniorate**

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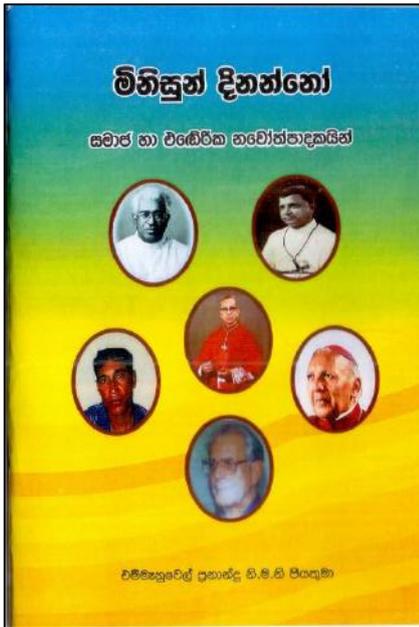
18 new students were welcomed to the Juniorate community on the 12th of January, 2020. They were received by the Juniorate Rector, Rev. Fr. Andrias Fernando, OMI in the Eucharistic Celebration, and in a subsequent ceremony which was meaningfully arranged. Out of the 18 students, 17 were to be enrolled in Grade 10, and one has entered the seminary after passing his Advance Level.

The OMI Juniorate Community, Kohuwala, is thankful to the Vocation Director, Rev. Fr. Roshan Fernando OMI for his untiring efforts.



# New book on Apostolate among fisher-folk

By Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI



During his priestly life as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI), Fr. Emmanuel has had the opportunity to work also for the socio-economic and spiritual development of the fisher-families in Sri Lanka. He is grateful to the Oblate Superiors for permitting him to minister to those families. In the booklet, Fr. Emmanuel has included some of his personal reflections on the fast-evolving situations of the fishing communities and some of the issues which affect these communities in Sri Lanka.

The booklet, "Fishers of People", contains also the accounts of the efforts made by a few compassionate pastors, the Religious, and the lay faithful who have inspired and encouraged him to improve the quality of life of the fisher-families. May their compassionate commitment and initiatives inspire also today's missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. This book has been first published in English last year and now in Sinhalese this year.

## Commemoration of the Life and Mission of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI

On January 17th, 2020, amidst a large gathering, the Centre for Society and Religion commemorated the life and mission of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI. To mark this 07th Death Anniversary of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI, there were two significant events:

1. The handing over of the Hard Disk containing the Digitization of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya's writings by The American Institute for Lankan Studies (AILS) to CSR. This work was coordinated by Ms. Crystal Baines of AILS. Ms. Crystal explained the work undertaken to preserve the great contribution made by Fr. Tissa's writings in digitized form and said that soon Fr. Tissa's writings would be available online.
2. CSR initiated a platform for "Citizens' Dialogue" on current topics and issues in society. The objective of this effort is to raise the critical consciousness of the citizens and to invite them to collectively work for common good.

The inaugural lecture was delivered on that day by Dr. Kumudu Kusum Kumara on "Social Criticism in a Dark Time". This was followed by a lively discussion. CSR will continue to hold similar discussions on every first Thursday of the month at CSR at 3.00 p.m.



## Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OIHL)

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The Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OIHL) which was established on 21st May 2016 during the Bi-centenary Jubilee Celebration, to find a way to comprehensively address conflict transformation which is a crying need in post-war Sri Lanka, has successfully completed three years of training in Peace and Conflict Studies. OIHL awards a Diploma in Conflict and Peace Studies which consist of four certificate courses: Conflict Transformation, Inter-



Religious Dialogue, Gender and Cultural Integration, Psychological Counselling as a Path to Peace and Social Engagement for Peace and Reconciliation. During the three Academic Years (2016-2019), 103 students were enrolled and 12 completed the Diploma, 54 students completed different certificate courses and 37 participated as audit students.

The Certificate Awarding Ceremony for the students of the Academic Year 2019 and the

Inauguration of the Academic Year 2020 was held on 11th January, 2020 at the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR). Very Rev. Fr. Irwin Morais OMI, Provincial Superior of the Oblate Province of Colombo cum Chairperson OIHL was the Chief Guest. Deshamanya Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nation Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict was the Guest Speaker.

## An Opportunity for Inter-faith Encounter

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On the 03rd Dec. 2019 Ashoka Thero of Kotte, the monk in charge of the temple in Illuppankadawala, Ullukkula, visited 'Rajabima' Center and expressed his willingness to conduct a Christmas programme in the said temple.

On the 05th Dec. 2019 Fr. Shane Winston De Rosayro OMI made a visit to the said temple to meet Ashoke Thero. The temple is situated about 3 kms away from the Anuradhapura Puttlam main road, in a rural set up, where the livelihood of the people is generally farming. There were about fifty-five children who were members of 'Arunodaya' Children's movement, initiated by the monk who is very much open for dialogue and interaction with other faiths.



On the 29th Dec. 2019 as scheduled the Christmas programme was held in the temple compound. For this occasion, about twelve children from Pothanagama Church joined in those children in carol singing. It had been a fine encounter between the people of two faiths and a true experience of Christmas to all who were present. The real meaning of Christmas was shared with the children and people who had never had something of that nature before.

## University Ministry Rejuvenated

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*‘Quality time with the Lord and friends for weekly renewal of academic life’,* is the running theme envisaged by Rev. Fr. Ruwan Prasanne Perera OMI for the Catholic students of the University of Peradeniya. It has paid huge dividends within a span of few months.



When Fr. Ruwan was formally appointed as the Catholic Chaplain of the Peradeniya University Campus by the CBCSL (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Sri Lanka) somewhere in November 2019, the maiden task ahead of him was to stage the annual Christmas Carol presentation, organized by the Newman Society, the Catholic student body of the university. Giving an orientation to the handful of students who were steadily available for the work was his challenge. It was done by motivating them to understand the need of creating lively and open relationships with peers, and it has to be a true result emerging from their Christian spirituality, they were told. The students got the message well for themselves, and passed it on to the ones who were unconcerned for participating in such events. The final outcome was somewhat a

‘mega event’ – a presentation of carols to a packed audience in the university chapel. There were students of other faiths too, patiently and proudly enjoying the beautiful Christmas melodies sung by their own friends. The dinner served for all who had come created an atmosphere for furthering their friendships and establishing new ones too.

With this experience, the workable mechanism was well traced by Fr. Ruwan for his chaplaincy ministry. Gradually, the theme above took shape in his mind, and relevant programs have been organized accordingly for the benefit of the students. Each program contains a substantial time for mutual rapport, during which not only the ideas are shared but also their friendships are broadened by the students. Fr. Ruwan has been able to find generous donors to raise funds for serving refreshments. This happens even after Sunday Eucharist. The mediocre attendance of participants in Sunday Mass has increased to a church-filled attendance. Now, the students have taken initiatives to organize Eucharistic celebrations and other liturgical services, to trace unknown Catholic students in the campus, to think for themselves creative ways of improving their faith life etc.

The services of the Oblate scholastics, Bros. Samith Sandaruwan, OMI and Charith Jayangana OMI as well as of the Brothers from the National Seminary, Ampitiya, are well-appreciated by Fr. Ruwan and the University students as well.