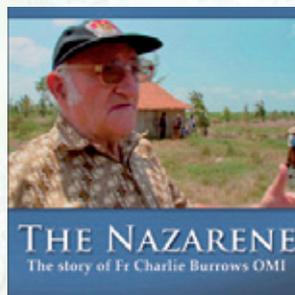




Beyond Mission



Charles Patrick Burrows OMI was ordained a priest in Dublin on 21st December 1969. Charlie was born in Dublin, Ireland, 8th April 1943. After attending O'Connell's

Christian Brothers School, Dublin Charlie entered the Irish Oblate Novitiate in 1962 eventually taking Final Vows in 1966.

Fr Charlie was appointed to the Australian Province after his ordination arriving in Sefton Parish in Sydney in September 1970. After three years he was appointed to the Oblate Mission in Indonesia where he still works. Who Fr Charlie is, at heart, began in a strong Catholic family dedicated to their church and the Oblates. At home, he was a Mr 'Fix-it', always available to help, and from that point of view, his mother was not all that happy to see him join the Oblates! During his seminary days in Ireland he became a man who liked to put into action what he preached, sooner, rather than later! This was sometimes uncomfortable and inconvenient for others, but it is certainly in the spirit of St Eugene de Mazenod who calls Oblates to be daring and passionate!

Fr Charlie is man of action with deep convictions about the dignity of every person. He has lived his life with compassion for the poor and oppressed. On the other hand, Fr Charlie ministers in the predominantly Muslim and sensitive culture of Indonesia. This has required a diplomatic approach to officials, leaders and the people. As he once said: "You have to have everybody on side and do things in the right way at the right time."

One of Fr Charlie's core principles of being a missionary is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." His tireless efforts to assist the poor without pressure to become Christian, or Catholic, has provided a mechanism for bridging faith boundaries and breaking down the barriers that lead to violence and mistrust.

Many have been touched by the example of Fr Charlie and the Oblates in Cilacap because their motives have been to liberate the people from the oppression of poverty, isolation and ignorance. One Oblate came for a visit and complimented Fr Charlie on his great humanitarian efforts but wanted to know; “when are you going to evangelise the people?” He replied, “I’m not! If they want to become Christian they will come and see me,” and many did.

Although Fr Charlie has certainly had his own transforming ideas (for example, setting up a not-for-profit organisation to manage his income generating businesses) he is adamant that “it is what the people want that’s most important.” As he travels around the large parish he sees people living in difficult circumstances and works out how to give them a voice to have their needs met in cooperation with other people.

Anglia Television Limited, 1991 (UK) produced a television show which revealed many positive attributes of Fr Charlie’s life. The outstanding image or feeling from one viewer, was the “love God and love your neighbour” attitude. Fr Charlie helped people to realise their greatness and hence help them to love themselves.

Another viewer said the stand out image was the way Fr Charlie put so many resources into education so the young people can have a better life and make a difference when they grow older. Even here, however, Fr Charlie is “radical”. He noted that often the institution stands in the way and the people come second. For example, if a student misbehaves the institution often removes

“the bad apple” to protect the good name of the school. The Church should be about taking the “bad apples” and making them into “good apples”.

It is fitting to hear how Fr Charlie sees his ministry: “I’m enjoying myself, saying Mass for the people, being with the people, it doesn’t feel like work.” And he receives much love in return from the people. By walking with them and sharing in their struggles and work (breaking rocks, carrying bags of rice, etc.), Fr Charlie has lived out the words of Pope Paul VI, who declared that people listen first of all to actions.

Fr Gerard Conlan OMI

THE FILM

The ABC program Compass recently aired The Nazarene, an independently-produced film for RTÉ’s Would You Believe series, based on the life and work of Fr Charlie Burrows OMI, an Oblate priest who has built up a vast business empire in Cilacap, one of the remotest parts of Indonesia. MAMI has been supporting Charlie for many years. The short film is a wonderful opportunity to see the construction, road-building, quarrying, banking and educational enterprises he runs are today that are valued at tens of millions of dollars, and yet Charlie remains as true to his vow of poverty and his Catholic spirituality as he was four decades ago when he first left the seminary.

ACTIVITIES

Fr Michael Twigg often says “People will sometimes believe what you say, but they will always believe what you do.” Discuss this quote. Explain how Fr Charlie lives the words of this quote.

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

- 1 Describe two programs that Fr Charlie runs, using pictures and at least 100 words each.
- 2 Identify the types of poverty addressed by each program.
- 3 As a class, discuss the term ‘social capitalist’. Is this a good description of Fr Charlie?
- 4 Fr Charlie currently controls programs worth tens of millions of dollars, but still remains true to his vow of poverty. How is this possible?
- 5 Remember your study of St Eugene de Mazenod in year seven. Draw parallels between his character and Fr Charlie.