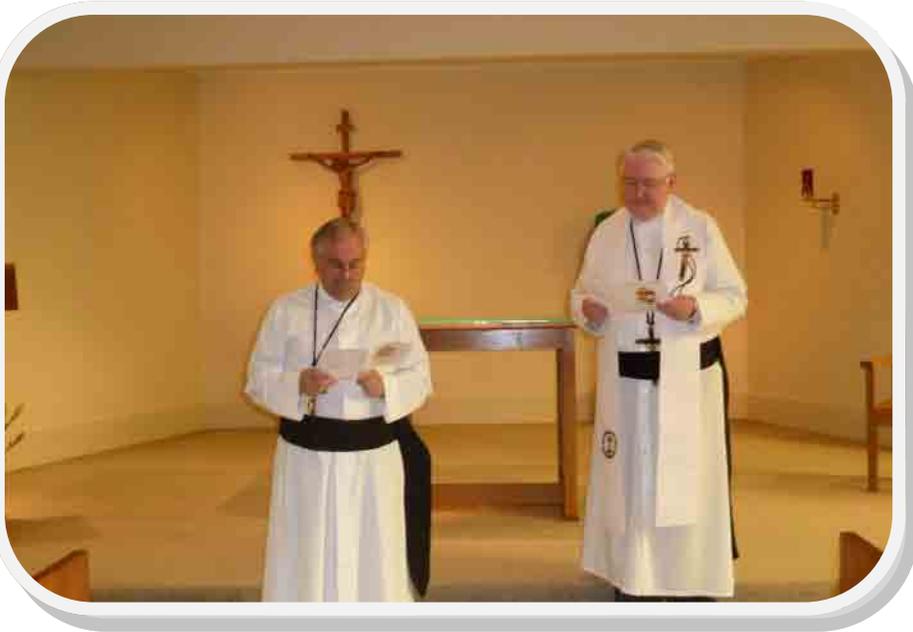
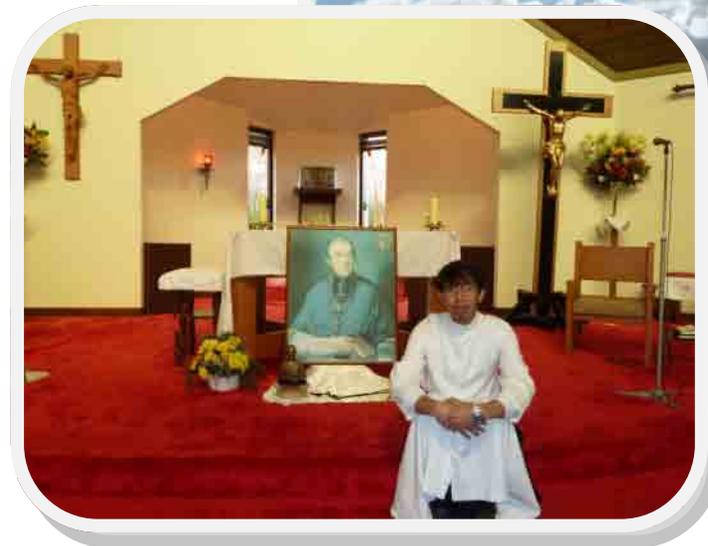
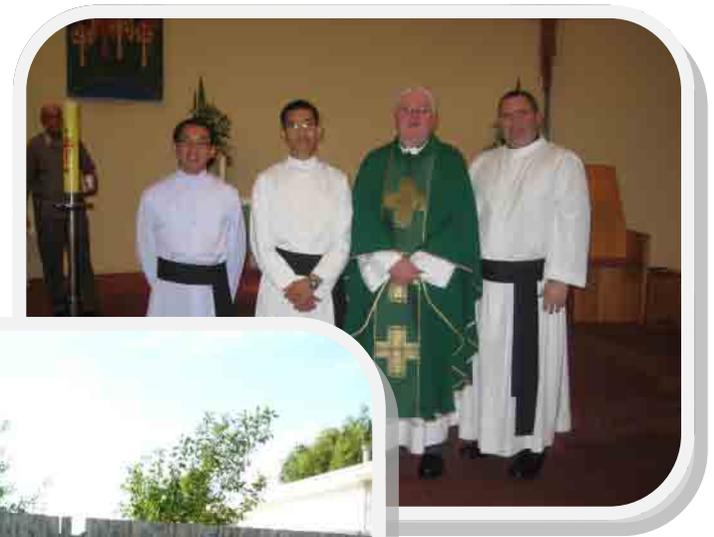


# *Yurana* 2011



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certain ways so as not to offend, disappoint or alarm others. Sometimes we should be more like Fr John and set respectable boundaries and not expect people to go beyond them all the time. Knowing one's limits may be what saves one from cracking under pressure.

The second time I was ever so glad to see Fr John was on his last day. I am so very grateful for the wonderful gift of having been able to say 'Thank You' and 'Goodbye'.

Having lost family members and close friends suddenly, tragically and, at times, violently in the past, Fr John's death allowed me to experience the gift of saying goodbye personally and with the other person able to respond. As Fr John lay dying in his last few hours on this earth, I thanked him for his example as a priest and as an Oblate, for his beautiful Masses and the admirable example of his prayer life, I also asked him to pray for me when he arrived in heaven. This, I know, he will be doing.

As for me and my future, I look forward to the challenges, hurdles and gifts that the good Lord will send me in 2012. Hopefully, I will be able to accept them as well as JJ Maher did in his life and especially in his dying.

Peaceful wishes to you all,

Jason



## *Foreword*

Greetings to you all and welcome to Yurana 2011.

It will be sad if the world ends in 2012, as many people have said. This will be the last edition of for Yurana ha! ha!.

This year has been a busy one, as usual, for St. Mary's Seminary with our study and schedule of training. It is not only a year when we were shaped by the people who came and went, including, those who were living here, but it was also a year of tragedy for us that we have lost three of our Oblate Fathers. However, this was still a year of hope for us, that we may receive more vocations to the Oblates.

We hope that, through reading each of our stories you will taste different flavours of the life which we are sharing, in the same faith of Christ.

God bless you all.

From editor

Br. John Ma Cha

## *2011 – FORMATION GOING ON*

Coming to the end of my second year at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Sefton, I was looking forward to the third, as many good things were happening. As Oblates, we had received the call from our 35th General Chapter to pursue what we had been praying for – “a profound personal and communal conversion”. After our Provincial Council had concluded their last meeting for 2010, I was most surprised to be asked by Fr Harry Dyer to come to St Mary’s, to assist Fr Leo Mifsud, the new Rector, with our students for whom English is their second language (ESL).

Coming back to St Mary’s after 45 years, I am aware that so much has changed on ‘the formation scene’. On March 1st, 1966, after our First Vows Mass at St Joseph’s Novitiate, Lovely Banks, ten of us joined the Scholasticate community led by Frs. Austin Cooper, Thomas Shortall, John O’Regan, Robert Cormican and Br Frank Thornton (the first Australian born Oblate, who was St Mary’s ‘Catering Staff’). In a day, the seminary family grew to 25! In 2011, as has been the situation over the last 21 years, St Mary’s again has had a regional community – from Australia, Korea, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. We began the year with ten. During this year, Fr. Waiphrot Phutasa OMI finished his studies at the John XXIII Institute, returning to Thailand and Br Vong returned to Vietnam for his pastoral year. Two of our three Pre-Novices: Peter Ly, from Sefton and Rick Parker, from East Melbourne have left us to discern their vocation elsewhere – assurance of our prayer and our thanks for their contribution to our lives go with them. Mitchell Johns, also from Sefton, has been a very welcome addition to our community in last quarter of the year.

Frequently, walking the main corridor between the two wings, one is graphically reminded by the annual community photographic portraits on the walls (replacing the Stations of the Cross put on one side wall 1966 after the building of the Library, Classrooms and Offices/Sacristy & Vestry) of the life that has filled this place over the last 48 years. Indeed, they are

arrival from Melbourne, I had been sent this way and that, from one end of the airport to the other, by apparently well-meaning airport staff. I just wanted to find Fr John and catch our connecting flight to Vientiane, Laos. I don’t know how, but I ended up going down these stairs which unearthed a small departure lounge, more akin to a holding pen, where a mass of humanity stood or sat, sweating, waiting for a sign or command to trudge off to a hopefully brighter fate.

Through all the people and the bags and the heat and the panic, there sat Fr John Joseph Maher, calmly reading his Breviary. As if his guardian angel had just whispered in his ear that I was on the steps, he looked up just as I gratefully clapped my eyes on his. He smiled and gave me a little wave. I felt such relief to see him there.

From the waiting lounge, we headed out onto the tarmac to load on to buses where there was no escape from the heat, sweaty bodies and smog, gladly, we boarded our flight to Vientiane and the paradise that awaited us only one hour away. In Vientiane, we were met by Pon and Beck. After a cup of tea, all Fr John wanted to do was to say Mass. It was in the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Vientiane that I fell in love with Fr John’s Mass. He and I were the only ones in the cool and quiet church. I felt so blessed to be there. He said Mass so prayerfully that you could not help but be moved by the experience.

Fr John was a beautiful man, but that should not be mistaken as code for weak. As you who knew him will attest, he had a very strong will. This aspect of Fr John Maher I admired, he was diplomatically forthright. He preferred to be honest and say if he didn’t like something rather than endure it for no reason. He knew what he liked to eat – so he ate it. He knew what he liked to drink – so he drank it. He was committed to his prayer life – so he did it. He loved being a priest- so he lived it. Too often, I think, we are cajoled and herded into acting

lowing Jesus. For this, I would like to thank God for His great love for me through my Oblate Fathers and Brothers in Australia, Thailand and Laos who have always supported me in friendship and prayer when I felt ups and downs. Lastly, I would like to thank God for the gift of my own family members who first gave the gift of faith and love to me. May our great God bless all of them and be with them always, especially in the coming Christmas and New Year.

Sayyane Xayavong

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### *Gratitude is the Word!*

The event of 2011 that has affected me the most would be the abrupt and untimely death of Fr John Maher. This event left me with two distinct emotional reactions, one cold, the other a deep sense of gratitude.

I was left feeling cold after the funeral of Fr John, when so many people just left. The Maher family and a few Oblates met at Camberwell in the evening following the burial, to share a few stories and to reminisce about the life of Fr John. For me, it did not seem enough time spent remembering an Oblate who loved a yarn and a good laugh more than most. Since that time, I have pondered the question and asked some Oblates what could have been so much more important, than to spend an evening honouring an Oblate taken so unexpectedly and so relatively young?

In the years I knew Fr John I have had two experiences where I was ever so happy to see him.

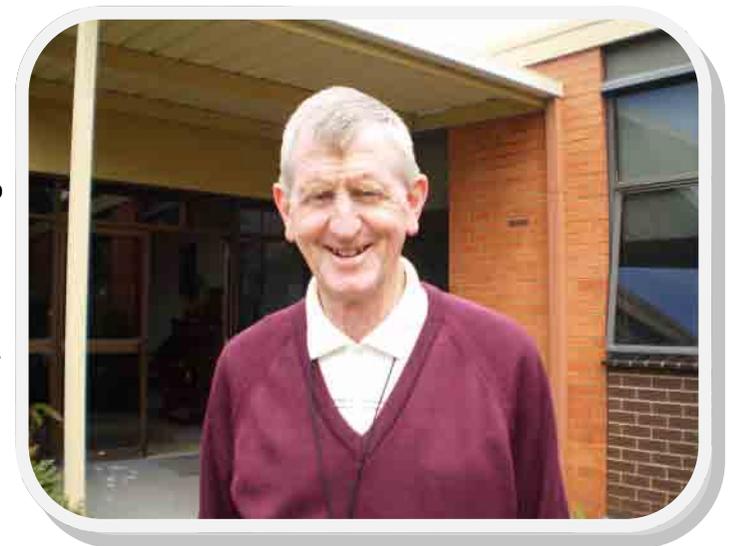
The first was on my first trip overseas by myself. It had been arranged for us to meet each other in Don Mueng airport in Bangkok. After my

whispering to me: “Cape diem!” (‘Seize the day!’) or “Nihil Linquendum Inausum” (‘Leave nothing undared to advance the Kingdom of Christ’) St Eugene’s words in our Preface, exhorting us.

Since settling in on January 25th, I have been on a ‘re-learning curve’ as a formator. Leo emphasised from the beginning the value of each one’s contribution to community building through prayer, shared work and recreation. We are all certainly involved in formation here; ‘first formation’ for the scholastics and ‘ongoing formation’ for the formation team. And it’s ‘all-round’ formation: physical, psychological and spiritual day by day. We have all been healthily challenged by our twice-a-week workouts with our very focussed personal trainer – Nick Lewton! St Paul was right when he said that when the body objects to the soul’s demands, one has to reconsider! “Dodge Ball” on the tennis court certainly introduced me to my physical limitations as a ‘senior’!

I admire the dedication of the students who travel so much further than I ever had to, for their lectures and tutorials. We are certainly suffering from the Australian ‘tyranny of distance’. I am privileged to be able to assist my younger Asian brothers in their struggle to pursue mastery in English as well as in their studies for the Priesthood. They have ‘crossed many borders’ to respond to their vocation. They inspire me to do the same in their regard.

William Ousley  
OMI





I have been called many things in life, even a bit of an actor or performer from time to time. I never thought it would be an official appointment. Well, it has certainly been an interesting experience returning to the community as Acting Rector of St Mary's Seminary, while Fr Leo Mifsud is overseas on his Sabbatical. This is my third time living at St Marys, 1994-2001, 2005-2007 and this time for three months.

The two main highlights have been the structured prayer life and the community. Each of us lives busy lives, as any Missionary should, but from time to time, we might take a short cut here or there in our prayer life; but at St Mary's, while a big property, on this point there is very little room to move. While St Mary's isn't currently a big community, it is certainly a pleasant and supportive community to live in.

While I have enjoyed my time here at St Mary's, I look forward to returning to my own bed in a few weeks. Thank you for supporting St Mary's and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and please continue to pray for Vocations.

God bless

Fr Christian Fini omi

Logie Award Winning Acting Rector



(Laos). I stayed with Fr. Kikeo, who is a Laotian Oblate working with the Bishop in the rural villages, and taking care of the small community of two Oblate brothers, Thao and Hai, who are from Vietnam, in the Oblate house. It was really a great time for me to be with them as brother Oblates and family. I would like to thank God for the gift of Fr. Kikeo and the two brothers who shared fatherly and brotherly friendship and love with me while I was there during my summer break. Before leaving for Thailand, for my pastoral work, Fr. Kikeo had arranged a small farewell party for Ma Cha and me, which was great. There were also some of the youth who joined us on that evening. It was a great joy for me to experience the support from Fr. Kikeo, the brothers and the youth groups. I wish them all joy and happiness.

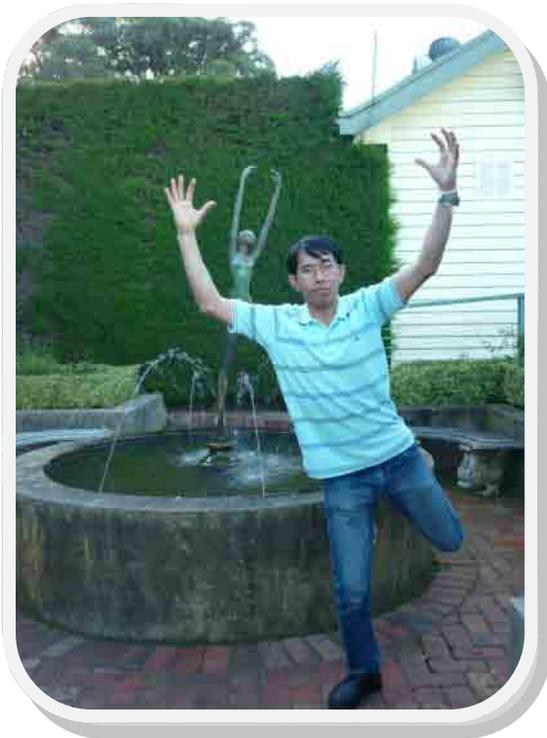
During the last month of my summer break, I was in Northern Thailand for my pastoral work. I was sent to stay with Fr. Frank in Leo City (Meung Leo) where the Oblates were working for a few weeks. During this time, I had an opportunity to learn how the Oblates work in the parish. I went with Fr. Frank to visit some parishioners, especially those who do not come to the church. This was a great experience for me in my working with people in the future. Besides, I had a chance to stay with Fr. Phonsy, another Oblate priest who works in Thabom, a village where our Oblates are working. After Sunday Mass, I went with Fr. Phonsy around the village to give Holy Communion to elderly people who could not come to join in Sunday Mass. My time with Fr. Frank and Fr. Phonsy gave me a great experience of working with people in the parish in the near future.

In brief, the summer break was full of great and exciting experiences. The experience of a great joy staying with my family and the Oblate community in Thailand and Laos has been an important part of my life and vocation. This experience has strengthened my inspiration in fol-

lives to the Lao Church and Lao people. The 35th Anniversary of the Oblates working in Laos was a meaningful event for me as well as for all the Oblates, remembering the great works of our missionaries.

Secondly, it was a great time to celebrate Christmas with my family and the people in my own village, because I had not celebrated Christmas with them for more than three years. In the village where I grew up, it is estimated that there are 200 Catholic families. Christmas is a joyful time for the villagers and their children because they will have candy and balloons, etc., from the Bishop or from the sisters. Some people in my village, I guess, might not know the meaning of Christmas and how important Christmas is. When I saw the boys and girls so very happy during Christmas time, it reminded me of (the time) when I was a child. I was very happy too because I would have a candy bar, etc., but when I grew up, I realized how important Christmas is for me. It is all about God's love for me and for all my brothers and sisters. I pray that those boys and girls in my village will realize how much love and care God has for them, while they are growing up, and then I hope they will become good Catholics and good citizens in their village and the community.

Finally, I spent time - two weeks - with the Oblate community in Vientiane



### *From the Rector*

As I write this article, I am sitting in my room in Aix en Provence, where I am doing the 'de Mazenod Experience'. From my window, I can see the top part of the Mission Church from which the first 'Oblate' Missions were preached. I can also see the window of the 'Foundation Room' where a small band of priests, led by Fr. Eugene de Mazenod, gathered to form the Missionaries of Provence, later to become 'the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.' Xelow is the Cloister where St Eugene gathered anything up to 300 children to form his Solidarity of Christian Youth, at great risk to himself... I should add that the risk came not from the children but because it was illegal to form solidarities in those post-Revolution days in France.

During the lectures and discussions, we have been given a deeper insight into how St Eugene was prepared for his 'Mission' and the process of conversion he underwent as he realised who God was in his life and how he was to respond to God's love.

Throughout this course, I have been identifying so many similarities between St. Eugene's story, my own journey and the many stories which are a part of the ministry at St. Mary's Seminary, as each student is called to discern his call to take on the challenge set before us by St. Eugene: 'to evangelise the poor'.

It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the objective of St. Mary's is not only to form priests but also to help our candidates to discover their vocation to Religious Life, in terms of our Oblate Charism. This will be achieved only by helping them go through and understand the process which the Founder himself underwent.

In his long and painful journey, St. Eugene de Mazenod had first to dis-

cover “who God is”. He had to discover that God was not only “Good News” for the ‘poor’, but that God was Good News for him, personally. He had to discover that Jesus had personally liberated him and was offering him new sight.

He then had to understand who he, Eugene de Mazenod was. That he was a man in desperate need of Good News, needing to be given hope. He had to understand that in spite of the wealth by which he was surrounded and all the social trapping in which he found himself, his life was a life of spiritual poverty, held captive to the dictates of his class and culture. He had to discover that he needed ‘the Liberator’ to free him.



The ‘Good Friday Experience’ was one way by which God moved him to realise this and so to begin a new life. There was never any sense of self-loathing or morbidity but rather a determination that he would not waste another moment of his life on self-centeredness but to spend his life in God’s service, because of the love God had offered, in Jesus’ offering of himself. Through this love God offered him freedom, and a new way of seeing God, himself and the people of God.

### *The First Summer Break in Laos and Thailand*

Joining the Oblates for the past three years has been a great experience. The experience of living at St Mary’s, in Australia, which is so far away from my hometown in Laos, perhaps makes me appreciate how much I miss them, my family. Far away from familiar people and places is a big challenge, and it always reminds me to recognize their worth and important influence in my vocation to be strong in following Jesus. The experience of living and knowing Thai and Australian Oblates has been a significant part of my life. I am very much grateful for the generosity of the Australian Province in supporting and training me to be a good Oblate in the future.

Last summer, I had an opportunity to be back in Laos and Thailand for two months. This was the first time, after the three years of studying in Australia. The two months in Laos and Thailand were a wonderful and happy time for me, because I stayed with my family and the Oblate community.

The time in Laos has been great for me for three reasons. Firstly, I had an opportunity to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Oblates working in Laos from 1975 to 2010. This celebration gave me a chance to meet some Oblates from Thailand, some lay people and some youth groups from our Vientiane diocese. The night before the celebration, there was a wonderful dinner with Oblates’ families, sisters and lay people. The meal was followed by an Oblate historical show presented by the youth groups. The show was about how the Missionary Oblates had worked in Laos from the beginning, until they were expelled from the country in 1975 by the Communist regime. The next morning, there was the celebration of the Eucharist in thanksgiving for the life of the Oblate Missionaries who had worked and devoted their

help others. This is when I contacted the Oblates, after discussions with a diocesan priest and after his suggestion.

I felt much like the Founder of the Oblates, St Eugene de Mazenod and could relate to his background, along with

his charism: "...be daring." I came to St Mary's Seminary (a little older than the others) with enthusiasm and zeal, feeling called by the Holy Spirit. It was difficult at the start, living in a community of different cultures, ways, likes and dislikes; but slowly, with God's help and prayer, I adapted. With the patience, love and care of my Oblate brothers, I now call St Mary's 'home'.

I have commenced Studies at CTC (Catholic Theological College, East Melbourne) which I found difficult at the start but have now settled in, hitting the books and writing essays. I enter soon into my second Semester.

I have also started some pastoral work at the John Hannah Aged Care Facility in Springvale, Melbourne and later this will continue elsewhere. Next year, I will commence my Novitiate Programme. I am unsure as to where, at this stage in my religious life but, please keep me in your prayers or continue to pray for me.

Until next time, God Bless, (Editor's note: Rick decided, with the help of the Acting Rector and his spiritual director, that he wasn't really coping with Oblate community life and the demands of his studies.)



And lastly, he had to discover what he was to do with this newly found knowledge and freedom. He had to discern how to become 'Good News' to the poor, how to lead people to the freedom and how to give them new sight.

Eugene spoke about a 'strong impulse outside of himself' driving him on. This impulse was God's call to conversion and to ministry to the poor and the abandoned.

This conversion was not only intellectual or emotional. It was set in a time and place. As I walked to one end of the Cours Mirabeau, the very fashionable street we are on, I come across the missionary Cross given by those first mission preachers to the town of Provence at the conclusion of the first mission almost 200 years ago. It stands proud as a reminder that real men preached the word of God to real people.

And at St. Mary's we too are called to be real. Life at St. Mary's is about forming community now and in this place. It is not about preparing to form a community in some future time and some other place. We know that the measure of our future success and the effectiveness of our future ministries can be measured only by the success of our present efforts.

We are called to commit ourselves to each other as once Frs. Eugene de Mazenod and Henry Tempier, two young priests, did for the sake of the mission. They lived to create a community around them who would encourage each other to proclaim the love of God to the most needy and abandoned.

Aix en Provence may be the place of our Foundation, but St. Mary's Seminary is the foundation place for our future ministry as Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Leo Mifsud, OMI, Rector

## *Going Home*

My waiting to go home last year reminds me of my grandma's and of Father John Maher OMI's waiting to go 'Home'

For YURANA this year, I would like to share a little bit of my story about the losing of my grandma and of one of the good Oblates that I have known, known to you all. I am sure that each one of us has our own stories, experiences of love and care from others. Some experiences can be about happiness and others can be about sadness or feeling the loss of someone we love and care for. However, these are all about life, things that we cannot choose or avoid; instead we should accept them as the will of God.

Last year, it was the first time for me to go back home to Laos after two years of study at Catholic Theology College and training at Saint Mary's Seminary. I was so grateful and joyful to see my family and my grandma who were waiting for me. She was 95 years old and she was dying, because she couldn't eat and drink for two weeks before she came to the end of her life. It was good to go back but it was also a sad time for me.

On the 23th September 2010, I arrived in Vientiane, Laos. When I came home, my grandma was very sick but she was still conscious and was able to talk to me. The first words she said to me were, "Is it you my grandson?" "Yes, it is me." I said. "Pray for me, so I may go quickly to God! It is so painful and I am suffering a lot", she said. I was crying when I heard this. I said to her and to my family and friends who were surrounding her, "Let us prepare ourselves and pray together for her, for God's forgiveness." We prayed one Our Father, three Hail Marys and the Glory be...

continued to finish my schooling and did my Registered Nurse Training at the Geelong Hospital. On completion of my course, I then moved to Melbourne. My main interest was working in the operating suite and pursued this area with further studies, eventually leading me into management at one of the largest private hospitals in Melbourne.

This, I thought, was my dream career, but I was never settled, as I knew God had other plans for me in His life. During my nursing, I met a Filipino nurse who invited me to the Philippines, to come and see his country, a country I would never dream of visiting. So, after much hesitation and persuasion, I went. It was the biggest shock to me, when I got out of the airport in Manila, to see the amount of poor but happy people struggling each day to make ends meet; to eat, feed their family and, basically, just surviving.

I was amazed. How could this happen? What was the Government doing to help or give assistance? I asked God, "Why could this be like this?" Instead of just asking, I did something. For over 10 years, I continued to work with poor people from the North side of Manila, donating clothing, medical supplies and financial assistance where I could. I also worked in an Orphanage for abandoned and disabled children, found on the famous rubbish tip known as "Smokey Mountain", who were brought to the orphanage. These children were looked after and given a home and a Catholic upbringing. Many children would not survive very long after the time they arrived.

During my time there and my last time leaving the Philippines, it was difficult to come back to Australia where we had everything that we wanted. On my flight back to Melbourne, I asked God to show me more in what to do. This is when I decided to be a missionary and

## *A long journey*

“You did not choose Me but I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name.” Jn 15:16

This scripture came to me in Holy Week of 2009, whilst celebrating at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Melbourne. I also heard God saying to me “For too long you have been running from Me; it’s time to stop and listen.”

My name is Rick Parker and this is my first contribution to Yurana. I came to St Mary’s Seminary in January of this year after being accepted into the Pre-Novitiate Programme with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I came to join with another pre-novice, Peter Ly, who, sadly, had to leave St Mary’s to discern his vocation more.

I am the only son and second eldest of four siblings, three of them being my sisters. I grew up in a low-income family household. My parents, who were of Irish and Scottish descent, were very strict. We lived first in Melbourne, then Geelong. Sadly, my father passed away in 1995 of cancer. My mother has also battled cancer over a number of years and continues to be in remission. I attended North Geelong State and High Schools, seeing myself involved in Religious and Sporting Programmes, during and after school, at Holy Spirit in North Geelong. For some time, I thought about joining a religious order and, even more so, when my best friend at high school was accidentally killed, on his way to school one morning. So, at the age of 16, I made a few inquiries and was accepted into an order.

Soon after, this intention was not to be fulfilled, due to home problems with my parents and my dreams were shattered. I

After greeting everyone in my family and my friends, I came back to Vientiane to live in the small, Oblate community with one priest and two Vietnamese scholastic brothers. I needed to come because I had not yet known the timetable for me to do. On the third day after I arrived in Laos, it was the time for my grandma to say good bye to us. One afternoon, it was around 4 o’clock, I was feeling that I needed to pray for my grandma, who was dying, as she had requested of me. I went to a chapel and prayed immediately for her. I said to God, “Lord into Your Hands I commend her spirit.” I couldn’t believe that God heard me and answered me. It was faith that only those who have had experience in God can understand this. It was only five minutes after my prayer that I got a call from my brother to say that she was passing away. I was grateful to God rather than crying because I lost her; but I also had faith in God that it was Him Who called her. It was



also because she trusted in my prayer and was waiting for my prayer. Finally, she died peacefully. After she died, I was wondering why she was waiting for me: was it to see me as the last person; was it because she loves me more than others or because I was a prodigal son. Anyway, other people told me that if I had not been there then she wouldn't die. However, I thank God for giving me a chance to see my beloved grandma before she died.

My second experience of feeling the loss of someone I love came with the death of Father John Maher OMI. I knew him as one of the very good Oblates in Australia. He is a humble and gentle Oblate. He is lovely person for everyone. When I first met him in Laos in 2007, I kissed his hand because I thought he must be a bishop, because of his gentleness and kindness but I was told after that he wasn't. Anyway, during my two years living in Australia, Father John Maher was my spiritual director. He had backed me up a lot in my difficulties with my study, with culture shock, and with problems at St Mary's. I was very thankful for his generosity and his lovely character. Every time I went to see him as my spiritual father, my problems had to be solved and I was most often happy coming back to the seminary. One of the things I couldn't forget about him was his "Hmong". Every time we met, he tried to greet me with his best Hmong, which was "Nyob Zoo" means "Hello, how are you?" He had a good memory for learning languages. I taught him this word only once when I met him in Laos, but he still remembered one year later when I met him in Australia! I very much felt at home when I heard him say this word.

It was sad when I heard that Father John was passing away. It was hard to accept it that he had died young and so quickly. However, I was grateful and thanked God that I was able to say thanks to him

prayer meeting. I believe that they are future hopes for the Oblate ministries and the Australian Church as well. Also, I am so proud that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have a priest like Fr. Christian Fini, who is the founder of the group. I know that he is a very busy man, managing several offices. But almost every time, he turns up the meeting and stays present with us. He is truly a good animator and a self-sacrificing Oblate.

As I was with these young people, I dreamt of organizing such an active and faithful young group in South Korea one day. When I see Fr. Christian Fini, he is a very active man but he is never a dictator over people. Every young person there feels quite free and finds what he/she can do for the community. It must be a key to have these two qualities- leadership and friendship. Certainly, that model is directly from Jesus Christ who stayed strong for the sake of the Kingdom as the head of the young community (the Church). At the same time, he called his disciples to be friends. I pray that I will also be such an Oblate, who has these two dispositions and lives like Jesus.

Br Peter Hong



## *Pastoral Experience with Young People*

In 2011, I went to the youth prayer meeting at St. John Vianney's Parish for my pastoral work. In the evening on Tuesdays, we gathered together in order to meditate upon the coming Sunday's gospel and shared our thoughts and feelings with one another. For me, it was a very meaningful time, because it was the first time that the theology which I learnt at Catholic Theological College for years became quite practical. Before that, sometimes I felt that I learnt the theology for the sake of learning. But when I shared my thoughts on the gospel, I realized that I was on certain theological grounds. On the one hand, I was happy to practise my knowledge. On the other hand, I felt challenged to study more seriously in order to say things rightly. It was perhaps a good moment for me to think that I have to prepare myself properly for the future ministry, priesthood.

The second thing I experienced was that this very small meeting on Tuesday was giving power to Oblate Youth Encounter which is really big in Australia. I have learnt that the spiritual ground is really pivotal for big external movements in the Church. It is because young people there could find solidarity within themselves while they share something about the gospel passages. That solidarity must make them love Jesus more in and through the community.

This is a miraculous reality that the words of God enable people to share not only their faith but also their lives with one another. The structure of a prayer meeting is really good. First of all, they read the gospel and share their faith. Afterwards, they make intercession while they are holding the Oblate Cross. As I am an Oblate Brother, it makes me so proud of that because this is a moment when the Oblate Charism reaches beyond the religious community.

I am really grateful for spending nearly one year with these guys. They are so joyful and bright. Although I am sometimes quite tired of the curriculum at the seminary and studying, I felt empowered whenever I joined this

before he died. It was on Thursday the 28th May 2011 when our brothers at St Mary's had came back from our holiday in Dromana, we went directly to Camberwell to see him. At that moment of the very last minutes for him, I had a chance to say good bye and thank to him for everything he had done for me, fostering growth in my spiritual life and for his good example of being a good Oblate for us. Sadly, He passed away peacefully a few hours after that.

Dear friends, brothers and sisters, thank you for your precious time reading my story. What we can do is only realize and acknowledge that death is a way to life that we will all pass through one day and not be worried too much about it but to try to live our lives as the best we can. I remember a Bishop of Laos saying, "It doesn't matter, whether we are rich or poor, beautiful or not, we are going to die one day." And Saint Paul said, "If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Roms 14: 8).

Br John Ma Cha

### *Five years on the bench*

I am fond of using a football analogy in regards to my postulancy. I spent 7 months on the field (2006), then interchanged for 5 years (2006-2011), returning to complete the last 5 months of the game (2011).

I left St Mary's in 2006, knowing that, while I wanted to continue my formation, now was not the right time to take the next step. I needed to mature and to form myself into a 'fuller person,' before I did so as a religious or priest.



I laugh now to think that, if I had any knowledge of the pain I was up for, over the next five years away from the seminary, I may have forced myself forward into the novitiate. Up until that point

in my life, I had been cocooned in the home-life of study with some employment and parish work on the side. When I returned to Sydney, after my 7 months of postulancy, I set myself some straight forward, but very challenging goals, such as: learn a trade, get a licence and a car, and support myself in my own home. Basics, but not simple achievements I soon learnt.

I regard it as a valuable life-lesson and a great character-building device, to maintain a full-time job and fend for one-self. I recommend it to anyone trying to learn not necessarily what they can and can't do, but what kind of person they actually are - who they are in the eyes of God. And, while it was tumultuous, weathering all kinds of personal storms - financial, physical, psychological, social and spiritual - I came through it a stronger person.

I have God's mercy to thank for how far I've come. I recall many times in prayer when I would plead my cause to Him: "When?!" I would say tearfully. "Wait", would be the reply; or "I can't do this!" I would wail. "Trust me" He would say gently, but with authority and

wisdom.

I have had many personal epiphanies over the last half decade too and I regard myself as blessed for this. I had discovered that my life is like, not a box of chocolates, but a jigsaw puzzle. The Lord hands me a piece at a time: it may be big or small; in rapid succession or ponderous infrequency; detailed or monotonous; but pieces of wisdom and clarity would continually come my way.

One of the biggest revelations that came my way would have been late last year or early this year when I walked into my spiritual director's office (Fr Con Campbell) and he remarked how 'at peace' I looked. I was, needless to say, taken aback because I was a person who, up until that point, had had a life riddled with anxiety. But I reflected deeply on this remark and sure enough it wasn't there anymore; that burdening anxiety, the looming depression - gone! Oh sure, I still had times when I felt down or worried, but so does everyone else, and for a bloke who saw himself as quite an individual, that little piece of shared humanity felt comfortable.

More comments of a similar nature followed from family, friends and fellow parishioners. These steadily became less a shocking insight from my fellow man and more of a gratifying gift from God. The Lord's same old responses of 'Wait' and 'Trust me' seemed to have come to fulfilment. He snuck up like a burglar in the night (Matt 24:42-44) and I was left dumbstruck at waking to find two of my life's most lingering demons exorcised and myself a new man in a new relationship with God.

People in Sydney would say to me constantly before I left to come back to St Mary's: "Are you excited?" and I would reply "No, not excited - fulfilled." Mitchell Johns