



# OST NEWS

OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Fall 2009 Volume 13 - No. 1



*Encouragement, Enrichment, Empowerment:  
The OST Sophia Community Program*

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# OST NEWS

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OST NEWS is a free publication of the Development Office of the Oblate School of Theology for the alumni, benefactors and friends of the Oblate community. We thank you for the voluntary donations that you send to help us defray the cost of printing, postage and handling.

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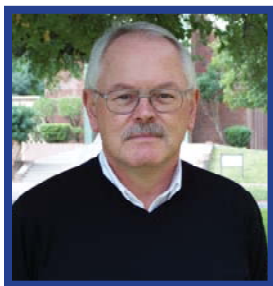
Cover Photo: 2009 Sophia Community Cohort

Oblate School of Theology, founded and sponsored by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is a Catholic graduate and professional school which provides education for the church's mission and ministry in the world.

The institution prepares persons for pastoral ministry through academic study and supervised practice. Through degree and certificate programs the School strives to educate and form candidates for priestly ministry as well as lay ministries. The School offers opportunities for professional continuing education and personal spiritual renewal to those serving in church and society.

Oblate School of Theology models and fosters collaboration in ministry. It accomplishes its mission in cooperation with formation communities and other ecclesial and societal institutions.

The pastoral orientation of the School requires practical and reflective engagement with the multi-cultural, global reality of church and society. Drawing upon Oblate School of Theology's location and historical dedication to the Mexican-American presence in the Southwest, the learning, teaching, and research of the School pay particular attention to the diverse and rich Hispanic reality of the Americas.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### The Place of Academics within the Preparation for Ministry

It's not uncommon for students who are preparing for ministry to be impatient with their studies. Academic theology can seem abstract and pretty far removed from the dreams that students nurse about ministry. Why all this abstract stuff when so many people have real problems that demand attention right now? Why are we studying this? I will never preach this from a pulpit! As well, most students preparing for ministry are anxious to get on with it. The prospect of four, five or six years of academic preparation can seem like an eternity – and a waste.

It's good to feel this impatience, a sign of emotional health; but it's also good to be challenged in our impatience. A good heart and good energy alone are not enough for good ministry. We also need good intellectual preparation.

There is an interesting story told about St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits: Wounded in battle, he experienced a powerful conversion during his convalescence. Recovered, fired by first fervor, inflamed in idealism, he set out to start a religious order that would mimic the very movements of Jesus. His idealistic dream was hopelessly unrealistic; it went nowhere. Eventually Ignatius admitted defeat, but he had learned a lesson. Before attempting to found another religious community, he attended the University of Paris for eleven years and studied philosophy and theology. When he set out again to found a religious community, he was ready. He had learned that it takes more than just a good heart to be effective.

There is empirical data to support this: Disciples of psychologist Karl Rogers once made a study: Working off the hunch that natural empathy is a more powerful tool in counseling than professional training, they set up two counseling clinics. The first was staffed with counselors who lacked professional training but were hand-picked because they radiated deep empathy. The second clinic was staffed with professionally trained counselors who didn't necessarily stand out for radiating empathy. The results were clear: The counselors who were more naturally empathetic, even though they lacked professional training, were more effective than the counselors who were highly trained but who weren't as empathetic.

But the experiment took things a step further: It then took those counselors who lacked professional training but who were more naturally gifted with empathy and gave them professional training. At this point, they became really effective!

In that is the lesson: A good heart and a good attitude are ultimately more important than professional training; but a good heart and a good attitude, linked to professional training, are what are really effective. It takes both.

Students, seminarians and lay men and women who enter theology schools generally do so precisely because they have good hearts and good attitudes; however, it is not uncommon to see this goodness linked to an impatience with the often abstract concepts within philosophy and theology. Indeed, sometimes this manifests itself as an almost outright anti-intellectualism. Academics are tolerated as a necessary evil, an arbitrary hoop to be jumped through, and a waste of precious time.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and history supports this. Every time the church has cheated on its academic requirements for priests and ministers, it has paid a high price. Indeed, many historians would argue that this was precisely where the church was compromised in the lead-up to the Reformation. It had an undereducated, underprepared clergy. Piety, outside of the checks of theology, invariably becomes unbridled. It is no wonder that one of the first acts of the Council of Trent was to institute vigorous academic requirements for ordination — three years of philosophy and four years of theology. In effect, they said, "A good heart and a good attitude alone are not enough!"

St. Thomas Aquinas once famously wrote that the will follows the intellect. We can be clear in our actions only if, first of all, we are clear in our thought. Action follows vision.

At the beginning of the movie *Grand Torino*, Clint Eastwood has a bitter argument with a young priest and, as he walks away from the conversation, he tells the young priest, "You are an over-educated twenty-seven-year-old who understands very little of life!" At the end of the movie, the priest, preaching at Eastwood's funeral, admits the truth of the comment. Still, one gets the sense that Eastwood's comment would have stung far more, and would have been a far more dangerous truth, if he had said, "You are an under-educated twenty-seven-year-old who understands too little of life!"

There is no substitute for sound academic theology!

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

Ronald Rolheiser OMI  
President, Oblate School of Theology.



(Seated left to right) Fathers Ron Rolheiser and Warren Brown, Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, USA; (Standing, left to right) Eduardo Tanudtanud, Notre Dame University, Cotabato, Philippines; Dale Schlitt, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada; Sylvester David, St. Joseph Theological Institute, Cedara, South Africa; Baudouin Mubesala, De Mazenod Institute, Kinshasa, Congo; Andrzej Jastrzebski, representing the General Administration, Rome, Italy.

## *Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Education*

**T**he Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Education, a group of executives representing Oblate higher education institutions worldwide, met May 25-29 at the Pat Guidon Center for Continuing Education at Oblate School of Theology. Father David Power, OMI, visiting professor in systematic theology at OST, shared his reflections on higher education within the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate based on his years of education ministry and on how the Oblate charism can be seen in these institutes.

Father Power's reflections led to discussions of how Oblate institutes of higher education can serve the congregation and how they can plan together to recruit younger Oblates to pursue higher studies in order to prepare for leadership of these important centers of Oblate ministry for the mission of the congregation.

Participants planned concrete methods of collaboration among the various institutes. They studied the statutes, approved in 2008, and revised them to reflect the developing nature of this group and the concerns expressed. A next meeting was scheduled May 24-28, 2010, in Obra, Poland.



## *Bishop Oscar Cantú Visits OST Class*

On Sept. 23 the Most Reverend Oscar Cantú, DD, auxiliary bishop of San Antonio, was guest speaker at the Orientation to Supervised Ministry Class. He spoke on the topic of priesthood. Bishop Cantu shared with the students about his own journey as a priest and now bishop. The students also heard about his recent trip to Cuba and his hopes for our Church.

## *Two Oblates Make Perpetual Vows*

**B**rother Ricardo Lopez, OMI, an Oblate School of Theology student, professed his perpetual vows as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate Sept. 5 in Oblate School of Theology's Immaculate Conception Chapel before the congregation's general superior, Father Wilhelm Steckling, OMI. Also professing perpetual vows was Brother Julio Cesar Javier Narvaez, OMI, from California.

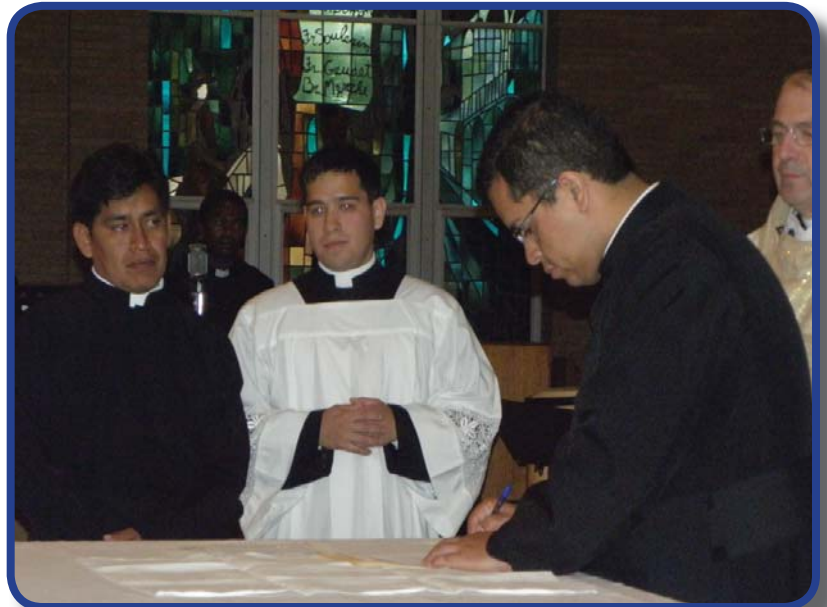
In a rite similar to a priestly ordination, Father Steckling examined the candidates on their readiness to dedicate themselves to God and seek perfect charity according to the rules of the congregation. The candidates lay prone on the floor as the choir led the congregation in the chanting of the Litany of the Saints.

Each in turn professed his vows and then signed and placed his oblation formula at the altar. Father Steckling also signed the formulas. Then, Lopez and Narvaez individually knelt before him and received a blessing.

Each received the Oblate Mission Cross that previously had belonged to another Oblate missionary until death.

Lopez received that of Father Philip Hoag, OMI, and Father Ray Wilhelm, OMI. Narvaez received that of Father Darryl Rupiper, OMI. Father Wilhelm died in July 2006, and Father Rupiper in February 2009.

Lopez is a native of Midland. He was ordained a deacon Oct. 17 and is to be ordained a priest May 22, 2010. He spent the past year doing his parish internship at Mary Immaculate Parish, a megaparish in Pacoima, Calif., north of Los Angeles.





(Seated left to right) Victoria Barrientes-Luna, Kelly Aguilar, Claudia Garza, Gloria Clayton, Rebecca Lopez (Standing left to right) Jamie Young, Rose Mary Lopez, Patrice Barta, Catherine Portele, Anita Doonan, Leanne Bergford, Romana Leonards, Clarice STAUBLE, Cathleen CATANIA, Judy Ortiz.

## *Encouragement, Enrichment, Empowerment: The Sophia Community Program*

**D**uring the regular academic year at Oblate School of Theology, the majority of students are male seminarians; but during the summer, lay women in the Sophia Community Program become the majority, living on campus while they pursue the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry (MAPM) degree.

Oblate School of Theology inaugurated the Sophia Community Program in 2006 in an effort to remove time, funding and other barriers that face lay women leaders in underserved parishes. Generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation has enabled OST to provide scholarships covering most of the cost, including room and board at the Pat Guidon Center while they are on campus. Students must meet all requirements of the MAPM program.

The curriculum includes four weeks on campus each June, taking classes, using school resources such as the library and the computer lab and building community with fellow students, said Rita Velasquez, director of the Sophia program.



“Community-building is an important aspect of Sophia. Living on campus enables students to build and develop a network with other students as well as with Sophia graduates. Later, a student may remember that someone she met in Sophia initiated a program in one parish that might be helpful in her own parish, and that person can serve as a resource,” she said.

Students arriving on campus this past June attended an opening retreat planned and presented by members of the first cohort, who had graduated in May. All embraced each other, sharing the personal journeys that had led them to the program. Most already had been active in parish ministries; others were just beginning to explore their baptismal call to discipleship.

Each student must meet all MAPM requirements, but what for most MAPM students take as a 15-week class the Sophia students complete in a very intense two weeks. Then they take new courses for the second two weeks. Living on campus away from the pressures of home and job enables them to totally immerse themselves in study.

Students have assignments that must be completed both before and after each summer session. They also take courses from Oblate online during each academic year. After three years of study both online and on campus, students pursue a year-long pastoral project.

Spiritual formation also is a vital component of the Sophia program. Students start with a two-week spiritual formation seminar, which emphasizes the necessity of personal spiritual development, with spiritual directors and mentors.

“We’ve heard nothing but positive feedback from our students and graduates,” Velasquez said. “One lady was a volunteer director of religious education in her parish, and her husband is a deacon. Her pastor didn’t realize the benefits she and the parish would get from it. She graduated last May, and when the pastor saw what she offered the parish, she said he hired her as a paid director of religious education.” Another moved out of state with her family and quickly found a parish staff position thanks to her newly-earned MAPM degree from OST.

The challenge of starting a degree program represented a formidable challenge in the new students’ lives at first, but their excitement and anticipation of learning more theology and further developing their pastoral skills was even greater.

Linda Baranoski, of Charleston, S.C., described the Sophia program as “a totally transforming experience – and not just academically but personally. “Sophia gave me a new perspective on what my value is for the church, my potential and how I can be in ministry,” she said. In her parish ministry, Baranoski can answer people’s theological questions with confidence. Her degree earns her more respect, too.



First graduation for Sophia program: (Left to right) Bonnie Abadie, mentor; Dorothy Runge, Linda Baranoski, Audra Cardona (front); Rita Velasquez, Sophia director (rear); Mary Campa; and Scott Woodward, MAPM director.

“I feel like a completely different person; I’ve become the person I was meant to be. My level of confidence is much higher,” she said. Baranoski said she was almost ready to “throw in the towel” the first few days of the first summer session, daunted by the volume of work required. But she didn’t because she’d always been a good student and knew she was getting an extremely valuable education for a minimum cost. All she had to do was the work.

“The work didn’t get easier, either; I got tougher. I said, ‘I can do

this.’ I’d wanted a master’s degree for many years, and this was a golden opportunity,” she said. “I had no idea I could ever accomplish this much work. At my graduation last May, I thought, ‘I can’t believe this is happening to me.’ I’m so grateful to God for this opportunity.”

Mary Campa, of San Antonio, who does spiritual direction ministry, said the Sophia program has given her the theological background that underpins Catholic spiritual direction. She also has confident answers for people who ask what the church teaches on a variety of topics – questions she previously had referred to her husband, a deacon.

“I felt the calling for three years before I enrolled, but I didn’t think it would ever happen. Then I found Sophia and it was like God saying to me, ‘Here’s all the reasons you said you couldn’t do it, and they’re all taken care of. Go.’”



## Pastor Receives 2009 Father Labouré Award

A 2009 doctoral dissertation presented at Oblate School of Theology by Father Norman Ermis brought significant insights to the topic of what dioceses must do to slow the rate of priests leaving active ministry within the first five years after ordination.

Father Ermis, pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish in San Antonio, earned his Doctor of Ministry degree at OST in May. His doctoral dissertation, *Experiences of the First Five Years of Priesthood and the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, earned him the Father Theodore Labouré Award, established in 2003, for his outstanding scholarship. The dissertation topic arose out of Father Ermis' nine years as vice rector of San Antonio's Assumption Seminary.

Father Ray John Marek, OMI, said that the dissertation is significant because the first five years after ordination, a period of transition from seminary life to active priestly ministry, can make or break a priestly vocation. Father Ermis provided some new and concrete information that dioceses can use in helping newly ordained priests make that transition.

"We need a process to help new priests negotiate those first five years of ministry. There are other studies of newly-ordained priests, but Norm pulled them together into one document. He also laid out benchmarks that dioceses and bishops can look at to see whether they're addressing the issues that newly ordained priests say they face," Father Marek stated.

He cited the scope of the dissertation, the thoroughness of the research, the density of the writing, the pastoral requirements Father Ermis introduced and the insightfulness of the discussion as factors in making the award.

Father Ken Hannon, OMI, praised Father Ermis for the rigorous methodology in his research, the choice of a timely, important topic and his careful and responsible scholarship, adding: "All these characteristics were achieved at a very high level, in my opinion."

The dissertation noted how important early assignments are for recently ordained priests and identified a range of considerations that can influence the wholeness of this early experience in priestly life. "[Father Ermis] has shown how important it is to inculcate a commitment to life-long learning and formation among priests. We can hope that he will be able to assist dioceses

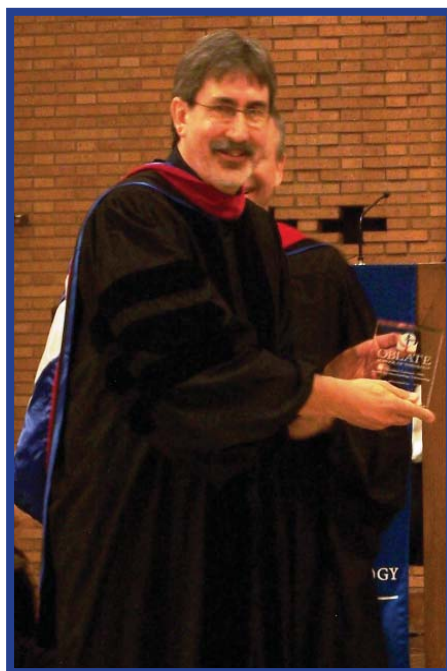
and religious institutes in their continuing recruitment and enrichment efforts on the basis of this very professional study," Father Hannon said.

A previous study by the late Catholic University of America sociologist Dean Hoge noted that 10 to 15 percent of all newly ordained Catholic priests leave the active priesthood within five years after ordination. Using that study as a starting point, Father Ermis sent a questionnaire to more than 200 priests across the nation with one to five years in active ministry. He received 125 responses. "I was interested in learning what the experiences of real priests are in their first five years, and how dioceses connect with those experiences in their ongoing formation efforts for newly ordained priests," Father Ermis said. He asked what gives new priests satisfaction and what things have impacted their priestly ministry in negative ways.

His research revealed that little had been written about young priests in crisis, although many authors have focused on stress in the priesthood. Like Hoge, Father Ermis discovered that the choosing of a new priest's first assignment and first pastor are critical. A bishop's support, or lack of it, for newly ordained priests is also critical since priests tend to follow their bishops' lead. New priests need to feel welcome in the priestly fraternity; they need hospitality from fellow priests.

Father Ermis found that 39 percent – almost two of every five – of the priests in his study had faced serious crises that impacted their priestly ministry in negative ways. The study indicated that crises could arise from relationships with pastors or parishioners, breaches of boundaries, unfavorable reports to the bishop, loneliness or celibacy, among other factors. Even if priests have support, some have little or no sense of it because they are overworked.

The Labouré Award is named for a professor of systematic theology who headed OST from 1913-16. Poor health forced Father Labouré's retirement from both positions, but in 1926, he was named provincial of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate for what then was the Texas Province. He was superior general of the congregation from 1932-42 and died in Paris in 1944. Father Labouré founded the publication *The Review of the Province, Mary Immaculate*.



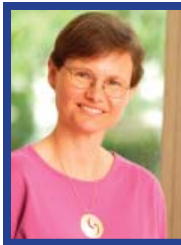


# Faculty Honors and Awards

**Sister Maria Cimperman, OSU**, was promoted to associate professor of moral theology. She presented in Portland, Ore., Spokane and Seattle on “Compelling Invitations In Religious Life Today.”



**Sister Linda Gibler, OP**, presented a lecture, “Discerning Vocations to Religious Life,” at the Archdiocese of San Antonio Life Awareness Weekend. She also facilitated a retreat, “Our Place in the Earth Community,” for the St. Pius X High School Day of Reflection for Faculty and Staff at the Dominican Spirituality Center Houston.



**Sally Gomez-Jung** was a presenter at a Day of Reflection for Liturgical Ministers at St. Mark the Evangelist Church Oct. 3. She represented Oblate School of Theology at the Hispanic Summer Program governing board meeting in Chicago Oct. 22-23. Gomez-Jung has been invited to be a speaker at Womenspeak 2010 in Mobile, Ala., in March 2010. This conference is sponsored by the Paula D’Arcy and Red Bird Foundation. Women from all over the world will gather to touch the hearts of women and inspire them to become voices for peace and change in this world.



**Father Jan Heemrood, OMI**, 88, professor emeritus of sacred Scripture at OST, stepped down this summer from his teaching duties because of health concerns. He has taught at Oblate since 1970. He taught in Sri Lanka before coming to Oblate. Father Rolheiser said of Fr. Heemrood, “His presence and his teachings have touched us all, and OST is very proud to have had him on our faculty. His career has certainly been of the ‘Hall of Fame’ variety. We will miss him in the classroom, but he will still be a presence on campus.”



**Father Bill Meyer, SM**, was featured in the July 10 issue of the *Hawaii Catholic Herald* conducting a two-day orientation for international priests who serve the Diocese of Honolulu. The focus of the orientation was pastoral care and accompaniment. Chaminade University, in conjunction with the Oblate School of Theology’s International Priests Internship, will present a second orientation session in November on American and local Asian culture, the American Church, parish structures and finances, and current Catholic social issues and concerns.



**Father David N. Power, OMI**, visiting professor for the fall semester, had an article published in the September issue of *Worship Magazine*, “The Eucharistic Table: In Communion with the Hungry.” *Worship* 83 (2009/5): 386-398.



**Father Robert Wright, OMI**, wrote the entries on “Brownsville, Texas,” “Kéralum, Pierre Yves,” “Galveston, Texas,” and “Roma, Texas” in *Dictionnaire Historique des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, vol. 2: Hors de France au temps du Fondateur, edited by Yvon Beaudoin, OMI., translated by Maurice Lesage, O.M.I. (Rome: Association d’Études et de Recherches Oblates, 2009). This volume is currently being prepared for publication in English. He has given several presentations: “Recent Devotional Trends at the Shrine of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle” at the annual meeting of CEHILA USA, Albuquerque, May 21-23; “History of the Diocese of El Paso” to the seminarians of the El Paso diocese, Aug. 3; “The Church and Mexican Americans in Houston: Reflections on Roberto R. Treviño’s *The Church in the Barrio*” at the Texas Catholic Historical Society workshop at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Sept. 26; “Historia de la Iglesia en Roma, Texas” at Our Lady of Refuge Church, Roma, Texas, Oct. 24.





# Oblate at a Glance



## Summer Institute: Demystifying Mysticism

Father Thomas Keating, OCSO (center), joins Father Ron Rolheiser and Associate Dean for Continuing Education, Rose Marden, after one of Father Keating's popular lectures on Christian mysticism during OST's 2009 Summer Institute, "De-mystifying Mysticism."



## 285 Oblate Benefit: Treasures of Zambia

OST seminarians (left to right: Sydney Musonda, OMI, Kennedy Katongo, OMI, and Kasonde Musaba, OMI) sing two hymns in Chechewa, one of the major languages of Zambia, during the Oblate 285 Benefit dinner Sept. 16. The dinner's theme was "The Treasures of Zambia," celebrating the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the first Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Zambia.



## International Priest Internship

Participants in the three-week International Priest Internship prepare for a weekend outing with Father Henry Walker, OMI (right). They included (left to right) Father Anselm Ofodum, Nigeria; Fernando Preciado Villegas, Mexico; Hector Manuel Navalo, CMF, Panama; Amado Vallejo Garcia, Mexico; and Daniel Chinwuba Onyeayana, CMF, Nigeria. Others were from Indonesia, Ghana, Poland, India and Madagascar.



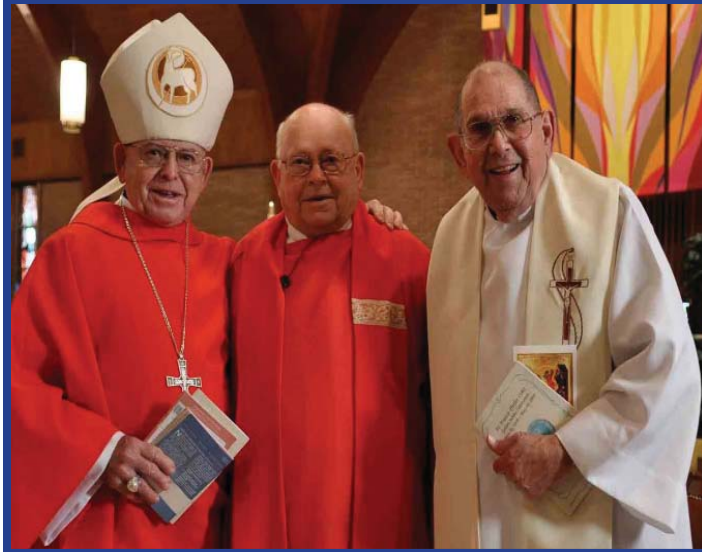
## After ACTS: Community Becoming Church

Monsignor Mike Boulette makes a point to students during "After ACTS: Community Becoming Church." About 125 enrolled in the five-week class, offered for men and women who want to enhance their theological understanding of their faith.



# Alumni News

**Father Ted Pfeifer, OMI, '59**, was interviewed by Deacon Tom and Mary Jane Fox Aug. 26 on the talk show *Catholicism Live*, aired by Catholic Television of San Antonio. They discussed *When the Wolves Came*, Father Pfeifer's memoir of his 44 years of missionary life in Oaxaca, Mexico and his resistance to the drug cartel. The book was privately published in June.



*Father Ted Pfeifer, OMI, (center) with his brother, Bishop Michael A. Pfeifer, OMI, (left) and cousin Father Jim Pfeifer, OMI, at his 50th anniversary Mass, May 31.*

**Father Fernando Rubio-Boitel, '75**, has worked in various parishes in New Mexico and was director of spiritual formation at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary in Santa Fe as well as at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio for fourteen years combined. He worked for the Hispanic Community (Casa Hispana) in Concord, Calif., in the diocese of Oakland.

**Nedra Voorhies, '86**, is in formation for priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. She serves at Bon Secours Hospital in Richmond, Va., as chaplain and is the Education Director at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, also in Richmond. Voorhies is a certified Pastoral Counselor in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors and obtained her Doctor of Ministry at Northwestern University in Pastoral Psychology.

**Father Alex Pereida, '08**, was the associate pastor of St. John Neumann Catholic Church in San Antonio for one year. On June 1 he began his new assignment at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in San Antonio.

**Let us feature you in Alumni News.**  
Send your info and a picture to  
[alums@ost.edu](mailto:alums@ost.edu)

**Bishop Thomas J. Flanagan, '79**, retired auxiliary bishop of San Antonio, was formally invested Sept. 11 as the newest Honorary Oblate of Mary Immaculate by Superior General Father Wilhelm Steckling, OMI, during a Mass in Oblate School of Theology's Immaculate Conception Chapel.

"It is said of our founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, that he had a heart as big as the world. Today, we present Bishop Tom Flanagan, a compassionate, big-hearted, loving priest of God, whom we honor as a son of St. Eugene and a brother in Oblate community life," said Father Warren Brown, OMI, executive vice president of the School, in presenting the recommendation to Father Steckling.

Bishop Flanagan, 78, was ordained a priest in his native Ireland in June 1956 for the Archdiocese of San Antonio. He served in many parish assignments in the archdiocese over a span of nearly 42 years before Pope John Paul II named him an auxiliary bishop to assist Archbishop Patrick Flores in 1998. He retired in December 2005. Bishop Flanagan had served twice as president of the San Antonio Community of Churches.

He graduated from Oblate School of Theology in 1979 with the master of divinity degree for clergy. Last year, the School honored him as a distinguished alumnus.



*Father Wilhelm Steckling, OMI (standing) with retired auxiliary bishop Thomas J. Flanagan, HOMI.*

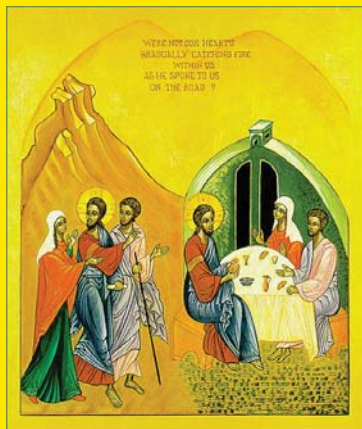
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# *People of Pilgrimage: Journeying into Silence*

The First Annual Contemplative Retreat  
An Ecumenical Gathering of Pilgrims on Oblate Hill



Sunday, February 28 - Thursday, March 4, 2010

Registration (including meals) \$345  
\$290 if postmarked by December 1, 2009  
\$325 if postmarked by Jan. 10, 2010

For Pilgrimage specific questions,  
E-Mail [peopleofpilgrimage@juno.com](mailto:peopleofpilgrimage@juno.com)

Open to all who share a desire for a Spirit-led life and companionship on the journey.