

# Oblate Partners in Mission



Partners in Mission (PIM) is a programme of the Australian Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate which offers members of the Oblate Family the opportunity to:

- work as part of an overseas Oblate Mission community; and
- develop their own faith by helping others and living in community as lay missionaries.

## Background

When he established the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1816, St Eugene de Mazenod challenged his followers to “leave nothing undared for the Kingdom of God” in the service of the poor and abandoned.

St Eugene could see that the hungry, homeless and helpless needed to have a sense of self worth and personal dignity before they could understand God’s love for them. The pragmatic approach he adopted, still followed today by Oblates, was, “First make them human, then Christians, and then saints”.

The charism, or spirit, of St Eugene inspires all Oblate works and that same charism is shared equally by religious and laity.

In that context, the Oblate Congregation seeks closer association and co-operation with all members of the wider Oblate Family.

## What is a Lay Missionary?

An Oblate lay missionary is a person who:

- volunteers their time and talents to serve God by serving others;
- is inspired by the charism of St Eugene de Mazenod;
- lives in community with Oblate religious;
- undertakes a personal formation programme;
- is open and willing to learn more about themselves by understanding more about others.



Fr. John anoints a sick student at shanty town school.

## In Which Countries Does the PIM Programme Operate?

The Programme will commence in 2009 in the Oblate Mission in Zhaoqing, in the Guangdong Province in south eastern China. Zhaoqing is inland from Hong Kong, about 4 hours by train.

Zhaoqing is a city of approximately 500,000 people, set in a rural landscape. The climate is sub tropical; hot and humid from May to October, cool to cold December to February and mild in March, April and November.

Fr. John Wotherspoon OMI established a mission in Zhaoqing in 2002, and works mainly with very poor migrant workers who have come to the city from rural areas seeking work. They live in very poor conditions in shanty towns on the fringe of the city.

The PIM Programme may also be extended to Oblate missions in Java and Kenya in subsequent years.

## What Work Will Lay Missionaries Undertake in China?

As a lay missionary working with Fr. John, you will assist teach conversational English. This may be in a number of different situations within the one week:

- students (Prep to Year 6) from the poor migrant families in the 5 shanty town schools that have been established by the Mission;
- students (Year 1 to Year 6) at Government schools in poor rural areas nearby to Zhaoqing;
- people (ages range from 6 to 60, but mainly teenagers) attending free English classes offered outside school/working hours in a Church hall in downtown Zhaoqing.

You do not need to be a trained teacher. Obviously, teacher training/ experience is an advantage, but there is a role for people of all levels of abilities and experience. You just need to be able to speak English.

Teaching English is a practical benefit to the children because it assists them gain entry to Government schools and to find employment. It means that Fr. John is freed of this role and is able to visit more needy families to provide medical and spiritual help. It also means that he is able to visit more surrounding villages to say Mass in the many Catholic Churches that remain in southern China, but which have been without priests for many years.

## Do You Need to Speak Chinese?

No. The classes are conducted by teachers and you are assisting them. In addition, you will have the services of an interpreter to travel with and attend classes with you.

Of course, it is expected that you will seek to learn some basic Chinese phrases, both for your own personal benefit and also to demonstrate to the local people that you wish to learn about and understand their culture, not replace it with your own.



## What Other Obligations Will You Have?

The PIM Programme is as much about the personal development and growth of the volunteer as it is about helping the poor and needy. In this context, you will :

- attend daily Mass;
- undertake a formation programme in which you will study the life of St Eugene de Mazenod, Founder of the Oblates, and of Matteo Ricci SJ, a Jesuit missionary in China in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century;
- complete an electronic diary of your experiences /feelings each fortnight.

## How Long is a Posting?

Six months with an option to extend to 12 months.

## Where Will You Live?

Lay missionaries will live in a two bedroom apartment in a typical lower middle class seven story apartment block. The apartment will have “western” fittings, but all your neighbours will be local Chinese. The apartments are all within walking distance of the shanty towns where Fr John lives and where most of your time will be spent. Daily Mass is said in an apartment occupied by some Chinese Canossian Sisters.



Volunteers and local staff at one of the mission centres.

## Is It Safe?

Fr. Wotherspoon has worked safely and very successfully in Zhaoqing for 6 years. He is completely open with the government authorities about what he is doing and respects whatever regulations/guidelines they introduce. He has been praised in numerous newspaper and TV items, and even publicly acknowledged by the Premier of China.

Religions are not permitted to “advertise” or promote their particular beliefs, so you will not be expected, or permitted, to undertake this type of activity.

You will spread the Gospel by your very presence in China, helping the poor and abandoned. Your mission will be your day to day example of the life you lead. Actions, example, presence, speak louder than words.

The people of Zhaoqing have come to love and respect Fr. John, and there is no doubt that they will love and respect those who work with him, provided you seek to accept and understand their culture, rather than live in your own .

## What Does It Cost?

As a volunteer programme, PIM operates on a “no gain-no loss” principle.

This means that you pay the cost of your return airfare to Hong Kong, and are responsible for any personal expenditure in country, not related to the work.

The Oblates pay:

- Visas
- travel insurance (which includes medical insurance in transit and in country)
- accommodation
- meals
- in country transport when required for work
- mobile phone for work purposes
- computer for email communication home and maintenance of electronic diary.
- a small weekly stipend to cover incidentals.

If you are selected to become an Oblate lay missionary as part of PIM, the Oblates will assist you with the organisation of fund raising in the your local Parish to contribute to the cost of the airfares.

## Who Should Apply?

- Married Couples;
- Single adults (male or female) over 21 years of age who are prepared to share an apartment with another person of the same gender;
- Active Catholics, who enjoy good health, who wish to live out their faith in action by serving the poor and abandoned;
- People who are willing to absorb and learn from a different culture;
- People who are willing to live as part of a religious community with the disciplines and benefits involved therein.



Children at shanty town school.



## Want More Information?

For more information about the work of Fr John Wotherspoon OMI and the Zhaoqing mission go to [www.china8.org](http://www.china8.org)  
For more information about the PIM Programme, either telephone David Maiden, MAMI Mission Co-ordinator on 03 9882 4013 or email David on [mami@oblates.com.au](mailto:mami@oblates.com.au)