

## De Sales says...

“What, then, can we do except have patience and not weary of our labors, since they are undertaken for the love of God..?”

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Meet an Oblate

### In the Spotlight

*Dominik Nguyen, OSFS, is a member of the South German-Austrian Province. He was born in Dong Nai, (South) Vietnam on September 5, 1982. His family immigrated to Germany in 1990 and settled in the city of Minden. He attended the Oblate high school in Fockenfeld, Germany. In 2004, Dominik made his first profession as an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales.*

*At present Dominik is student of theology preparing for ordination at Katholischer Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. He is in his third year of theological studies and during the 2006-2007 school year lived and studied in Toronto at the University of St. Michael's with the Toledo-Detroit Scholastic community. Summer of 2007 found Dominik working at the De Sales Center in Brooklyn, Michigan. He returned to Germany in August, 2007.*

Spotlight continued on 2



Spirituality

## A GIFT TO WELCOME INDEED

by John Lehner, OSFS

“God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). God loves the world, and all that is in it. God’s Word became flesh in the mystery of the Incarnation so that Jesus might help us to better understand the great love of God. And what is this love of God, but a love of attraction, fellowship, and agape.



God loves the world and all that is in it and is greatly attracted to it. The Book of Genesis reminds us that God created the plants, the fruit trees, the sun, the moon, and all kinds of animals and creeping things and saw how good it was. Finally, God made humanity in his image and likeness and found this to be very good!

God holds his beloved people close to his heart. Isaiah, chapter 40, reminds us, “Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.” Later, in chapter 62 of Isaiah, we are reminded, “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”

In the Fifth Part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales reminds us of the following: “The sun shines upon a certain spot on the earth and gives it no less light than if it shone nowhere else and shone only for that place. In the same manner our Lord thinks about all his beloved children and gives them his care. He thinks of each one of them as though he did not think of all the others.” How precious they are to his heart.

Then there is also the endearing image of Mary at the manger tenderly holding the child Jesus close to her heart. As Mary holds Jesus close to her heart, so does God hold each of us close to His heart. God can’t help it, He loves us so!

Another endearing image is that of the Lion and the Lamb, who

Gift continued on 3

## Spotlight

Continued from I

**Q:** Your family is originally from Vietnam, but you were raised in Germany. What's the story?

**A:** The story is the result of the war of Vietnam. Many people struggled with poverty and with the political changes within the country (especially people in South Vietnam) after the reunion of the North and South in 1975. People



Dominik Nguyen, OSFS

were searching for a better way of life and decided to leave hoping for a better future for themselves and their children. This included three of my oldest siblings. They left Vietnam after 1975 in a small boat risking their lives in the ocean, and were picked up by a German refugee ship. Eventually they got to Germany. About ten years later the German government allowed relatives of refugees to join their family members in Germany. Invited by my siblings my parents started the reunion process with my siblings. We arrived in Germany in September 1990.

**Q:** Where did you first meet the Oblates?

**A:** I met the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales in 1999 for the first time as a student in one of their High Schools (in German "Gymnasium") in Fockenfeld (Southern Germany), and I decided to join the Oblates after my graduation in 2003.

**Q:** What made you think of spending a year in Toronto to study theology?

**A:** I had thoughts of

spending a year in Toronto during the General Chapter of our Congregation in the summer of 2006. During the preparation for the Chapter every Oblate was encouraged to send proposals to the Chapter. For that reason a group of young Oblates in our Province came together to discuss the possibilities of the proposals.

One of my concerns as the single scholastic in our province at that time was, "How could I be connected with the Oblate confreres who are in same stage of

formation as me? Could we find a way to get ourselves together so that we could have the opportunity to share our understandings of being an Oblate, and our appreciations of religious life?

Fr. Thomas Vanek, OSFS, the formation director of our province, asked me if I would want to study a year abroad, since the University allows us to do that. I asked our Provincial superior about spending a year in Toronto and was encouraged by one of the confreres in our province who also studied in Toronto a few years ago and had a good experience there.

**Q:** Did you notice differences in Oblate life during your time in North America?

**A:** There are several differences in Oblate life which I noticed during the past academic year. First of all there

are more young Oblates who are in formation in North America than in our province. I also noticed the way the Oblates in North America organize their daily life within their communities is different from the way it is done in Europe. Our Province is getting smaller and our ministries are different from each other so

that we are not able to organize the house by ourselves as the confreres in America are doing it. We depend on people

outside our communities to help us with laundry, cooking, etc.

Things which impressed me in North America, especially in the Toledo-Detroit Province, are the engagement of the young Oblates with the older confreres working for vocations, sharing their lives with young people, and helping younger people to discover their own vocations. There is a good Spirit in the Toledo-Detroit Province who knows how to bind the two generations of older and younger Oblates together in communication, common life, and in their sensibility for one another. I remember that we laughed so much together, and that we had very serious discussions as well. Besides these things there are also differences in matter of culture and mentality. The environment which the Oblates in America



Dominik Nguyen, OSFS (far right) poses with the 2006-2007 Toronto Scholastic Community.

have, and the way Americans live and think are different from European people.

**Q:** What things did you have to adjust to while you lived in Toronto and then at the De Sales Center in Michigan?

**A:** The most difficult thing I had to adjust to during the past year was the language. Even though I have studied English at school, I found that it was difficult to listen to a conversation, to share my thoughts in a conversation, or even to understand an argument within a discussion. I remember that I would hesitate to talk to others for a long time.

**Q:** What do you think you might do when you are done studying Theology?

**A:** This is a question everyone - my family and my friends - is asking me since I returned to Germany. Honestly I do not really know for sure what I might end up doing after my graduation. Besides, I still have two more years of Theology before finishing. Therefore, I can only speak of considerations of what might happen. In making the decision to enter religious life my wish is to be where people need me, to help people who are in difficulties, and to show people God's love. At times I imagine either teaching Mathematics in a high school or working in a parish. But these are just ideas and at present I am trying do my best to prepare for my graduation in the summer of 2009. I want to keep an attitude of openness and of hope that God's providence will reveal to me his will at the right time.✠

## Gift

continued from I

live in harmony with one another. Isaiah presents this imagery in chapter 11, where, "the wolf is a guest of the lamb, the calf and the young lion shall browse together, and there shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain." In Matthew, chapter 25, we read of the gracious fellowship shown to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the ill, the naked, and the prisoner. Love shown to these, the most in need, is love shown to Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God. These are not cause for separation and division; but rather for compassion and fellowship

In John's gospel, chapter 17, Jesus prays, "That all may be one, as we are one, I in them, and you in me, and that you love them even as you love me." When we gather at the Liturgy, our great sign of unity is our sharing of Communion. We long to be one in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Francis de Sales, in the Second Part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, reminds us to "make Jesus as welcome as possible," as we open our hearts both to him, and to one another in the gift of Eucharist.

Love is an invitation to community with others. It is not an invitation to build a 700 mile wall to keep out "undesirables;" nor is it an invitation to build a wall through the very city where Jesus prayed, "that all may be one." Walls, those ominous signs of separation and division! The Lord's gift of love is one of community and fellowship! Did walls separate the shepherds from the

newborn infant? On the contrary, they went in haste as the angels directed, meeting no obstacles, to celebrate fellowship with their newly found brother! The Christmas hymn echoes this as we sing, "Joy to the World, the Lord is come, let every heart prepare him room." Isaac Watts had it right when he penned these words, "Make Love as welcome as you possibly can."

What does Jeremiah tell us in chapter 31? He makes God's voice quite clear: "With age-old love I have loved you." Or, as a contemporary hymn reminds us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." During the Christmas season, we proclaim, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," as we kneel before the manger. Love unbounded, love unending, love with no strings attached, love totally undeserved: this is the gift of agape love, given to us in Emmanuel. With the mind and heart of St. Francis de Sales, do I want to make him as welcome as possible? Even after a bad day? A broken relationship? A difficulty unresolved? After that "dark side" of me manifested itself in an even darker manner? No doubt about it. Lord, to whom else would I go?

My heart renews its joy and sings, "Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down; visit us with your salvation, enter every trembling heart."✠

Come Lord Jesus.  
Come Emmanuel.  
Be born anew in our hearts,  
In our lives,  
And in our world:  
A gift to welcome indeed.

Fr. John Lehner, OSFS, is chaplain at St. Francis de Sales High School in Toledo, Ohio.

# Postulancy

by Robert Lockwood



What is a postulant? The students at St. Francis de Sales High School in Toledo, Ohio, often ask this very questions as three of the four postulants walk the hallways of the school. Often students ask seemingly odd questions such as, "Does Fr. Olszewski have the biggest bedroom," and "Can you watch TV?" along with other outlandish questions of course that only the mind of a teenage boy can fathom. I often laugh at some of the questions, because we do not see lives as postulants extraordinarily different than anyone else. Once they find out about our ordinary lives, they are often surprised. The students are surprised to learn that in our down time we spend time together in the TV room, going out for recreation, or playing video games. In fact, they are so surprised that they often try to invite themselves to such events.

However, aside from the day in and day out excitement that ministry brings, there are other components to the postulancy

which we have tried to embrace. When it comes to life together, we truly are a generational community. At St. Francis' Faculty house our senior member is 82, while our youngest is 23. At St. Mary's in Adrian, Michigan, where Erick Jorge lives and ministers a generation gap exists as well. Needless to say trying to integrate the new and the experienced is an adjustment. But all in all, we are making the transition together. Between moving furniture and re-organizing elements of the house, every day is a new adventure. We often find

*"What is an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales postulant?"*

ourselves sitting around a table doing just that; telling stories and listening to the stories of the influential Oblates that came before us. And while we are at the bottom of the totem pole, we have been fully embraced by the community and take an active role in it. At the end of the day, regardless what has been brought our way, we come together to pray and share a meal. That is at the

*"When it comes to life together we are truly a generational community."*

heart of the life of a postulant. Each of our lives as postulants is a busy balance between prayer, community and ministry. Between Erick's ministry with the Hispanic community in St. Mary's Parish, and three of us teaching at St. Francis, we still try and find time to enjoy fellowship a few times a month. One of those times included a trip to Long Beach Island, New Jersey by car (an adventure to say the least).

At the start of this article I posed the question, what is an Oblate postulant? For me a postulant is an ordinary man trying to take a deeper look with God at himself in order to determine if he can live an Oblate way of life. It's the beginning of trying to find God's will for me. At the start of postulancy thoughts like, "What did I get myself into?" floated though my head. However, at this point, those thoughts seem distant to me and each of us in our own way and ministry seem like old pros now.

When all is said and done, I am proud to be on this journey with the Oblates and my fellow postulants. While we do not yet know for sure where these days will take us, it is comforting to know that God has brought us together to learn about Oblate life and to give us the opportunity to live, pray, and work together with the

Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. In the end, postulancy is the first step in a journey of something greater and I look forward to continuing the adventure. Even though this group of postulants will be leaving their ministries around summer time, we are leaving our mark and a mark is being left on us. We also pray that the greater-Province community will continue to be blessed with more Postulants in the years to come.✠

Robert Lockwood is a first year postulant from Wilmington, Delaware.



“Our souls should give birth, not outside themselves, but within... It is Jesus whom we must form and bring to birth in ourselves. I speak this way because I know your ardent desires; but have courage, for one must suffer much to bring Christ to birth. Besides, the Child is well worth whatever we endure in order to bring him to birth. I shall stop here begging this heavenly Child to make you worthy of his graces and favors...”

Francis de Sales in a letter to Jane de Chantal, 1604.

Salesian Enrichment

## Ever Faithful, Ever New

The 25th Annual Joseph Power, OSFS, Salesian Conference

This year's Annual National Joseph Power, OSFS, Salesian Conference on the Spirituality of Ss. Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal was special. It was the twenty-fifth time people of North America met to celebrate and share the great spiritual legacy of Francis and Jane. The conference gathers people who have been touched by the gift of Salesian spirituality through Oblates, Visitation Sisters, Oblate Sisters, Salesians of Don Bosco and other Congregations and lay movements

which take Francis de Sales as their principal patron. Each year we are given the opportunity to learn from the insights of keynote speakers, discuss more specific topics in Salesian spirituality, revisit and renew friendships and forge new ones.

Fr. Joe Boenzi, a Salesian of Don Bosco, was our first keynote speaker. Boenzi described styles of discipleship present in four classic western spiritualities: Ignatian, Franciscan, Carmelite and Salesian. Francis de Sales, educated and formed by both Jesuits and Franciscans, was

by Bob Mossett, OSFS

presented as an integration point for all of the aforementioned spiritual

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traditions who invites everyone to dwell in God's presence in the everyday and ordinary.

Sr. Mary Greenan, a Salesian Sister of John Bosco, was Saturday's keynote speaker. She addressed how to make Jesus alive today for the Generation Xers and the Millennials whose reality is the virtual time of interactive media. How do you "Live Jesus" with those who are immersed in the world of media and gadgets? Implicit in "Living Jesus" with these generations of multi-taskers is the challenge them to be authentic. They need a "High Definition" Jesus image

Conference continued on 6

## Conference

continued from 5

who is highly relational, relevant, and radical; and who is a real experience of God mediated by Christians' actions and words.

Sunday's keynote speaker, Fr. Kevin Nadolski, OSFS (Wilmington-Philadelphia Province), spoke on the Salesian quest for social justice. Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal never spoke on social justice. This is a Gospel challenge of our time articulated in *Gaudium et Spes*. What Salesian spirituality does bring to this topic is the image of the gentle Jesus who humbly places the person ahead of everything,



Salesian Conference participants take some time during an evening social to enjoy fellowship and music.

seeking fidelity - not victory - in making the foreign familiar.

Five afternoon presentations were available and conference participants could attend four. Fr. John Graden, OSFS, gave a "Salesian Spirituality 101" presentation meant for those unfamiliar with the heritage of Francis de Sales. Danielle Charles' session, "The Influence on Francis on the Role of Women (and Men!) in Today's Church," recalled Francis' work with the people of his day who had left the Catholic Church. Communication was central in his missionary efforts. Dialoguing comfortably, sharing faith, gently welcoming and seeing the goodness in the "other," set Francis as a model pastoral minister that can be

translated into any age and state in life. Joe Caporaso, a Salesian Companion of Dom Bosco, who worked as a public school principal for 18 years shared St. John Bosco's *Preventive System of Education* in order to educate not only the mind but also the heart of each student. "It's not enough to love the children," Caporaso stated. "They have to know they are loved." Brother Al Vu, SDB,

explained God calls each by name to experience the divine presence in every age. Finally, Wendy M. Wright (Creighton University) chronicled De Sales' devotion to Mary through out his life and ministry.

One of the many highlights of the conference was the very entertaining Friday evening event, "A Midsummer Night's Salesian Dream of Francis' and Jane's Excellent Adventure." With a clever and humorous power point presentation background and appropriate music the show opened with Francis presenting to Jane the letter from the Archbishop of Lyon directing the Visitation be an enclosed cloister and canonically approved order. After accepting this as God's

will, Jane leaves and Francis falls asleep. Jane returns in Francis's dream and leads him into the future. From off stage come the voices of Francis and Jane's disciples: first, Fr. Pierre-Marie Mermier the founder of the Missionaries of Francis de Sales; next Claudine Echernie who with Fr. Mermier founded the Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Cross, who like the Visitandines accepted women who would not be accepted in more rigorous religious orders. Next the audience was taken to a scene in Turin, Italy to visit Giovanni Bosco and to witness the founding of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Mother Mazzarello appeared on stage telling of the founding of the Salesian Sisters, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the founding of the Union of Salesian Cooperators for laymen and women. Another scene witnessed the appearance of Madame Caroline Carre de Malberg who, like Jane de Chantal, was a widowed mother of four, and who with her spiritual director, Fr. Henri Chaumont, founded the Daughters of Francis de Sales (later the Association of Francis de Sales) for both lay men and women who wish to consecrate themselves to living lives marked by Salesian Spirituality.

The entertaining trip through Salesian history continued on stage with Caroline Carre, who was a Visitandine alumna of the Visitation School at Metz. The school superior was Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis, who later became the superior of the Visitation of Troyes, France in 1866. The chaplain of this monastery was Fr. Louis Brisson

and one of its students was Leonie Aviat. Under the influence of Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis Leonie Aviat and Lucie Canuet, guided by Fr. Brisson, became the first Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales working with young women who came from the country to work in the factories of Troyes. Leonie took the name Sister Frances de Sales. Because of her work and heroic virtue she was canonized in 2001.

It took Marie de Sales Chappuis twenty-five years, three miracles, and a vision from Christ to get Fr. Brisson to start the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. In 1875, our community was founded. In 1943, an Austrian Oblate, Fr. Franz Reizinger, established the Secular Institute of Frances de Sales whose members live a vowed life and follow Salesian Spirituality but live in the world. And now for twenty-five years men and women, priests, religious, and laity have been gathering annually in North America to learn, share and celebrate the spirituality of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal.

Francis and Jane had a dream. Through the years their way of loving God by uniting oneself to God's will and living the little virtues has grown in the men and women who have embraced lovingly all that God's providence allows to happen. Through all of us who strive *ever-faithfully* to follow the Spirituality of Jane and Francis, God's dream is being fulfilled *ever-new*. ☺

Bob Mossett, OSFS, is a member of the Pastoral Staff at St. Anne's Parish in Monroe, Michigan.



## Cause of a Lifetime

Fr. Louis Brisson, OSFS (1817-1908)

Lord,

Please visit and protect the family of the Oblate Sisters and of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales which is the vine your powerful hand has planted through the work of your servant, Louis Brisson, OSFS. For the glory of your Name, make this family grow in your love, and grant to it, for the joy of the whole Church, the recognition of the untiring zeal of its founder for the Gospel and of his heroic courage in the midst of trials. Amen.

2008 marks the 100th Anniversary of Fr. Brisson's death. Join with us and pray that the Church will consider Fr. Brisson's life a life of heroic virtue, of worthy of imitation, and of holiness rooted in Jesus Christ.

**Bondings** is published regularly for the members and friends of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Toledo-Detroit Province. Its purpose is to enhance and develop the bond we have through our common faith and spirituality.

"We have no bond but the bond of love."  
-St. Francis de Sales

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## From the Editor...

Happy Advent! As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the gift of God's presence in Christ at

Christmas I am reminded of the many signs of God's promise to be with us that appear in our daily lives. The work and commitment of



my predecessor, Jack Loughran, OSFS, is one of these signs. I am grateful to Jack for his support and encouragement as I attempt to continue the important work of keeping us connected that he has begun in *Bondings*; and I am thankful for his faithful witness to Christ in his tireless work as a brother Oblate.

As I write this note I can see snowflakes blowing around outside my window in Toronto. The seasons are changing and as you can see we are experimenting with some changes to *Bondings* as well. In this issue we are trying out new paper and new fonts hoping that it will make *Bondings* easier to read and allow photos to print more clearly. As you receive each issue please provide me with your feedback so that we can together continue the work of remaining connected - bonded in Christ Jesus and directed by St. Francis de Sales.

+ Peace,

*Shaun Lowery, OSFS*

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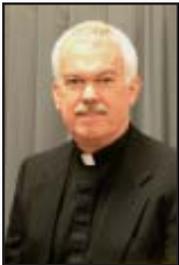
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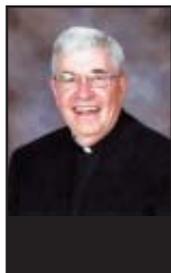
## *Whatever Happened to...*

**Jim McHugh, OSFS**, is approaching twenty years of service as a member of the faculty at Judge Memorial High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. This November Jim was honored by



the staff and students at Judge Memorial for his thirtieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Jim teaches in the science department at Judge and assists on weekends at a parish in the suburbs of Salt Lake City.

**John Fallon, OSFS**, is the current president of St. Mary's Catholic High School in Stockton, California. John was recently honored by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI and was awarded the



Cross of Honor along with other members of the Diocese of Stockton. The award is one of the highest Papal honors given and recognizes the performance of outstanding ministry in the Church by either the laity or clergy. Congratulations, John!

**Joe Dumphrey, OSFS**, currently lives and ministers in Lockport, New York. Joe has served in a variety of roles in Lockport from teaching and administration in schools to assisting in parishes. At present Joe



serves as Parochial Vicar at St. John the Baptist Parish. Joe's generosity is well-known in the Buffalo Diocese and most recently the Bishop of Buffalo asked Joe to take on the role of being Canonical Administrator of De Sales School in Lockport.