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of Mary Immaculate

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Bishop Daniel VERSTRAETE, OMI: 102 Years of Following in the Footsteps of the Spirit

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Some lives are measured not by honors, but by faithfulness and a life given to the Lord. Their stories invite us to look across more than a century with the confidence of faith and the joy of the Gospel.

The life of Bishop Daniel Verstraete, OMI, who celebrated his 102nd birthday on July 31, is one of them. Today, he is the oldest Oblate bishop, the last living Council Father who participated in the Second Vatican Council, and the second-oldest bishop in the universal Church, after Mexican Bishop José de Jesús Sahagún de la Parra.

A Life Dedicated to Mission

Bishop Verstraete was born in Oostrozebeke, Belgium, in 1924, into a family of twelve children, three of whom embraced religious life. After completing his novitiate in Korbeek-Lo and his studies at the Oblate scholasticate in Velaines, he was ordained a priest on February 19, 1950. Inspired by religious obedience and missionary zeal, he was assigned to the Transvaal region of South Africa on May 16 of that same year.

His first assignment was in Orlando, Soweto, in Johannesburg. In late 1959, he was asked to explore the possibility of establishing a Catholic presence in western Transvaal, a region drawing large numbers of people following the discovery of gold and diamonds. After traveling throughout the territory for two years, he concluded that the mission could succeed if catechists were properly trained and accompanied.

A Shepherd Guided by the Spirit

Bishop Daniel Verstraete, OMI

In 1965, Bishop Verstraete was appointed apostolic prefect of western Transvaal and took an active part in the Second Vatican Council as a Council Father. When the mission territory became the Diocese of Klerksdorp, he was appointed its first bishop and ordained to the episcopate on May 14, 1978. He chose as his episcopal motto, “We must continue to follow in the footsteps of the Spirit.”

After undergoing several back surgeries, he stepped down from the leadership of the diocese on March 26, 1994. However, he remained in South Africa and devoted himself to the South African Catholic Bible Society and the Bible Institute in Johannesburg. His commitment to placing Sacred Scripture in the hands of God’s holy people reflected his deep dedication to evangelization and the formation of communities in Scripture.

After 63 years of missionary service, he returned permanently to Belgium on December 8, 2012, and now lives at the Oblate community in Waregem. In 2024, Bishop Victor Hlolo Phalana of Klerksdorp traveled to Belgium especially to celebrate Bishop Verstraete’s 100th birthday. At 102, the eldest Oblate continues to remind us that the mission remains alive whenever we follow in the footsteps of the Spirit.

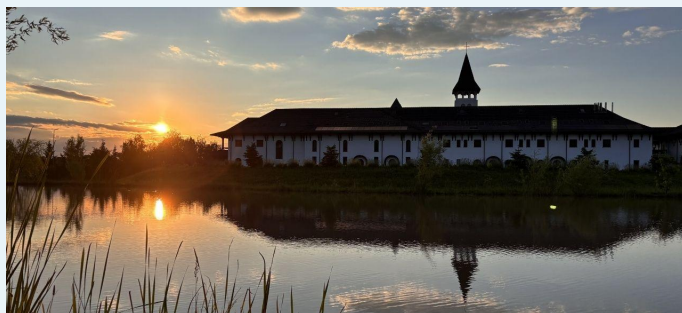
Leo VANDENEDE, OMI

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**With heavy hearts, we honor and celebrate
the lives of the following departed Oblates:
May their souls find eternal peace,
and may their lives and devotion to service continue to inspire us all.**

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