INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATIONS IN PLANCY AND TROYES FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF FR. LOUIS BRISSON, OSFS

On 2 February 1908 at 10:34 a.m., Fr. Louis Brisson, founder of the Oblate Sisters and Oblate Fathers and Brothers of St. Francis de Sales, died in his home at Plancy (France). To commemorate the centenary of the death of their founder, the Major Superiors, delegates from the ten Provinces and Regions, and the International Commission for Salesian Studies (ICSS) of the De Sales Oblates gathered in Troyes to participate, with the Oblate Sisters and the Visitandines, in the celebrations held in Plancy and Troyes on 2-5 February 2008 to mark this anniversary, as well as for the annual meeting of the Major Superiors. Each day there was a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated at a different venue connected to Fr. Brisson by Bishop Marc Stenger, bishop of Troyes and a revered friend of the Oblates. There were also pilgrimages to these and other sites, as well as a workshop on the ministry and spirituality of Fr. Brisson. Here follows the highlights of these grace-filled days when all felt they walked on sacred ground in the footsteps of Fr. Brisson, Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis, the "Good Mother" (1793-1875), St. Léonie Frances de Sales Aviat (1844-1914), and the first Oblates.

A Prayerful Day in Plancy on the Anniversary of Fr. Brisson’s Death

Fr. Brisson was born in Plancy on 23 June 1817. Six days later he was baptized in the parish church dedicated to St. Julien, where at age twelve he also received his First Communion, and shortly thereafter, while saying his morning prayers there, experienced a strong divine inspiration that he was called to be a priest. In the final years of his life, Fr. Brisson retired to Plancy after the implementation of the 1901 law approved by the French Senate disbanding religious orders and congregations and confiscating their goods and property. A little more than two weeks after being diagnosed with an untreatable intestinal obstruction, he entered there into eternal life on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 1908, at the age of ninety.

One hundred years to the day, Saturday, 2 February 2008, Fr. Brisson’s Oblate Sisters and Oblate Fathers and Brothers made a pilgrimage to Plancy to mark this milestone in our congregational history. Other pilgrimage groups—one led by the Oblate Sisters from Childs, Md., and another, by the De Sales Oblates from the Netherlands—also participated in this observance. The day in Plancy began with a tour of Fr. Brisson’s beautiful newly restored house. There the pilgrims visited the room where Fr. Brisson died, prayed in his attic chapel, and viewed the meticulously arranged and conserved display cases of his personal items, clothing, and vestments.

At mid-morning the pilgrims assembled in the parish church for a candlelit prayer service that took place at the very hour of Fr. Brisson’s death. Subsequently, there was also an opportunity to “explore” the church in greater detail, e.g., the font in the baptistery where Fr. Brisson was baptized and the pew in which he sat praying several weeks after his First Communion when he felt a strong call to the priesthood, as well as to walk through the town to see the house where he was born, which still has a “B” over its front door. The Oblate Sisters then hosted a delightful lunch in the town hall, with an informative and entertaining PowerPoint presentation on the life of Fr. Brisson following. Before lunch was served, Mother Françoise- Bernadette, OSFS, Superior General of the Oblate Sisters, offered warm words of welcome to their guests. The mayor of Plancy also attended the prayer service and luncheon, and likewise extended a gracious welcome.
In the afternoon, the first Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving, which was also the diocesan celebration of World Day of Consecrated Life, was held in the parish church, with Bishop Stenger as principal celebrant and homilist. A champagne reception followed in the town hall. Before the return trip to Troyes, all gathered for the communal celebration of Evening Prayer in the parish church. That evening back in Troyes, the De Sales Oblates hosted a festive “family” dinner for the Oblate Sisters and all the pilgrims at Notre Dame en l’Isle, the former diocesan seminary, where the Major Superiors, Province and Regional representatives, and the ICSS were housed. Now it was the turn of Fr. Michel Tournade, OSFS, the French Provincial, and Fr. Aldino Kiesel, OSFS, Superior General of the De Sales Oblates, to extend a heartfelt welcome to all.

**A New Biography and Statue of Fr. Brisson**

On Sunday morning, 3 February, the formal gathering of the De Sales Oblates—the workshop on Fr. Brisson’s spirituality and ministry—opened with an address by Fr. Kiesel, who explained the “special meaning” of these days in Troyes:

Our goal here is not to discuss issues related to our Provinces and Regions. These days have the special character of a celebration. We are here to celebrate and to give thanks to God. It is good to be here where we were founded and where we started as Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, and from where we spread out over the world. It is good to celebrate the life of our founder, Fr. Louis Brisson, and the life of the first Oblates. It is good to give thanks to God for our history, our charism, and our mission in the Church. It is good to give thanks for our Salesian spirit, the treasure we received from God through our holy founders: St. Francis de Sales, the Good Mother and Fr. Louis Brisson. It is good to give thanks for the gift of our own vocation and the vocation of our confrères who are Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. It is good to give thanks to God for so many wonderful things happening in the Church through our ministry as Oblates.

Significantly, these sessions took place in Notre Dame en l’Isle’s aula magna, which, during Fr. Brisson’s days as a student and faculty member at the diocesan seminary in Troyes, was the chapel.

There followed the formal presentation of the new biography, Louis Brisson, by Fr. Dirk Koster, OSFS, of the Dutch Province and a member of the ICSS, as well as the unveiling of a new statue of Fr. Brisson by sculptor Dik Kompier commissioned by the Dutch Oblates. Five years ago, Fr. Koster, whose biography of St. Francis de Sales was published in 2000, was asked by the former Superior General, Fr. Lewis S. Fiorelli, OSFS, to write a biography of our founder. In his presentation, Fr. Koster detailed how he undertook the research for this biography, generously acknowledging all those who assisted him along the way. A DVD about the biography was then shown. Remarks followed by Fr. Joseph Chorpenning, OSFS, Chairman of the ICSS, which lent fraternal encouragement and financial support to the project, and Dr. Jack Dick, an American who is professor of theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) and the English translator of the biography. (Louis Brisson is available in a variety of languages in addition to English: Dutch, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish.) Finally, before formally presenting this biography to Fr. Kiesel, Fr. Koster shared what he considered as nine decisive moments in the life of Fr. Brisson illustrated with photos and pictures.

Dik Kompier’s new statue of Fr. Brisson captures his sense of mission that sent into the world two religious congregations. The Oblate Sisters are represented by Mother Aviat, with children gathered around her. As for the De Sales Oblates, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Deshairs (1847-1921), the second Superior General, takes over carrying the torch, stepping into the world of education with books and a raised teaching finger. While St. Léonie Aviat is well known, Fr. Deshairs is a forgotten figure in the history of the Congregation who saved it during the difficult years when Fr. Brisson was in exile in Plancy. Here he is accorded his rightful place. A DVD was also shown about the sculptor and this statue.

**The Cathedral of Troyes and the Motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters**

The Troyes cityscape that is most familiar from the story of Fr. Brisson’s life is that which was impacted by the Industrial Revolution:
Troyes . . . was an important business center and a booming industrial city with ninety textile factories. . . . The largest part of the population . . . worked in the factories. Children were the cheapest laborers and worked twelve hours a day doing light sorting and checking. Young girls between twelve and eighteen were dexterous and cheap. Around 1840, the mechanical looms were introduced and factories were built with high smoking chimneys and discharge pipes for their stinking industrial waste. The workers lived nearby in quickly built shacks. The open sewers were constant sources of germs and illness. Making underwear, shirts, and dresses demanded the handiwork of women. Many young girls therefore, looking for jobs, moved from the countryside into the city.2

It was precisely these conditions that led to Fr. Brisson’s opening of supervised houses for young women working in the factories that provided a safe and stable environment, together with Christian formation, and eventually to the foundation of the Oblate Sisters.

It is less well known that, in the Middle Ages and early modern period, Troyes was a widely recognized center for sacred art, as its wealth of churches attests: the cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, the basilica of St.-Urbain (constructed 1262-86 by the order of Pope Urban IV, a native of Troyes), and the churches of Ste.-Madeleine, St.-Pantaléon, St.-Jean, St.-Nicolas, St.-Rémy, and St.-Nizier. The sacred art adorning these worship sites was produced by the city’s ateliers, which were among the best in Europe. For example, the triple-arched rood screen (1508-17), sculpted by Jean Gailde (active c.1493-d. c.1519), in the church of St.-Madeleine is one of the greatest of its kind to survive. The churches of Troyes are renowned for their splendid stained glass (two volumes of the prestigious “Corpus Vitrearum France” series are devoted to the churches of Troyes), which was produced between the 14th and 17th centuries by such well-established stained-glass makers as Jehan Soudain (active 1416-56) and Linard Gontier (1565-c.1642) and their workshops. This tradition of excellence by native artists was continued in the 17th century by the Mignard brothers, Nicolas (1606-68) and Pierre (1612-95), who excelled in the field of religious painting (both did commissioned paintings of the Biblical episode of the Visitation for the main altars of the Visitation monasteries of Avignon, Orléans, Paris [rue de Bac], and Troyes), and by François Girardon (1628-1715), who produced some of the finest sculpture of the Grand Siècle, such as the Apollo group and spectacular fountains at Versailles and the tomb of Cardinal Richelieu in the chapel of the Sorbonne.3

Among the churches of Troyes, the cathedral, built between the 13th and 17th centuries, stands out for its impressive tower, remarkable proportions, beautiful nave, and vast sanctuary illuminated by the warmth and intense colors of its stained glass. Fr. Brisson was an honorary canon of the cathedral (he was appointed on 12 February 1858), and his Solemn Funeral Mass was celebrated there on 6 February 1908. Fittingly, on Sunday afternoon, 3 February 2008, it was the venue for the second Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for the centenary of Fr. Brisson’s death celebrated by Bishop Stenger. Those attending had been forewarned to dress warmly because the temperature in the cathedral is frigid as there is no indoor heat. It was not a vain admonition!

After Mass in the cathedral, there was a visit to the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters on the rue de Terrasses. Among the highlights were the motherhouse chapel, the crypt chapel where Fr. Brisson and St. Léonie Aviat are buried, the grand astrological clock that Fr. Brisson built, and the impressive museum that the Oblate Sisters have assembled with great attention, care, and devotion. The latter provides a privileged and singular view of the material culture of Fr. Brisson and Mother Aviat. Among many other things, the extraordinary beauty and variety of Fr. Brisson’s Mass vestments, so well preserved and displayed in this museum and in his house in Plancy, point to the solemnity and dignity with which he must have celebrated the sacred liturgy. The day concluded with the celebration of Evening Prayer with the Oblate Sisters in the motherhouse chapel.

The Troyes Visitation

The Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary was co-founded in 1610 by St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641). The Visitation monastery at Troyes enjoys the distinction of having been founded during Jane’s lifetime by the second daughter of the Visitation, Marie-Jacqueline Favre (1592-1637). The Troyes foundation was made amid great difficulty proceeding from opposition by the municipal authorities. This aspect of the foundation is memorialized in a 17th-century French painting by an unknown artist, The Virgin Mary and St. Joseph Seeking
Lodging in Bethlehem, that hangs over an altar, flanked by gilded statue-reliquaries of Francis and Jane, in the anteroom of the monastery's choir. This painting fulfilled a vow made by Mother Favre and her small community of four sisters and two novices, who came from Paris in 1631 to found the monastery of Troyes. When, after two years of waiting, they were still no closer to being admitted into Troyes by the town council, the sisters made a vow to have a painting made of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter in Bethlehem to commemorate their long and frustrating period of waiting. The painting was done in 1635, when the little community was finally settled in their monastery.

In April 1636 the monastery had the privilege of being visited by Jane herself, who also availed herself of this opportunity to visit the Carmelite nuns in Troyes to thank them for their great assistance to the Visitandines in the travails of their foundation. In Troyes, Jane encountered again Mother Marie de la Trinité d'Hannivel (1579-1647), formerly of the Dijon Carmel, whose counsel about religious life she had sought thirty years earlier, and with whom Jane formed an enduring spiritual friendship.4

During the French Revolution, the Troyes Visitandines were expelled from their convent; the chapel was plundered, and the buildings half destroyed and then sold. In 1807, the buildings were restored to the sisters, who returned to reorganize. But the monastery soon came under ecclesiastical interdict on account of Jansenist tendencies, and community life was in disarray. To stabilize the community and put it on firm footing, the sisters requested as their superior Mary de Sales Chappuis, the novice mistress at Fribourg (Switzerland), who had previously re-established the Visitation monastery at Metz, and who was renowned for her deep grasp of Salesian principles and uncommon leadership ability. For the remainder of her long life, with the exception of an interval when she provided leadership for the Visitation in Paris on the rue de Vaugirard (1838-44), she served the Troyes community, where she became known as “the Good Mother.”

France at this time was experiencing a new spiritual energy—a revival of the Catholic faith and a rich harvest of new religious congregations. The Good Mother had carefully studied the life and writings of Francis and Jane, and soon she became convinced that the Lord was calling her to cooperate in a great apostolic work that would dominate her life: the establishment of the congregation of priests that St. Francis de Sales had not lived long enough to found. The congregation's mission would be to make present again and to spread far and wide the image and spirit of Francis, who during his lifetime was perceived by his contemporaries as reflecting "the Son of God as a living image [une image vivante]" so that "in seeing him they seemed to see our Lord on earth."5 It was to be accomplished by living and spreading the Salesian primary virtues of humility before God and gentleness toward neighbor, thus opening new pathways of grace in and transforming the world. In the Good Mother’s own words, as reported by Fr. Brisson in his biography of her: "God has looked into Himself and has decided to open up new sources of graces. He wants that I should be responsible for carrying out what will be required to communicate to the outside the effects of this action."6 Further, the Good Mother believed that the Lord would direct her to the specific priest who would found this new congregation, and that this would happen in Troyes. In 1843, Fr. Brisson was appointed chaplain of the Troyes Visitation. The first time the Good Mother saw Fr. Brisson, she knew immediately that he was the priest who was to be the founder of the new congregation.7

The third Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for Fr. Brisson’s centenary of death took place in the exquisite chapel of the Troyes Visitation on Monday morning, 3 February 2008. This chapel has brilliant stained-glass windows (the blues and reds are spectacular!) of the Nativity of the Lord and the Agony in the Garden, a majestic sanctuary and main altar replete with elegant architectural elements and a magnificent painting of the Visitation by Pierre Mignard, and striking colorful lateral murals portraying Francis’s presentation of the profession cross to the first Visitandines and the apparition of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-90).

Prior to the Mass, there was a visit of the monastery that commenced with the chapel within the cloister where the Good Mother is buried. After her death in 1875, she was buried in the community burial vault in the monastery’s inner courtyard. In 1901, the Good Mother’s body was exhumed, found to be incorrupt, and reinterred in its current resting place.

The visit then proceeded to the room where the Good Mother died that is preserved intact. Her Bible—a two-volume folio edition illustrated with engravings by Gustave Doré (1832-83), the most popular French designer of wood-engraved book illustration of the mid-19th century—rests on the table beside
her deathbed. As the Good Mother was dying, the Lord assured her that He Himself would be present to safeguard and protect the "work" He had entrusted to her of establishing a new congregation of priests. On the wall opposite the bed hangs, among other things, an emblematic painting illustrating one of the Good Mother's distinctive sayings, Couper court, "Cutting short," which here has a mystical nuance: the soul, symbolized by a bird, flies upward to the crucified Savior, having been cut free from the strings of those things that would otherwise constrain it.

The parlor where Fr. Brisson and the Good Mother conversed may be aptly described as "the birthplace and cradle of the De Sales Oblates." As is well known, this is where Fr. Brisson wearily listened to and resisted the Good Mother’s prophetic entreaties for many years. The visit continued with this parlor, where the Lord appeared to Fr. Brisson in Lent 1845 to confirm that all that the Good Mother said to him was true, and that the new congregation that she wanted him to found was indeed the will of God. A brass plate marks the place on the floor where the Savior stood.

During the Good Mother’s fifth triennial as superior at Troyes (1847-50), the city of Troyes began a canal project that was to run through the monastery property. Digging began either in late 1848 or early 1849. However, in March 1849, the Good Mother saw Our Lord pass before her through the little door to the large field on the monastery property through which the canal was to run, and received His assurance that she and the sisters would always continue to pass by that way. The visit included a walk through the monastery’s inner courtyard and grounds to the place where this canal was to have been, but which never materialized.

**Workshop on Fr. Brisson’s Spirituality and Ministry**

The workshop on Fr. Brisson’s spirituality and ministry continued from Monday, 4 February, through Wednesday, 6 February 2008, with a variety of presentations. Each was followed by an opportunity for questions and in some cases by small discussion groups. Most of these papers/presentations are available on the Fr. Louis Brisson website: www.louisbrisson.org. Here it is impossible to do justice to the richness of these presentations, and consequently a brief summary will be offered in the hope of whetting the reader’s appetite to explore the full texts posted on the aforementioned website.

The inaugural paper was delivered in French by Fr. Roger Balducelli, OSFS, former Superior General and Archivist of the Congregation; simultaneous translation into English was provided by Fr. Sebastian Leitner, OSFS, and into German by Fr. Marcus Kraxberger, OSFS. Fr. Balducelli’s topic was "Fr. Brisson, OSFS—From His Priestly Vocation to His Religious Vocation." This paper reflected on how God was at work in Fr. Brisson moving him beyond his priestly vocation to embrace a religious vocation. This movement was a lengthy journey through a long dark valley filled with many difficulties and challenges, not the least of which was Fr. Brisson overcoming his natural resistance to the Good Mother’s prophetic entreaties about founding a new congregation of priests in the mold of St. Francis de Sales. Even after the Lord’s intervention in a decisive way by His apparition to Fr. Brisson, it took many years for him to alter his disposition toward the Good Mother and to allow her doctrine to find its way into his inner life. Ample attention in this slow and gradual process of conversion was given to the Good Mother, who was the "Inspiration" of the De Sales Oblates in that out of her came the creative spirit that animated Fr. Brisson to make this foundation. She is the "key" that unlocks the mystery of the sacred history of the congregation.

Mr. Jean-Louis Humbert, a historian specializing in the urban history of Troyes, made a presentation in French on "Troyes at the Time of Fr. Brisson, OSFS." Again, Fr. Leitner offered simultaneous translation into English, and Fr. Kraxberger, into German. Mr. Humbert marshaled ample data to give an idea of the Industrial Revolution’s impact on Troyes in terms of its geographic boundaries (it expanded well beyond its original boundaries, marked by its medieval fortifications configured in the shape of a champagne cork), its population (between 1841 and 1911, the population more than doubled from 25,000 to 53,000), and industry (the building of numerous factories that manufactured not only textiles, but also paper). By 1914, 54% of the textiles manufactured in France were produced in Troyes, making it one of the most important textile centers in Europe. While conditions for workers were very difficult in the period 1810-70, they improved between 1870 and 1914, due to the efforts of religious communities such as the Oblates, the wives of factory owners, and societies of mutual
assistance. The devastating impact of industrialization on family life was also noted: low wages forced both parents and children to work.

The paper, "The Spiritual Directory Today," was presented by Fr. Lewis S. Fiorelli, OSFS, immediate past Superior General and a Salesian scholar. Fr. Fiorelli considered the question: How is it that "Christian, Salesian and Oblate holiness all [rest]—at least for us Oblates—on the slim shoulders of a short Preface, ten brief Articles and a few concluding words of Advice and Counsel that constitute the Spiritual Directory for Daily Actions"? Christian, Salesian, and Directory spirituality all have one and the same goal: union with God, a union that is realized by following or living Jesus. For the Congregation’s founder, Fr. Brisson, the Directory was central to the Oblate’s identity. The Congregation’s “Inspiration,” the Good Mother, promises that through the faithful practice of the Directory "Jesus will be born in us and in our actions, He will be seen once again walking upon the earth." In this light, the Directory "is best understood not so much as a spiritual book but as a way of life or a spiritual strategy for attaining continual union with God similar to what Jesus Himself experienced. It is our way of living as Jesus lived and of continuing His saving work." In its essentials, the Directory is the distillation of, and has the same goal as, the Treatise on the Love of God, Bk. 9, where Francis speaks of love as a “union of wills.”

The workshop concluded with a two-part PowerPoint presentation, "Human Relationship in our Salesian and Brissonian Tradition," by Fr. Michel Tournade, OSFS, Provincial of the French Province, a respected educator and Salesian scholar, and a former member of the ICSS. This thoroughly enjoyable, engaging, and masterful presentation may be viewed on the website: www.louisbrisson.org. While in the first part, Fr. Tournade identified the key elements, illustrated with an abundance of visual images, of Francis’s theology/spirituality of human relationships, in the second, he highlighted many points of continuity between Francis and the Salesian spirituality that Fr. Brisson modeled for and fostered among the first Oblates.

**The Tuilerie and St. Bernard’s School**

On Tuesday afternoon, 5 February 2008, there was an excursion to the Tuilerie and a joint session with the Oblate Sisters at their retreat and conference center there. In 1887, Fr. Brisson purchased an old roof tile factory (tuilerie) in the town of St. Parres aux Tertres near Troyes, with the idea of turning it into a house for retreats and relaxation. In 1892, while walking through a building on this property, Fr. Brisson fell through some rotten floorboards and landed at the bottom of an old brick oven. He promised to build a chapel on the site if he succeeded in getting out. Giving one last desperate try, he pulled himself up to firm ground. Subsequently, he had a shrine dedicated to Notre-Damede-Pitié (Our Lady of Compassion) built on the spot; it was blessed on 19 August 1894. In the former brick oven into which he fell, he had a crypt constructed for the 14th Station of the Cross: a life-size statue of the recumbent dead Christ (Figure 10) guarded by an angel.8

The visit to the chapel included the opportunity to descend the narrow spiral staircase to the hole into which Fr. Brisson fell and the 14th Station of the Cross. Afterwards, there were small discussion groups with the Oblate Sisters reflecting on "Fr. Brisson, OSFS, Today," followed by the opportunity to ask questions of the assembled group of experts on Fr. Brisson. It should also be mentioned that this took place on Mardi Gras, and, in keeping with the character of the day, the Oblate Sisters provided a magnificent goûter (afternoon snack or tea).

In the evening, the fourth and final Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving was offered by Bishop Stenger in the chapel of St. Bernard’s School, the Oblates’ first educational institution. Immediately after the Mass, the bishop blessed the school’s two new buildings (the elementary school and the cafeteria). A reception and dinner followed, as the celebration of this joyous occasion continued.

**Novena and Resources for the Year of Fr. Brisson**

On Ash Wednesday afternoon, the gathering of the De Sales Oblates concluded with the business meeting of the Major Superiors, Fr. General’s closing address, and Eucharistic liturgy.
Fr. Kiesel announced that the General Council had approved a novena of prayer for this Year of Fr. Brisson proposed by Fr. Thomas F. Dailey, OSFS, who is coordinating its preparation. As is customary in the Church, special anniversary occasions are celebrated with a “year” of attention. The centenary of Fr. Brisson’s death affords the De Sales Oblates a unique opportunity to celebrate the life and legacy of our founder by engaging in a worldwide spiritual “novena” to mark this occasion. This liturgical exercise is not the promotion of a cult (i.e., for the intercession of Fr. Brisson), but a collective prayer by our Oblate congregation on behalf of the cause of beatification/canonization of our founder (i.e., prayer for Fr. Brisson).

The Year of Fr. Brisson includes three major elements: (1) the year begins on 2 February 2008 with the international celebrations in Plancy and Troyes for the centenary of his death; (2) it continues with a worldwide “novena” by the Oblates on the First Friday of each month, from March through November 2008; and (3) it concludes with the local celebrations of the annual renewal of vows by the Oblates on 21 November 2008. The novena is intended primarily for the De Sales Oblates, particularly in their own individual and communal lives. The Oblate Sisters are also invited to join in prayer with us and to participate in the novena for our common founder. The novena may be adopted for use in Oblate apostolates as a means of inviting others into our Salesian-Oblate heritage and spirituality. Each month the novena includes four brief elements: (1) Fr. Brisson’s story; (2) Fr. Brisson’s words; (3) reflection on Fr. Brisson; and (4) prayer for his beatification. It may be used in a variety of ways, e.g., as a personal exercise of prayer, as part of communal Morning or Evening Prayer of the Church, as part of a communal/public exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, or as a post-Communion meditation during the celebration of Mass. The novena for each month may be found on the website: www.louisbrisson.org.

Many other resources are also available for use in the celebration of the Year of Fr. Brisson:

- In Troyes, each Provincial and Regional Superior was given for the use of his Province/Region a CD-ROM, prepared by Fr. Herbert Winklehner, OSFS, of the Austrian-South German Province and a member of the ICSS. This CD includes the following: a PowerPoint presentation (in French and in English) given by Fr. Tournade as part of the workshop in Troyes; a PowerPoint presentation (in German and in English) about the life of Fr. Brisson; galleries of more than 100 images and pictures of Fr. Brisson, the Good Mother, and St. Léonie Aviat; and five guided meditations, which were used by the De Sales Oblates each morning during the gathering in Troyes (2-6 February 2008).

- Fr. Winklehner also distributed a press packet (in German) for the Year of Fr. Brisson that includes printed materials and a CD-ROM.

- A variety of materials, including papers and presentations from the workshop on Fr. Brisson’s spirituality and ministry that took place in Troyes, 3-6 February 2008, are available on the website: www.louisbrisson.org.

- The biography, Louis Brisson, by Dirk Koster, OSFS, is available in various languages, including Dutch, English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish.


Fr. Kiesel also took this opportunity to underscore the indispensability of original scholarly research into the primary sources of our Salesian-Oblate spiritual patrimony. He emphasized as well the necessity, for the benefit of the Congregation and the accomplishment of its mission, of encouraging and preparing young Oblates to be Salesian scholars.

Finally, warmest thanks and kudos were extended to Fr. Tournade and Fr. Leitner, ably and generously assisted by Bro. Thierry Marcoz, OSFS, and Fr. Kraxberger, for their flawless planning, organization, and coordination of the centenary celebrations and hospitality in Troyes for the De Sales Oblates that made these days so memorable and enjoyable for their confrères who were privileged to participate in them. These international celebrations in Plancy and Troyes of the centenary of the
death of Fr. Brisson afforded a singular opportunity to return ad fontes of our Congregational history and Salesian-Oblate spiritual patrimony and to immerse ourselves in the paradigmatic narrative of our foundation for a threefold purpose:

- to give thanks to Almighty God for these gifts that have been entrusted to us;
- to renew and refresh, in light of this history and patrimony, our Salesian-Oblate identity and commitment to the accomplishment of our unique mission in the Church of presencing and spreading far and wide the living image of St. Francis de Sales by the primary Salesian virtues of humility and gentleness; and,
- to enter anew into this foundational narrative in order to reflect on and tease out its implications for our Oblate life and ministry today in such key areas as the primacy of mission, seeking together the will of God, and collaboration with one another, other members of the Salesian family, and the laity.

Joseph F. Chorpenning, OSFS

NOTES

1. Fr. Brisson’s last years were very difficult, due to the law suppressing religious orders and congregations in France. However, as Fr. Kiesel noted in his opening address, “But while the doors were closing on the one side, other doors were opening.” It was precisely events in France that fostered the worldwide expansion of the De Sales Oblates to other countries in Europe, to the United States, and to the missions in South Africa, Brazil, and Uruguay.


8. Beaudoin, 513; and Koster, 193-94