

Program: Reconciliation

In the work of Franz Bänsch, reconciliation plays a decisive role:

- as a missionary and priest, he reconciled sinners with God;
- as a fellow human being, he reconciled the righteous with their unjust fate;
- as a helper for families in need, he reconciled children with their parents;
- as a European visionary, he reconciled Germans with Poles and Czechs.

Father Bänsch describes the fruits of his efforts for reconciliation as follows: *“Very many have expressly stated that they, the Czechs, don’t wish the Germans anything bad; ...that they die for a reconciled and peaceful world.”*

However, he had not only a view for the prisoners, but also for their relatives. Even beyond death and across boundaries of nationality, Franz Bänsch sought to inform the families of the executed and to enable them to bid farewell to their loved ones in a dignified manner. For example, he transmitted the last letters of the executed to their relatives. He also tried to obtain the reburial of deceased Czechs in their home country after the war.

In the post-war years, another concern of Franz Bänsch was the appropriate commemoration for the victims of the Nazi regime in the prison at Münchner Platz. This should have a spiritual character for him. In 1954, the foundation stone was laid for the Maria-Hilf-Kapelle in Kleinnaundorf, not far from Dresden, which served as a memorial.

Short Biography of Franz Bänsch

- 1899** Birth in Großenhain/Sachsen
- 1899–1913** Family, childhood and school days
- 1913–1917** Juniorate St. Karl in Valkenburg/NL
- 1917–1919** Soldier in the First World War
- 1920–1928** Entering the Congregation (OMI) and years of study
- 1923** Perpetual vows in Dresden
- 1925** Ordination to the priesthood
- 1928–1934** Popular missionary in Breslau
- 1935–1957** Pastor in Dresden-Plauen
- 1935–1945** Prison chaplain in Dresden
- 1957–1961** Diocesan director of men’s ministry
- 1961** Death after a severe heart attack

Has your interest been aroused?

Further information on the Missionary Oblates and Father Bänsch, please visit our websites: www.oblaten.org and www.omiworld.org

Are you interested in our exhibition?

We are pleased to offer you our Roll-ups. You can also obtain from us the book ‘Father Franz Bänsch, O.M.I. A Portrait of His Life’.

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Yours sincerely,
Fr. Felix Rehbock, O.M.I.
Provincial



FATHER FRANZ BÄNSCH OMI



Missionary Oblate
of Mary Immaculate
Religious and Priest
in Two Dictatorships
Conciliator and Example

A Child of the Diaspora

Franz Bänsch was born March 21, 1899, in Großenhain, north of Dresden. The Catholics were a minority in Saxony even then. They counted only 4.9 percent of the population. There was not even a parish in Großenhain.

The faithful parents, Alois Bänsch and Klara Bänsch, wanted a catholic education for their son. Therefore, Franz first attended the Dresdner Kapellknabeninstitut. In 1913, he changed to the missionary school of the Oblates M.I. in Valkenburg, the Netherlands. The grammar school prepared future candidates for the Oblate Congregation. At that time, the boy Franz had already had a strong desire to become a religious.

He spent most of the First World War in Valkenburg. Only in 1917, he was drafted in his Saxon homeland. But he was not yet transferred to the front. Franz used the time to prepare himself for the uncertain future of a soldier in trench warfare. He went to confession *“to come clean with God”*. However, Franz was spared a deployment in the trenches.



A Missionary Oblate for Germany

In 1919, Franz Bänsch entered the novitiate of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) at Maria Engelport. Brother Franz showed himself to be a modest novice: *“I thought that one must have a certain degree of perfection. ... I already doubted my worthiness.”*

How did Franz see the goal of his life back then? *“My life must concentrate on my intention to become holy. This thought may never leave me. I must never throw doubt on the possibility of achieving this goal, because the Savior gives everyone enough graces for that. Therefore, conscientious observation of the rule; strict examination of conscience, consistency in acting according to my resolutions.”*

In the 1920s, the Oblates founded several communities and schools throughout Germany in quick succession. They were mainly active in the popular mission. Father Bänsch was also appointed to the popular mission. After his ordination in 1925, he initially worked in Silesia since 1928. This wandering life ended for Father Bänsch in 1935, when the provincial administration appointed him superior of the Oblate community in Dresden-Plauen. At the same time, he became pastor of St. Paulus.

The Good Shepherd in Dresden at the Münchner Platz

The prison Dresden-Münchner Platz, which was also the central execution site in the Nazi Empire, belonged to the parochial territory of Father Franz Bänsch. As the parish priest, he was also responsible for the prison chaplaincy there.

The Oblate rules of 1931 state about the prison ministry: *“As charity demands, we should spare no effort to prepare those sentenced to execution for a good death.”* Between 1935 and 1945, Father Bänsch maintained this claim and proved its validity when he accompanied about 1000 prisoners sentenced to death.

Franz Bänsch perceived every death row inmate, regardless of his guilt, as a human being. One prisoner wrote to him: *“With every KPD man (communist) and with every foreigner I spoke to in prison, they all raved about your love for the prisoners.”* Of course, Franz Bänsch also distinguished political prisoners from criminals and murderers. The latter were concerned with their individual conversion to God. This involved also the reconciliation with their fellow men. In his eyes, the political prisoners were not criminals. It was a matter of reconciling them with their difficult fate. *“Here it was above all about the fact that those condemned to death did not leave the world in despair, anger and hatred, but reconciled with God on the way to eternity,”* says Bänsch.

