



OMI Documentation No. 288 (English)

September 2009

In service of the Word made flesh
Reflections on the vocation of the Oblate Brother

Table of Contents

Foreword: History of the Permanent Committee of Oblate Brothers
p. 3

Statistics of Oblate Brothers over the years
p. 4

“We are God’s Co-Workers” (1 Cor. 3:9)
The Oblate Brother and the Congregation’s Mission
By Fr. Oswald Firth, OMI, Assistant General
p. 4

The Identity of the Oblate Brother
in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
By Bro. Benoît Dosquet, OMI
p. 7

The Witness of two Oblate Brothers
p. 12

A bibliography on Oblate Brothers
in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
p. 13

In service of the Word made flesh

Reflections on the vocation of the Oblate Brother

Foreword: History of the Permanent Committee of Oblate Brothers

During the Chapter of 2004, the Brothers who were present addressed a letter to the capitulars in which they proposed “the creation of a permanent committee of Brothers, representing the different regions, and charged with the animation of the life and the mission of the Brothers.” In its final recommendations, the General Chapter mandated “the Superior General in Council to establish a permanent committee of Oblates (R149f), to foster the vocation of Brothers within the Congregation.” The Chapter also determined that the “committee would function in accordance with statutes approved by the Superior General in Council.” It also suggested, in broad lines, some of the elements that could be included in these statutes.

During the plenary session of April-May 2005, the General Council carried out the mandate of the Chapter by forming the Permanent Committee of Brothers and they decided to place the dossier for Brothers under the responsibility of the Mission Portfolio of the General Council. In each Region, a Brother was called to represent the Brothers on the Permanent Committee.

During the plenary session of May 2006, the Superior General in council officially formed the Permanent Committee of Brothers, made up of a representative of each Region of the Congregation and of another Brother named directly by the Superior General. Fr. General also designated Fr. Frank SANTUCCI to participate at the first meeting of the Brothers’ Committee as an invited guest. The Committee, thus formed, was brought together by the person in charge of the Mission Portfolio at a first meeting in Rome on October 16-20, 2006. The following Brothers took part:

- Bro. Charles GILBERT (Canada-United States)
- Bro. Edgar FRANCKEN (Latin America)

- Bro. Anton FERNANDOPULLE (Asia-Oceania)
- Bro. Rex HARRISON (Africa-Madagascar)
- Bro. Benoît DOSQUET (Europe)
- Bro. Andrzej RUP, (Poland), named by the Superior General

The General Council had thus done its part in executing the mandate of the 2004 Chapter concerning the creation of the Permanent Committee of Brothers.

Since then, the Permanent Committee of Oblate Brothers has met three times at the General House. At the conclusion of the first two meetings, we wrote a letter that one can find in *OMI Information*, No. 460, December 2006 and No. 471, December 2007.

During our meeting in October 2008, with the help of Fr. Roberto SARTOR, we elaborated a draft of the statutes for our committee. In collaboration with Fr. Adriano TITONE and Fr. Paolo ARCHIATI, we presented our viewpoint on the formation of Oblate Brothers; and, with Bro. Dominique DESSOLIN, we continued our reflection on the identity of the Oblate Brother.

Before our gathering in Aix-en-Provence for our fourth meeting, in March 2010, we want to share with all the Oblates and the whole Mazenodian family, our reflection on the Oblate Brother in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

You will find here some statistics about the presence of the Brothers in the Congregation; two major reflections “The Oblate Brother in the Mission of the Congregation” and “The Identity of the Oblate Brother;” then we will hear from two witnesses; and we will conclude with some bibliography for continuing our reflection.

Statistics of Oblate Brothers over the years

The first Brother could have been Brother Maur who lived with our Founder from 1812 until 1815. History decided otherwise; after the fall of Napoleon, Brother Maur was able to return to his Order and he left Aix on September 18, 1815, a few weeks before Eugene de Mazenod wrote to Father Henry Tempier.

The first novice brother, entered the Congregation at Notre-Dame du Laus about 1820 and it was only in 1828, two years after the approbation of the Rule, that the first brother, John Bernard Ferrand, made his vows. He was also the first to make perpetual vows in 1834, some twenty years after the Congregation was founded. (Dictionary of Oblate Values)

The entry of Oblate Brothers was very slow before 1841; afterwards, it took on a certain rhythm and a percentage that remained stable

for 150 years. At the death of the Founder, Oblate Brothers were about 20% of the Oblate personnel.

1899: 18%

1933: 25%

1964: greatest number of Oblates, 7526, of whom 1309 Brothers, or about 17%.

1987: there were only 14%, that is 728 of 5431 Oblates

1998: 530 of 4713 Oblates - 11%

2000: 565 of 4664 Oblates - 12%

2008: 424 of 4300 Oblates - 10%

2009: 407 of 4244 Oblates - 9%

In line with Fr. Fernand JETTÉ, we would say that a province that has not had Oblate Brother candidates among its Oblates in first formation for the past five to ten years is in danger!

“We are God’s Co-Workers” (1 Cor. 3:9) The Oblate Brother and the Congregation’s Mission

By Fr. Oswald Firth, OMI, Assistant General

The Brother in the Church

The attempt to establish and determine the place of the Oblate Brother in the Congregation’s Mission will be better realized if we were to hark back to our roots, particularly to the time of our Founder, where he clearly spells out the role and function of the Brothers within the Congregation. He very categorically states, “*In our Society, Lay Brothers must not be regarded as house servants*” (Article 11).¹ Superior General Fernand Jetté reiterated similar sentiments when he spoke to the Brothers in 1986, when he said, “*From the very beginning, the Brother in the Congregation was considered as a confrere, a companion, and not a servant*”.² In contemporary phraseology we would perhaps

speak of the Oblate Brother being the “Co-Worker” in Mission.

In a papal audience of 2nd February 1995, that turned into a class on catechesis, Pope John Paul II, elucidated the core of the 1994 Synod of Bishops on *Consecrated Life*. In this instance he clarified the term “*Brother*” in religious institutions with priests. His perception was that in a religious order, all are “*Brothers*,” where some were ordained while others were not. What was important was that all participated in the Church’s Mission of evangelization though the missionary tasks were different and complementary.

Brothers, affirms John Paul II, are the “*Bonding Point*”, because they link both human and ecclesiastical realities, they are the bridge builders between the ‘*Kingdom of man*’ and the ‘*Kingdom of God*’. Further, Vatican II has

¹ *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, Brothers, p.48

² *Vie Oblate Life*, 1986, p.279.

brought into focus the role of the Church in the world as being “*Missionary*”. Whether ‘Priest’ or ‘Brother’, the primary challenge the Oblate faces is to become and be a “*Missionary*”. But “*Missionary*” has been transformed into being an extended term calling all baptized persons, whether lay or religious, to take on the task of being “*Missionaries*” with ministries specific to their particular status in life. While this line of thinking has very demanding theological implications (Rom.12:4-8)³, for an Oblate, the call to be “*Missionary*” is combined with sharing the mission, while living in fraternal communion, without even the semblance of class distinctions.⁴

The Brother in the Congregation

Fr. Fernand Jetté spoke with great esteem of the Oblate Brother as a constitutive member of the Congregation to the extent that without the Brothers the religious order would somehow be impoverished in its missionary endeavours. “*For me*” said Fr. Jetté, “*the Congregation is not complete if the Brothers are missing*”.⁵ With this eloquent reminder, the tone was set to recall for the benefit of all Oblates the co-responsibility of our mission thrust: “*We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers...we commit ourselves to evangelize the poor*” (CC 1), whom we encounter with their many faces (CC 5). All ambiguities are shunned. The mission is the common legacy handed down to us as a community, despite the fact that responsibilities will be complementary and exercised through a variety of “*forms of witnessing and ministry*”, whether through the celebration of sacraments or through service (CC 7). As if to emphasize that Brothers are missionaries of equal status, the General Chapter of 1986 modified the 2nd paragraph of RR 3 to read: “*The Brothers share in the missionary work of building the Church in the universe*”.⁶

Documentary evidence indicate that Brothers flourished already when the Founder was alive and

leading the Congregation with great energy and enthusiasm. The years 1850-1853 saw Brothers teaching in Canada and England. Between 1841-1861, at least twenty-five Brothers were engaged in catechetical instructions in France. Records have it that Bishop de Mazenod made them a part of every missionary contingent. The Brothers were ready and willing to take on any challenge that came their way for the sake of the mission.

Foreign Missions, daring excursions into the unknown to bring the Good News to the destitute in distant lands through a host of skilled services, attracted many a young man to the call of Brotherhood. They were building God’s kingdom through their talents. At the death of the Founder, of the 414 Oblates 87 were Brothers, a good one-fifth of the entire Congregation.

Savings resulting from the work of the Brothers, who were pioneering architects and engineers of mission constructions which included schools, churches and hospitals, were a testimony to their spirit of poverty. There were Brothers who were tinkers, tailors, farmers and cooks. Some ran printing presses and motor mechanical repair centres. Others were known for their skills in setting up electrical installations, airfields and trade schools. Among them were those versed in the fine arts of music, painting, drama and methods of spiritual meditation. Their commitment to mission and the quality of their work were legendary and phenomenal and left lasting impressions among Christians and non-Christians as well, whom they served with devotion⁷

The Brothers’ Mission Today

Times have changed. Today, there is a need for even greater professionalism in the service we render to our mission to the poorest. The Brothers have responded energetically to this call. So we have among our Brothers, medical doctors, Human Rights lawyers, psychological counselors, computer scientists, trained social workers, managers of training and retreat centres, and qualified accountants. In fact, the list is unlimited. Brothers are daring to cross social-cultural borders in an expression of solidarity and service to the most needy.

³ *Christifidelis Laici*, 1988, no.23; *Lumen Gentium*, 35,36)

⁴ Fernand Jetté: *Vie Oblate Life*, Vol.45, 1986,p.279; Normand Provencher, *Documentation*, 259, p.9

⁵ Fernand jetté, op.cit. p.283

⁶ *Dictionary of Oblate Values*..op.cit.p 65.

⁷ See Fernand Jetté, *Vie Oblate Life*, p.278.

The 33rd General Chapter of 1998, gave special recognition to the mission of the Brother when it said: *“Through a life of apostolic activity, he evokes the primacy of mission. Through a life of professional activity, he is clearly involved in the world. He participates fully in evangelization which leads to and finds fulfillment in the Church’s celebration of the sacraments. The Chapter understands that the Brother has a special identity and stands on his own two feet as a religious; he is not defined in function of the priests ministry”*.⁸

Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, the Superior General, made a poignant assessment of the world today in his address to the Interchapter that met in Johannesburg, in September 2007. *“The world”*, he says, *“no longer works in the same way. Old boundaries are breaking down even as new borders are emerging.....we live in a world that feels like one global nation. The ease of communication and travel, as well as movements of goods and money have created new realities and new consciousness”*.⁹ The world today and the ‘new borders that are emerging’ that Fr. General is referring to opens the door to new risks as well as to new opportunities for evangelization which should not be alien to the Brothers, since it is they, more than even the priests, who have closer links with the secular world.

C133 challenges us to *“break new ground at the service of evangelization”*. This challenge is within the spirit of daring if we take our mission as *“being sent”* seriously to search for means to *“better meet the needs of the poor and most abandoned”*.¹⁰ It is in this light of searching for new ways to evangelize that we must view the *Permanent Committee of Brothers* that came into being as a result of the General Chapter of 2004.¹¹ It continues to be the task of this Committee to explore how the Brothers could contribute to the

⁸33rd General Chapter: *Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, 1998, no.25

⁹Wilhelm Steckling, *Daring to Cross Borders*, September 2007, p.3,4.

¹⁰Wilhelm Steckling, *Oblate Mission Today*, November 2006, p.3.

¹¹See Acts of 34th general Chapter, *Witnessing to Hope*, F, p.66-69 (English text).

Congregation’s mission today.

Fr. General, in his address to the entire Congregation, *“Oblate Mission Today”* (November 2006), invites all the members of the Oblate family to be conscious of the *“elephant in the garden”*, or the *“new poor”* that sits glaring at our face. How can the Brothers respond to this invitation? Among the ways that this has been attempted and continues to be further attempted, the following are noteworthy:

Mission with the Culture of Secularity: ‘Secular’ is not synonymous with *‘material’*. But in a world where the *‘secular’* dominates, God does not enter the equation. Here there is no place for the transcendent, but for science and technology. The spirit of secularity defends near absolute freedom of the individual, while respecting the intrinsic value of the human being. Brothers together with priests have formed pilot communities to respond to this mission of secular humanism that leaves many professionals, university students, intellectuals, the business community, etc. devoid of a spirituality that looks towards the beyond. Birmingham and Indianapolis, Indiana, have been positive attempts in this direction.¹²

Mission to Migrants: With the rise of migrants in the western world, there is a mission of justice and fair treatment to help these people who have uprooted themselves from their home base for political and/or economic reasons be integrated into their new surroundings, while retaining what is socially acceptable in their cultural practices.

Working for Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation: Conflicts around the world, especially where Oblates are present, call for training and involvement in techniques of conflict transformation, reconciliation and counseling. The need for this humanitarian service has been impelling today more than ever before.

Concern for the Environment and Ecology: Depleting natural resources, global warming,

¹² Many of the ministries mentioned find their place in the letter to the Congregation on *Oblate Mission Today*, the OMI General, Wilhelm Steckling, November 2006.

the disappearance of rare species, and the use of chemical fertilizers are all contributing to cause climate change and damage to the planet earth. There is much that could be done through education programmes to safeguard the environment for all living species on earth.

Making the Gospel present in Tribal Cultures: Today, the spirituality, theology and culture of tribals are channels through which the Gospel and the values of the Kingdom can be promoted. The rights of tribal people to their lands and culture are areas of concern regarding which a voice needs to be raised in national and international fora.

Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Dialogue has been recognized by the Church as a means of evangelization today. Starting with the dialogue of life one can even progress to the level of a deeper dialogue on doctrine.

Ministry with Youth: This is a priority ministry in the Congregation dating back to the time of

the founder. Youth are in search of meaning and spirituality in their lives, and when there is a vacuum in their life drugs, violence and desperation often take over.

Working with AIDS Patients: More than the physical illness is the social rejection and stigma that accompany the disease. There are some Oblates involved in bringing medical aid and consolation to those suffering from this illness and certain others engaged in advocacy for cheaper and accessible drugs for the victims.

These are possible areas which are open to all Oblates as they 'cross borders' to engage in evangelization. These are areas of ministry among the new poor open to the Brothers which reminds us of the words of the Founder, "*leave nothing undared*". *It isn't that we dare because things are difficult; it is because we don't dare that they are difficult*² (Seneca). These are not ministries reserved for priests alone; rather, they are challenges to Brothers as well in so far as the essence of their character and calling is to be a "missionary".

The Identity of the Oblate Brother In the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

By Bro. Benoît DOSQUET, omi
President of the Permanent Committee of Oblate Brothers

"You have only one Master, and you are all brothers" (Matthew 23:8)

Foreword

To live as brothers among ourselves with those around us and, in a wider sense, with every human being created like us in the image of God, is the goal of all followers of Christ.

To follow Christ in religious life is not "the highest point" of Baptismal life, nor is it a ministry (namely, a function intended to animate the community of believers . . .) but it is simply an open witnessing for everyone to see, and "something different with others."

The identity of religious life lies in what we are,

as we follow Christ. It doesn't matter whether we are many, or weak, the essential element of religious life is communion with Christ which gives power to life. The religious is a man who is in touch with the currents and questions that crisscross society, but allows Christ, who is in him, to show through.

Reflection on the vocation and the place of Brothers is of concern to all Oblate communities, Fathers and Brothers, for it touches upon the very identity of our institute¹.

¹ Normand Provencher, *Documentation OMI*, May 2004.

Religious life is vital for us Oblates, and the presence of Brothers in the Congregation reminds us all of the fraternal dimension, or, according to the words of John Paul II, that “the lay brother is a reminder that religious life has a *communal* dimension.”²

Year after year, the Brothers Committee discovered how important it was to start from the religious life of the Oblate Priest and the Oblate Brother. In the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, certain ones are called to enter as Brothers, and others sense a call to the presbyteral ministry. Nevertheless, all the Oblates, *priests and Brothers, have complementary responsibilities in evangelization*³.

Eugene de Mazenod “*faced with an enormous task, he gathered a few priests around him, men who shared his impassioned zeal for the most abandoned.*”

*‘Live together as brothers,’ he urged them. . . . At his persuading, they committed themselves permanently to the preaching of missions, binding themselves by religious vows. Soon afterwards he decided to receive Brothers as true sons of the family. Thus began the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*⁴”

Identity

The Oblate vocation is a unity: the Brother Oblate, just as the Oblate Priest, is a man who has heard *the call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church by way of people’s need for salvation*⁵. By his oblation, the Oblate offers himself totally; he gives the best of himself by means of the gifts which he received from God.

Starting from what animates a person, and not from the task accomplished, the Oblate Brother must not be identified with an occupation

²Documentation OMI, May 2004.

³CC & RR N° 7

⁴Forward, CC & RR.

⁵CC & RR N°1

or a function. The first and most important contribution of the Brother is the gift of his person, offered freely at the service of the Lord. It is therefore in the openness of religious life that he is a prophetic witness, within the Church and the Congregation, to the world of today.

Our founder always insisted on the dignity of the person “ . . . know your dignity – know who you are . . .” Eugene de Mazenod wanted that the Brothers be given tasks befitting their talents. John Paul II, in 1955, said that ‘lay’ brothers should have a proper role that enables them to cooperate actively in the life and the apostolate of the Institute.⁶ We say that everyone’s vocation is to build the Kingdom by one’s own identity. This means that each must develop the gifts which God has placed within his person, so that he can become a son, and find inner confidence. That is how one becomes an accomplished man, a happy man, who doesn’t expect everything from the superior, but brings his own stone to the structure of the common good; a man who participates actively in making visible the Kingdom by using the many gifts he has received in service of the community.

The Oblate Brother has responded to the call of the Lord, and, after discernment of this call in concert with his superiors, he develops skills in one field or another, so as to make best use of his talents and place them at the service of the community and the mission.

Being is BEING one’s self

The real value of the Brothers’ vocation

Vatican II acknowledges the participation of every Christian in the Priesthood of Christ, and not just the ministerial priesthood⁷.

After Vatican II, religious orders were called to revisit the charism of their beginnings. Certain orders insisted on forming “fraternities” and on being called “brothers”. As for us, Oblates, our founder started by creating a society of priests

⁶Documentation OMI, May 2004.

⁷Lumen Gentium N°10 [The common priesthood].

(even though he would have liked to retain Brother Maur, who returned to a Trappist Monastery before Eugene founded the Congregation⁸). As soon as he received Brothers in the Congregation, he wanted a family spirit to reign in the relations between Fathers and Brothers.

Historically, the Chapter of 1966 transformed the identity of the Brother. The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 situated the true value of the vocation of brothers much higher than the tasks which they accomplished. These tasks were also seen more helpfully from the point of view of the apostolate. The Brothers, in fact, according to Father Gilbert, are missionaries:

1. by the witnessing of their lives (R. 18). It was well emphasized that their work brings them in close relationship with the daily lives of people. They are thus able to give a special witness of Gospel life and can exercise a very fruitful apostolate complementing that of the priests;
2. by prayer, especially due to the fact that now the Brothers can recite the Divine Office (in the vernacular) with the priests, and by their more intense participation in community concelebrated Masses;
3. by professional activities which are now more and more advanced due to higher education;
4. by activities that are directly pastoral⁹.

In 1985, Father Fernand Jetté described the conditions under which the Brothers can be a richness for the Congregation:

- They must be men who possess a real human constancy and maturity.
- They must be men of Faith and complete generosity.
- They must be men animated by a real missionary spirit.
- These men must have at heart to develop their competence in the service that is confided to them.

⁸Letter of 28 October 1814.

⁹Synthèse de l'histoire des frères Oblats dans *Vie Oblate Life* N°50 1991.

He concluded: You are religious . . . You are apostolic men . . . you participate in the unique priesthood of Christ . . . You cooperate in your own way – that is to say as collaborators with the priest – to reconcile everything in Christ.¹⁰

This is how the Chapter of 1998 defines the Oblate Brother: *“the vocation of the brother recalls us all to our consecration as religious. In the light of what we said about evangelization, we can see how the brother’s vocation is both real and relevant. Through a life of apostolic activity, he evokes the primacy of mission. Through a life of professional activity, he is clearly involved in the world. He participates fully in evangelization which leads to and finds fulfillment in the Church’s celebration of the sacraments. The Chapter understands that the brother has a special identity and stands on his own two feet as a religious; he is not defined in function of the priest’s ministry. Moreover, the presence of brothers enriches the life of our communities keeping us all close to the daily life of the people.”*¹¹

This completes Rule 7c: *“Oblate Brothers share in the common priesthood of Christ. They are called to cooperate in their own way in reconciling all things in him (cf. Col. 1:20). Through their religious consecration, they offer a particular witness to a life inspired by the Gospel.*

*Brothers participate in the missionary work of building up the Church everywhere, especially in those areas where the Word is first being proclaimed. Missioned by the Church, their technical, professional or pastoral service, as well as the witness of their life, constitute their ministry of evangelization.”*¹²

The Mazenodian vocation

In the image of our Founder, the Oblate Brother, like everyone who lives by the Mazenodian charism, is drawn to live an experience of Christ

¹⁰Circular of Fernand JETTÉ, N° 293, 1985.

¹¹Acts of the 33rd General Chapter, EPM N°25.

¹²Rule N° 7c

the Savior, to be leaven in the dough which, after having experienced the total and liberating love of the Savior for him, draws others to have the same experience.

Religious life reminds us of the importance of the gratuitous gift of God; the Oblate Brother emphasizes the absolute necessity of the religious life for every Oblate. Like every religious, he chooses to let himself be grasped by the Word, to the very depths of his being; this in turn allows him to trust and, with God, to invent his own future and to be a “dynamo” for the mission.

Brotherhood in mission

The mission is confided to the community, and this task is communal before it is personal. This means that we accomplish our mission not only by words and works, but also, and most of all, the quality of our lives. Today, in our individualistic world, the ability to live as brothers in community is truly a sign of God’s presence.

Brotherhood is a path, an essential dimension, of the very nature of Christianity. The Founder gave us the example from the time of his early Lenten sermon of 1813: “*my brothers, my dear brothers, my respectable brothers . . .*” until his spiritual testament: “*practice among yourselves charity, charity, charity. . .*”¹³

A witness of Charity

During a catechesis which followed the 1994 Synod of Bishops, John Paul II firmly underscored the specific contribution of the Brothers’ vocation in these terms: “These religious are called to be *brothers of Christ*, deeply united with Him. ‘The firstborn among many brothers’ (Romans 8, 29); *brothers to one another*, in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; *brothers to everyone*, in their witness to Christ’s love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; *brothers for a greater brotherhood in*

the Church.”¹⁴. In other words, he reminds us that we are all brothers in Christ.

Sent

The Brother lives his religious vocation as one who is “sent”. He is essentially a man who receives his mission from Christ by way of his Superiors. He fulfills that mission by membership in an apostolic community “*of priests and brothers, united to God by vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor.*”¹⁵ Throughout history, the Brothers have shown themselves to be missionaries by their way of being in the world.

Service of the Word made flesh

One of the aspects of priestly service can be translated by “service of the Word. The Brother’s service, as well, is a **service of the Word made flesh**. That was the kind of service rendered by Mary. In some way, it was in her that the Word took on hands and feet: the hands which worked in Nazareth. The feet which trod the dusty road from Galilee to Jerusalem. A young brother had this to say: “*My vocation gave me a kind of ‘physical expression’ of the call I had received: to put my head, my hands my feet entirely at the service of one task alone which is that of responding to the manifold calls of the community and of the mission.*”¹⁶

Certain Brothers bring their contribution by their work with people; they get through to the mentality of people. In our world marked by materialism, many are the Brothers who are a living testimony to the dignity of the worker, who dominates his work rather than being dominated by it, and who cannot become a robot at the service of productivity.

In taking Mary as a model who kept all things in her heart (Luke 2:52), the Brother has the role of a confidant. Many young Oblates speak of

¹³Note from the Lenten sermon of 1813 and the spiritual testament of Eugene de Mazenod.

¹⁴*Documentation OMI*, May 2004.

¹⁵CC & RR N°1

¹⁶*Dictionary of Oblate Values*, Brothers, p. 47.

the Brother cook or the Brother mechanic who was their confidant during their studies: *“I went to him to speak of what I was going through.”*¹⁷

The Brother should not be relegated to the role of a laborer or of a hidden servant. His closeness to people, sharing with them, is a prophetic way that his simple encounters can quite often allow him to work at the threshold of pastoral ministry.

A bonding point

We recall Normand PROVENCHER’S document, in which he quoted John Paul II, in an audience of January 12, 1980. We can say that the activities of the Brothers can be considered at the *“bonding point between human reality and Church reality, between the kingdom of people and the kingdom of God.”*¹⁸

Father Santiago REBORDINOS sees in the words “bonding point” a field of action for the Oblate Brother, who cannot administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but can act as the leaven of reconciliation in a great many ways.¹⁹

We could say that the Brother is a bridge between ‘laymen’ and the clerical world. This is how a young Oblate Brother describes his experience: *“my life for the past five years, with all the young people we come across, convinces me of the importance of a mixed community, made up of priests and brothers, as a witness of life for the young. . . It has happened to me many times that he or she confided to me ‘it’s easier for me to speak to you just because you are not a priest.’”*²⁰

The Congregation is not complete if it does not have Brothers

Father Fernand JETTÉ acknowledged: *« for me, the Congregation is not complete if the brothers are missing”*, while recalling that our Constitutions show clearly that the Congregation gathers into apostolic communities priests and

brothers with mutual responsibilities in the task of evangelization.²¹ Today, I would say that a Province that has not had for the past five to ten years among its Oblates in first formation some candidates for the vocation of Oblate Brothers is in trouble. And there are numerous Units in our Congregation today that have no Brothers in first formation. This lack should make us ask the important question: what sort of Church are we announcing?

The specific missions that can be entrusted to the Brothers include a great number of functions and varied ministries according to the culture, the needs . . .

The Brothers are deeply involved in all of the apostolic works in which the Congregation’s mission is active: as much in all the material and technical work needed for the apostolate and the general services of the Congregation, as in the explicit proclamation of Jesus. Like their brother priests, they are open to be sent to the victims of discrimination, to those who are deprived of human dignity, to those who are voiceless or powerless, to those whose faith is failing, and to those who want to hear the Good News of Jesus. They are at the service of communities and undertakings that require their help to accomplish the mission of the Congregation.

Thus we find certain Oblate Brothers who put their professional talents as secretaries, mechanics, agricultural workers, doctors, directors of formation centers, etc., at the service of the mission which is confided to them, in certain places. The rich history of the Brothers and the multiplicity of tasks and ministries accomplished by them in the whole world show clearly the diversity and the complementarity of their apostolic mission in the Congregation. All of this reminds us that the identity of the Oblate Brother must not be separated from the Oblate identity which brings together in apostolic communities priests and brothers who have responded to the same call of Christ.

¹⁷Witness of a scholastic in Cameroon in 2008.

¹⁸Documentation OMI, May 2004.

¹⁹Dictionary of Oblate Values, Brothers, p. 47.

²⁰Brother Jacques LANGLET 2008.

²¹Fernand JETTÉ, «La vocation du Frère Oblat hier et aujourd’hui», dans *Vie Oblate Life*, 45, 1986.

The Witness of two Oblate Brothers

Excerpt from a statement of Brother Hervé GIVELET, on the occasion of his 50 years of religious life, December 11, 2004, in Yaoundé.

With so many graces and signs of affection, what have I given? Not much, for heaven's sake! Speak about my life as an Oblate Brother? You know me and, as you can see, what I am among you, I have been the same more or less during my 50 years of religious life. Surely, places, jobs, and especially faces have changed along with my assignments, but the people, all the people, wherever they are, live, work and suffer.

It is work that shaped me the most during the novitiate and the ten years I spent in France. At one time in France, each house of formation had at least ten Brothers who took care of the needs of the house; and in the workshops, the gardens and the fields, there reigned a great peace, in spite of the noise of the machines, as in the carpenter's shop; and the Brothers worked in silence all day long. We had to produce, to make the house run.

As for me, I was at Notre-Dame-de-Sion, a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary, a place of pilgrimage. There, I witnessed enthusiastic activity in a lively and joyful community made up of Fathers, Brothers and laity (all the personnel of the hotels) and workers. It was necessary, among

other things, to modernize the hotels which were somewhat old.

I later found this enthusiastic activity in Laos where we were two Brothers, Brother GAUDIN and I. With our own workers, fifteen of them, we were responsible for the material upkeep of the Minor Seminary: rice plantations, a vegetable garden, the electrical plant and the vehicles, etc. This lasted until our expulsion in 1976.

Then it was on to Chad: management of the diocesan garage and the drilling of wells; the latter brought me into the villages and let me become close to the local people. And in the end, it was the ministry of formation of our young Oblates where I have been for sixteen years and where, at times, we ask who is the formator and who is in formation... But what is sure is that, as far as our human formation of creatures in God's image is concerned, each one has something to contribute, the young and the old, thanks to the brotherhood which is created in the formation community, at the novitiate as well as at the Yves-Plumey House.

Statement of Bro. Jacques LANGLET, Fontenay-sous-Bois 2008

At the beginning, I joined the Oblates with the desire of becoming a priest... Let's say that at that time, that was how I considered a commitment to follow Christ in service of the Gospel. But, as I often tell myself, I would never have entered a Congregation of Brothers, such as, for example, the Brothers of Saint Gabriel...

It was during my studies at the scholasticate and especially during my regency year in Australia that the question came up: Oblate...yes, but as a Brother or a Father?

And then, what was truly a sort of call for me, something very clear in myself, was the fact that I asked for my first obedience as a Brother... I received that obedience for Fontenay-sous-Bois

with the specific assignment of restarting a place to welcome youth in Ile de France.

Five years later, I am the only Brother in the community; my confreres are all priests. I give witness not only of the Oblate brotherhood which unites us in a diversity of ministries, but especially in the complementarity of skills and charisms.

What I have been experiencing these five years with all the youth that we touch confirms for me the importance of a "mixed" community, priests and Brothers, as statement about life for the youth. It has happened to me several times that someone has confided to me that "it's easier for me to speak with you precisely because you are not a priest..."

**A bibliography on Oblate Brothers
in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
(Supplement)**

You will find the first part of a bibliography on Brothers in Vie Oblate Life, #50, by Yvon BEAUDOUIN, in 1991.

- 1991 BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., « Les Frères dans la congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de M.I. Survol historique. » *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), p. 3-26.
- 1991 BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., «Essai de bibliographie sur les Frères dans la cong. des O.M.I. ». *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), p. 27-38.
- 1991 TRÜMPER, Hajo, o.m.i., «La vocation de l'Oblat frère : conception et spiritualité. Réflexions à partir des CC. et RR. et des normes générales de la formation. » *Vie Oblate Life*, 50 (1991), 357-383.
- 1991 ZAGO, Marcello, o.m.i., "The priestly character of the Congregation", *OMI Documentation* #185, April 1992, 19 pages. (p. 11-12: "A charism shared by priests and Brothers").
- 1996 REBORDINOS, Santiago, o.m.i., "Brothers" in the *Dictionary of Oblate Values* (1996), pp. 47-70, under the direction of Fabio Ciardi
- 2003 GASPAR, Karl, cssr., "Brothers in communion with the poor", A paper presented at the National Convention of Religious Brothers of the Philippines, University of St. La Salle, Bacolod City, October 18 to 20, 2002. *OMI Documentation*, #250, January 2003, 15 pp.
- 2004 PROVENCHER, Normand, o.m.i., "A Theological Reflection on the Place of the Brothers in the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," *OMI Documentation*, #259, May 2004, pp. 5-16.
- 2004 BROTHERS' COMMITTEE, "The Oblate Brother in a clerical congregation," *OMI Documentation*, #259, May 2004, pp. 3-4.

DOCUMENTATION OMI is a non-offical publication
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
C.P. 9061, 00100 ROMA-AURELIO, Italie
Téléphone (39) 06 39 87 71 Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22
E-mail : information@omigen.org