

Acts of the 32nd General Chapter
(1992)

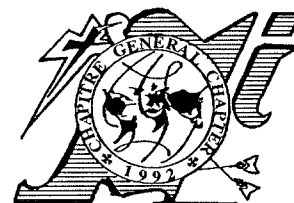
**WITNESSING
AS
APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY**



Acts of the 32nd General Chapter

(1 September - 1 October, 1992)

WITNESSING AS APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY



MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this booklet is to communicate to the whole Congregation the decisions, statements and messages of the 32nd General Chapter (Rome, September 1 - October 1, 1992). Some of them may significantly influence the future of the Institute, e.g. the document *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, the decision to facilitate a greater financial autonomy for all Provinces through a sharing of capital, and the decision to set up a post-Chapter committee to study the organizational structures at all levels of the Congregation.

The 1992 General Chapter also discussed a number of items that are not included here, as no specific decisions were made in these areas. They concern the Oblate Brothers, the De Mazenod Experience, St. Paul University, Justice and Peace ministry, and the Exchange of Personnel. The importance of these issues is recognized, and the General Administration will give them the necessary attention during the years to come.

In a sense, we are moving into a new phase of our missionary journey. Please God, may the path we walk be that of Jesus, so that we may truly be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world, witnessing as apostolic community.

1.

**ELECTION
OF
SUPERIOR GENERAL
AND
COUNCIL**

Through the process of election, in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment, the following Oblates were "called to the service of authority" (C 111) by the 1992 General Chapter

Superior General:	Marcello ZAGO (Italy - Laos)
Vicar General:	Daniel CORIJN (Belgium - South Africa)
1st Assistant General:	Ryszard SZMYDKI (Poland)
2nd Assistant General:	Guillermo STECKLING (Germany - Paraguay)
General Councillor for Europe:	Jean-Pierre CALOZ (Switzerland - France)
General Councillor for Canada:	Gerard LAPRISE (Canada)
General Councillor for U.S.A.:	Ronald CARIGNAN (U.S.A.)
General Councillor for Latin America:	Santiago REBORDINOS (Spain - Argentina)
General Councillor for Asia/Oceania:	Angelito LAMPON (Philippines)
General Councillor for Africa/Madag.:	Alexander MOTANYANE (Lesotho)

2.

MAIN DOCUMENT

**WITNESSING
AS
APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY**

WITNESSING AS APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

PRESENTATION

Dear Fellow Oblates,

Gathered together in General Chapter, we have lived an exceptional experience of brotherhood and grew in our pride at being Oblates. During this time we also heard an urgent call to become even more authentic as Gospel witnesses.

For several days we reflected and meditated on the Oblate mission and the witness that today's world expects from our apostolic communities.

Throughout the entire course of our work we stressed the importance of our Constitutions and Rules, for they are the primary inspiration for our apostolic life; and we have also reaffirmed the current validity of *Missionaries in Today's World* (Document of the 1986 General Chapter).

The 1992 General Chapter's reflection, presented here under the title *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*, is an invitation to re-read our main Oblate sources from the vantage point of the quality of our life with a view to improving our testimony at the core of today's world.

We present the result of our work under the following headings:

- I. The Present-day Need for Salvation
- II. Our Response: Apostolic Community and Witnessing
- III. The Implications of our Choice: Animation and Formation

The last part of this text treats of ways whereby laity are associated to our life and mission. Although this question is not directly linked to the main topic of our reflection, it did receive special attention because of its current importance.

In sending you the following pages, we would like to share the hope we bear in our hearts at the close of this Chapter. We are now called, all of us together, not only to ponder our witness, but also to express it in our daily lives.

Your Brothers of the General Chapter.

I. THE PRESENT-DAY NEED FOR SALVATION

1. As Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we strive always to be attentive to the voice of Christ who calls us through people's need for salvation — especially through that of the poor. In our world in radical transition, this cry is painfully urgent. What response are we to give under the Spirit's guidance?
2. Like the Founder we see so many ills that beset the world and the Church: secularist mentalities that leave no room for God, the breakdown of family life, an environment despoiled, millions of people in poverty and exploited by oppressive systems, discrimination against women, confusion among the young... These evils afflict many parts of our world; they are most evident, however, in the chorus of the powerless, of those bereft of hope and deprived of their rights, in the plea of so many persons desperately looking for meaning in life, a sense of belonging, more justice and equality, for something to believe in and for someone to trust. Theirs is a cry for salvation. The weariness, indeed the resignation of those who have given up all hope of ever having their voices heard, has touched us deeply.
3. Many factors explain the existence of these evils. First of all, these evils mirror the division and complexity that becloud our own hearts. One factor

deserves to be singled out, however, because of its particular anti-Gospel character: a wielding of power, egotistical and abusive, so contradictory to the way of Jesus Christ. This abuse is found not only in the economic and political domains; with sadness we note its occasional presence within the Church in the actions of some who are her ministers.

4. The net result is that both victims and oppressors see no hope of positive resolution, only the same temptations to fear and distrust, fundamentalism, self-serving ideologies, unhealthy individualism, bourgeois comforts, and a feverish quest for certitude in sectarian intolerance.
5. In spite of the truth of this, we see another side as well. Beneath and within all this there is, almost everywhere, the sincere search for God. Many walls have fallen and long-standing prejudices waned. The poor are getting organized: men, women and young people are struggling to assert their dignity. In the cry of today's poor we perceive the groans of birth rather than the moans of death. Christ is being born anew in a flawed world. Are we capable of serving this promise of hope?

II. OUR RESPONSE: APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY AND WITNESSING

A. Apostolic Community

6. Like our Founder before us, we seek to gather around the person of Jesus Christ so as to achieve solidarity of compassion, to become a single heart that can be food for the life of the world.
7. Therefore we choose community as a way whereby we are continuously evangelized and can be witnesses of the Good News in this graced moment of today's world. Recognizing that what we dream alone will remain always just a dream, but what we dream with others can become reality, we acknowledge the limits of the individual and the fruitfulness of community. We can be effective evangelizers only to the extent that our compassion is collective, that we give ourselves to the world not as a coalition of free lance ministers, but as a united missionary corps. To seek to achieve quality in our community life and in our being, with each other as Oblates, first of all, as well as with all persons of good will: that is the first task of our evangelizing activity.
8. It is not primarily for its own sake, then, that our common life exists: it is flesh for the life of the world. The community we create together around Jesus Christ is the banquet table to which we invite mankind. In a prophetic way it challenges the individualism found in today's society and the arbitrary use of power that is responsible for the plight of so

many poor people. At the same time our community life offers grounds for hope to this world which is struggling to overcome its disintegration and fragmentation. Like Christ's gentle invitation to his banquet, our community life speaks with the meekness of an authority that invites but never imposes or coerces.

9. We can build such apostolic communities only if we again choose as our centre the person of Jesus Christ, "who was chaste and poor and who redeemed mankind by his obedience" (C.12). In this choice we discover the freedom to love all our brothers and sisters and the courage to "bear witness to God's holiness and justice" (C.9). Thus animated by the Spirit we can issue an invitation to communion, a sign of the new world born of the Resurrection.
10. The community of the Apostles around the person of Jesus is the model for our life together. The person of Christ unites us in charity and obedience; this enables us to live again the communion of life and the common mission in his Spirit that the Twelve Apostles shared with him (C.3). From this perspective, it is clear that the objective of community is much more than merely gathering a group that functions well together; its aim is to establish interdependence and profound communion between its members.
11. On **the human level**, we are called to the accountability of mature adults. Such accountability is more than mere reporting our activities to a

Superior; it commits us to live in "a spirit of cooperation and initiative" (C.26) and calls us to genuine dialogue within community; it requires, moreover, that we mutually support each other, share with one another, and care for each other.

12. On **the faith level**, we are reminded that "we achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ" (C.31). We are therefore called to a deepening of our relationship with him, both as individuals and as communities. As we mature in our responsibility for each other, we become more transparent to each other, and thus we learn to share in depth our personal histories, missionary ideals, and lives of faith.
13. As we become "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), our communities will become more and more apostolic; by the quality of the witness they give, they will "bear fruit that lasts" (John 15:16).

B. Witnessing

14. In fact, "people today put more trust in **witnesses** than in teachers, in experience than in doctrine, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission..." (RM 42)
15. Christian witness is most truly manifest in the lives of those who experience Jesus Christ both personally and communally. Such persons have discovered the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46) and have found a true center for their lives; they

are truly free! By becoming **disciples** who follow Jesus, they can by that fact better share in his mission as **apostles**.

16. They truthfully witness to **their humanity** by practicing certain human qualities such as respect for others, generosity, and empathy. They are able to accept others in both their freedom and their uniqueness.
17. They truthfully live out **their Christian vocation** by witnessing to their personal experience of God's love for them and their conversion to Jesus Christ. Obedient to God, they commit themselves to the service of his Kingdom of justice and peace. Their role is not so much that of transmitting a doctrine as it is that of taking concrete steps towards peace based on justice and truth. They are men who live in God's presence, are united to him in prayer and joined in communion to all their brothers in a love that has God as its source.
18. They truthfully live **their commitment as religious** when their style of life corresponds to the values they profess by their religious vows and when they do their part in implementing the missionary enterprise of their community.

Life-long conversion renewed daily is indispensable if our witness is to be credible, free from inconsistency, contradiction or falsehood.

III. THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR CHOICE

A. Animation

19. Progress in such a demanding course requires that we regularly review and evaluate the quality of our witness in all the elements that comprise it: our community life, our living of the vows, our openness and hospitality, our life of prayer, our commitment to justice and peace, our ministry and mission, our use of money and material goods.
20. To help us on this course of action, the Chapter invites the General Administration to develop an instrument to evaluate the local community, an instrument that Provinces and Regions may then adapt for their own use. This instrument ought to include a selection of texts from Scripture, the Constitutions and Rules, as well as passages from *Missionaries in Today's World*. Finally, it ought to include suggestions for reflection and concrete measures that will enable us to assess the quality of our witness. In developing such an instrument, it would be good to bear in mind that, in their evaluation exercise, some communities might wish to involve lay persons who are closely associated with them.
21. Because the credibility of our witness depends in part upon our commitment to justice, the Chapter invites the General Administration during the next six years to challenge our commitment to the weakest in our midst. Among these we must not overlook those nearest to us: our brothers who are

ill, aging, or living in isolation; Oblates severely tested by difficult political or economic situations, and people in our employ.

22. So that we may continue to be alert and to advance in communion and interdependence, we must concretely and in truth commit our lot to the life of the group. The Chapter therefore makes the following recommendations:

23. 1) Let each Oblate re-examine the community dimension of his life: what priority does community have in his hierarchy of values? to what degree and at what level does he truly feel part of the community? what concrete actions affirm and strengthen that belonging?

2) Living community in terms of communion-interdependence requires a regular rhythm of meetings and retreats to "praise and thank the Lord, to assess the community's life, to renew its spirit and to strengthen its unity" (C.38). For an active missionary group, this presupposes community planning put into effect by each member adapting his personal program in consequence.

3) Financial sharing constitutes an essential dimension of our life in communion and interdependence: it is an incontrovertible test of our belonging to the community. We are asked to be open and ready to be accountable to the community for our use of money and goods, so that together we may grow in freedom and detachment.

4) Community living calls for the practice of discernment. Discernment enables us to establish the

truth within ourselves and to clarify our motivation. Hurts springing from our life or ministry are unavoidable and that is why the community plays a role in bringing about healing and reconciliation. When this service is not provided, the accumulation of misunderstandings destroys trust and renders community relationships superficial and formal.

5) The Chapter reaffirms that **district community** is an authentic and important expression of local community (C.38). This presupposes that it will adopt "a program of life and prayer best suited to its purpose and apostolate;" that "once set up, such a program is entrusted to the vigilance of the Superior;" that "regular meetings will be held..." and that there will be financial sharing. Current experiences are to be evaluated in terms of communion and interdependence; otherwise we may stagnate in the routine and mediocrity of groups that are district communities in name only.

6) This Chapter strongly reaffirms the importance of the local Superior. He is the pastor of his brothers. He brings the community together to evaluate its experience, to give itself objectives for its common life and mission and he ensures the implementation of the same. The quality of local Superiors is a determining factor for the Congregation's life. For this reason, the Chapter considers the formation of local Superiors to be a priority and it asks Provinces and the entire Congregation to develop appropriate instruments to render such formation effective.

7) Let local communities distinguish themselves more and more for their quality of life. Let them therefore be attentive to anniversaries and feasts, share the joys and pain of each member, be open to the life of the Congregation, practice hospitality, and take part in the life of the local Church.

8) Every community is called upon to develop a common missionary project. This could be a good means of bringing people together for reflection and missionary action.

24. The Chapter clearly expressed its firm insistence that we put into effect *Missionaries in Today's World*, that we be consistent in regard to our Constitutions and Rules and the vows we have made and which constitute us as witnesses, credible signs, and apostolic communities. That which animates, sustains and justifies this whole process is our missionary concern for the needs of the world. "Because we are missionaries, we need to listen to the cries of persons and groups who hope for salvation, to be challenged by these cries and to respond by our prayer and our availability, and to re-echo this cry wherever we hear it" (Superior General's Report to the General Chapter, no. 12). These words of Father General have resonated deeply within us. For this reason we choose to be close to the poor to whom we give our preference (C.5), while we do not shun the rich who often make decisions that affect the world's destiny. In solidarity with persons of goodwill, especially those, Christian and non-Christian alike, who are dedicated to the pursuit of justice and peace, we

commit ourselves to a dialogue with society. We take the risk of both seconding and challenging our world, of acknowledging the good within it, even as we also prophetically confront it. Such is our way of accompanying the world on its painful journey in search for reconciliation.

B. Formation

25. Witnessing as apostolic community has important implications for formation. Encounter with Christ and interiorization of values are at the heart of this life-long process.
26. The image that summarily expresses what we wish to say is that of Jesus the Formator who calls and gathers his disciples around himself, who builds bonds of unity and love between them, empowers them with his Spirit, and sends them out to be his witnesses (cf. Preface; CC.3 and 37).
27. Christ is still calling us today to follow Him and to bear witness to his life and mission. Hence we feel compelled to emphasize the present reality of his call, his invitation to follow him, and the urgent need of being credible in the service of his mission.

— Vocations

28. The vocations ministry is not optional: "Jesus never ceases to call people to follow him and to proclaim the Kingdom" (C.52). While we share

with every Christian the same baptismal vocation, we are also convinced that God calls us to the specific vocation that is ours as sons of Eugene de Mazenod (MTW 146).

29. We believe in our missionary and religious vocation; and confident in the generosity of the young people of today, we declare that they have the right to hear the call to be Oblate missionaries.
30. To make this call of Jesus heard is an integral part of an apostolic community's mission. We accomplish this by the joy and generosity of our lives (MTW 151). We carry this out by setting up appropriate structures of welcome for candidates and assigning personnel for discernment and accompaniment of those who are seeking God's will in their lives. Can a Province without such provisions still call itself missionary?
31. Practical lines of action...
 - make youth a priority in all our ministries: without the young we have no future.
 - for attracting vocations, deeds and witness speak louder than words.
 - stress vocations in public celebrations of the liturgy; not limit ourselves to mentioning vocations only once a year.
 - let local communities invite young men to "come and see" our way of life.
 - present our Oblate family as a Congregation that is international in character and made up of priests and Brothers.

- accompany possible future candidates and begin an initial discernment.
- examine ourselves as individuals and as a community with regard to what we are concretely doing to foster vocations.
- alert our Christian communities to calling forth candidates from their ranks.

— First Formation

32. Witnessing as apostolic community requires that initial formation help the young Oblate become a disciple and a man of community.

A disciple is a person who is called to follow Jesus and to be schooled by him. A man of community learns to share what he is and what he has and places his friendship and God-given talents at the service of all (C.39).
33. Among the various elements that comprise formation, we would like to underline the preparation for perpetual vows. We believe that for the young Oblate this is a privileged occasion to deepen his personal experience of Jesus Christ and of Christ's life, mission and message. It is also an occasion to develop his appreciation of our vocation as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a gift granted to the Church through Eugene de Mazenod.
34. To ensure the quality of this preparation, we suggest the following:
 - To provide a **De Mazenod Experience** espe-

cially adapted to those who are preparing for perpetual vows.

- It would be a kind of **second novitiate** that serves as a framework for a genuine faith experience and a deeper integration of the Oblate identity and missionary values.
 - This experience could be offered at the local level, or preferably at the regional level.
 - There would be an added advantage if such an experience were offered at the general level, so that the international character and worldwide mission of our Oblate family could be lived. Though aware of the difficulties that such an undertaking must face, we nevertheless feel that a pilot project could be tried in this sense.
35. What is important is our determination that there be a thorough preparation for perpetual vows so that our young Oblates may become "mature religious, capable of carrying on the Oblate mission" (C.50).
36. Other practical suggestions:
- The content of initial formation must reflect the needs of our mission.
 - Adequate time and energy must be dedicated not only to academic formation but also to spiritual formation.
 - Train Oblates in formation to take care for and share the material goods at their disposal and to use money wisely.
 - The exchange of Oblates in first formation between Provinces and Regions for a fixed peri-

od of time can promote the learning of languages and knowledge of other Oblate contexts. This suggestion is also relevant for formators.

— Ongoing Formation

37. Constitution 47 perfectly expresses what ongoing formation is and its importance for witnessing as apostolic community:
- "Formation is a process which aims at the integral growth of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and develop into the persons we are called to be. Formation involves us in an ever-renewed conversion to the Gospel and a readiness to learn and to change in response to new demands."
38. Practical lines of action:
- establish a program of ongoing formation for Oblates during the five years that follow their first obedience.
 - encourage every Oblate to continue enriching his spiritual and intellectual life according to a planned and regular pace.
 - that we accompany Oblates at key moments of their lives: when they begin their pastoral ministry, when changing apostolate, when approaching retirement age.
 - give special attention to affective growth and achieving sexual maturity.
 - recall the necessity of direction for progress in the spiritual life.

NEW FORMS OF ASSOCIATION WITH THE LAITY

39. As witnesses in apostolic community we stand at the heart of today's world. Thus our relationship with lay persons is a priority for the future of our Congregation and our religious life. With this in mind, we want to reaffirm the value and importance of Chapter IV of *Missionaries in Today's World*: "Mission with the Laity". We invite each Oblate to re-read this chapter in view of better appropriating it and of drawing inspiration therefrom for his activity.
40. A new reality is becoming evident: families, married couples, single people, and young people wish to be more closely united with us and manifest a special commitment to our charism. Various forms of association already exist in all the Regions of the Congregation. This relatively new phenomenon is a **sign of the times**. We are not the owners of our charism; it belongs to the Church. And so we are happy to see that lay persons who are called by God want to share it.
41. We already know from experience that such a sharing in our life and mission is a source of life, dynamism, and fecundity for both Oblates and lay persons alike. In a spirit of creativity and concerted action we will continue to explore structures for communion that are at the service of the mission.
42. Where these forms of association already exist, they are a positive influence on the faithfulness of

persons and communities to the Gospel. They therefore affect the quality of our witness and reveal a new facet of the Church. Together we are in a more credible way prophets of Christ's Passover; from this Passover a world based on the equality and dignity of each human person is born.

43. We are aware that it is premature to give a formal and definitive structure to these forms of association. There are different modes of sharing the Oblate charism. The term "association" allows sufficient flexibility to integrate the various forms that already exist as well as others that may yet arise.
44. The Chapter encourages these initiatives and offers the following guidelines:
 - 1) That each Province/Delegation name one person or, better still, a group of Oblates and lay persons, whose task will be to promote association between Oblate communities and laity.
 - 2) Encourage Oblates to meet laity, not only to work with them but also to share what animates us both: rootedness in the same baptism, the experience of living the same charism of the Church in a common missionary vision.
 - 3) That we be attentive to the aspirations of lay persons; these aspirations are often more comprehensive than our response. Let us call, invite, and challenge laity to share the Oblate charism and welcome those who express the desire to do so.
 - 4) That we foster and develop the various forms of association that already exist and that we encour-

age new forms which are adapted to different local settings, always safeguarding the essential elements of the Oblate charism and respecting the specific vocation of the laity.

5) That at the provincial, regional and Congregation levels we establish means to exchange information and share experiences (e.g. newsletters, meetings, congresses, etc.) and that we remain informed about what other religious institutes and congregations are doing in this field.

6) That we ensure an appropriate formation for Oblates and lay persons, and for local communities (e.g. the practice of personal and communal discernment, knowledge of the Oblate charism, the life of the Founder, the Oblate tradition, etc.).

7) The fact that this is basically a communitarian endeavour should not prevent us from giving full value to personal initiative. Without the conversion and commitment of each individual Oblate, we risk missing an opportunity given to us by the Spirit.

In this exploratory moment that we are living in the Church, we are called to openness and mutual trust, aware that the time is more than ripe for communion and sharing.

CONCLUSION

45. Mary Immaculate is the Mother of our apostolic community. She brings to us the faith and courage that marked her life from Nazareth to the upper room in Jerusalem. Mary constantly invites us to deepen our personal intimacy with Jesus. At Calvary he gave us to her as sons. She challenges us to care for each other as brothers and to love the people to whom we are sent to proclaim the Good News. Mary is our model in her commitment to the values of the Kingdom and in her unique witnessing in the midst of her Son's first community.

3.

**OTHER STATEMENTS
AND
MESSAGES**

I. The Anniversary of 500 years of Evangelization in the Americas

Motivated by the Anniversary of 500 years of Evangelization in the Americas, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, joined together in General Chapter, make the following statement:

1. As Christians we believe in the seeds of life and hope which have taken root and continue to flourish in the experience of our peoples, for the good of the entire continent, without hiding the reality of death which has always been present in their conquest and subsequent history. We recognize and support the authenticity of the challenges made by the indigenous peoples after 500 years of oppression and evangelization with its successes and failures. But rather than dwell on the mistakes committed in the past, we want to insist more on the structural situations of social, economic and political injustice and marginalization which even TODAY on this continent, the majority of whose people are considered to be Christian, our brothers and sisters belonging to indigenous and Afro-American cultures continue to suffer.
2. As Missionaries of the poor, we commit ourselves to the non-violent movements and organizations with which the poor themselves try to gain control over their future. Recognizing their human rights

organizations as "vehicles of authentic gospel values" (MTW, 81), we support their efforts to defend their shattered dignity and the forgotten rights of the aboriginal peoples in the Americas.

3. We denounce with indignation inspired by the Gospel the hypocrisy with which the influential and powerful manipulate the religious sense of the people, snatching from the poor the Good News of Christ the liberator to impose a religion of passivity and resignation. This undoubtedly is one of the greatest damages which has been done to our people during these years.
4. We pay homage to the witnesses who have given their lives for the wholistic development of these peoples and we encourage our Oblate brothers who are missionaries among the indigenous and Afro-American peoples and who, with their witness of insertion and inculturation, continue to stimulate a missionary spirit throughout the Congregation. We encourage other Oblates to accompany the indigenous peoples "with humility and trust in their efforts to make the Gospel their own and to express it in their culture" (MTW, 59).
5. For the future we propose to:
 - * collaborate actively in the task of recovering the historical memory of their cultures;
 - * empower them to become the authors of their own development;
 - * help them defend their ancestral rights, using all the Gospel inspired means at their disposal;
 - * permit ourselves to be taught by the indigenous peoples, so deeply respectful of Nature, a new

relationship between Humanity and its surroundings;

- * favor the formation of indigenous churches with their own characteristics, liturgical expressions, ordained ministries and ministries entrusted to the laity, catechetics and theology;
- * assume the pastoral commitments related to agrarian issues, especially land ownership, in our different countries, recognizing the vital and sacred value that the earth has for the Amerindian peoples and supporting an ongoing dialogue with them (*Working Paper of Santo Domingo*).

II. Elderly Oblates

To express its strong support for Oblates who are aged or infirm, the 1992 General Chapter unanimously agreed to communicate the following message:

For an Oblate, witnessing in Apostolic Community is a reality which never ends. "Mission does not cease, it merely changes", said Fr. Zago in his report on the Congregation to the 1992 General Chapter.

For many Oblates, this change is to a less active ministry due to age or infirmity. In light of this fact, the Chapter urges Provinces and Delegations to provide Oblates, as they grow in age, the time and opportunity to adapt themselves, in thought as well as ministry, to a new stage of life.

To those Oblates who are unable to minister due to age or infirmity, we, the Chapter members, extend our prayers and fraternal support for their continuing role

as witnesses in apostolic communities, and we sincerely thank them for their years of service to the Church and the Congregation.

We also affirm those who care for their brother Oblates, and encourage them to take advantage of opportunities to grow in knowledge about the changes brought on by age or illness.

Finally, we express our thanks to our own parents and the parents of all Oblates. Even now, when many of our parents are aged, they continue to be a support for our Oblate vocation. May those of our parents who have gone before us rest in peace.

III. Social Communications and Media

- *Whereas the media have a determining influence on the contemporary person;*
- *Whereas the use of the media is increasingly seen as an integral part of evangelization;*
- *and taking into consideration the proposals of the International Oblate Congress on Communications held at Rome from September 17 to 26, 1991,*

the 1992 General Chapter:

1. requests that the Superior General and Council bring a special attention to the area of the media, and seek to develop appropriate resources within the Congregation;
2. supports the development of an international Oblate communication network;
3. requests that initial formation include an adequate

preparation in Media, not only as a technology, but also as a culture; and

4. requests that within this context, the place in the Congregation of CREC-AVEX (founded by Pierre Babin) be examined.

IV. Oblate Centers of Theological Studies

Whereas voices have been raised in the Chapter Assembly expressing concern that centers of theological studies and reflection should be maintained and strengthened in the Congregation,

the 1992 General Chapter resolves:

that the General Council member who holds the portfolio for formation be charged with supporting and encouraging the development of those centers (universities, schools of theology, or seminaries) which are under Oblate responsibility.

V. Association for Oblate Studies and Research (AOSR)

The AOSR "is a free association of Oblates actively interested in undertaking, promoting and coordinating research, study and exchange on the history, spirituality, mission and present life" of the Oblate Congregation. A brief written report on the nature and activities of the ten-year old Association was distributed to all Chapter members. Further oral explanation was given

in plenary session, especially around the two AOSR research projects entitled "Oblate Spiritual Values Yesterday and Today", and "Oblate Historical Dictionary".

The 1992 General Chapter

expresses its gratitude, appreciation and encouragement for what the Association for Oblate Studies and Research has already done and will continue to do for the spiritual animation of the Congregation.

4.

FINANCES AND SHARING

Introduction

Since Vatican II the understanding of Church as the universal communion of particular churches has been growing steadily. This communion finds its expression also in financial sharing as described in the Acts of the Apostles (4:32) and in responsible stewardship of material goods. The 1992 General Chapter took a number of important decisions in the field of finances and sharing within the Congregation.

I. Recommendations of the 1992 Chapter Committee on Finances

After having approved the financial report of the General Administration, the Chapter endorsed the following recommendations:

1. We recommend that the *General Finance Committee* develop an Oblate Sharing Directory which would indicate the procedures involved in applying for funds from the Oblate Sharing Fund, the Fernand Jetté Fund and sharing funds which are present in some Provinces. We further recommend that the General Finance Committee suggest specific procedures which can alleviate the difficulty of 'double funding'.

2. It is suggested to Father General and Council that the *General Treasurer* be authorized to con-

duct regular training sessions for treasurers at the regional level and to meet with Provincials and their financial advisors to advise them on sound financial management.

3. We recommend that the *General Formation Committee* reflect on the implementation of the request for training, during first formation, in the responsible use of money and accountability for expenditures, and that the requirement of financial training be inserted into the *General Norms for Oblate Formation*.

II. Toward Financial Autonomy within a context of Interdependence

The Constitutions and Rules call Oblate units to "be solicitous in sharing their resources" (R 15). A number of sharing funds do exist on provincial and general levels. These funds have been and continue to be both expressive of a sense of interdependence and beneficial to all concerned. Nevertheless, it is possible that they sometimes may promote dependence rather than financial autonomy.

The 1992 General Chapter drew attention to the continued need for animation and education in the responsible use of our resources by all Oblate units and each individual Oblate. Moreover, the Chapter felt that the time had come to broaden the vision of sharing within the Congregation in order to foster the "relative autonomy" (cf. C 75) of all Oblate units, within a context of solidarity and interdependence. The Chapter, therefore, made the following decisions:

1. The 1992 General Chapter commits itself to the principle of capital sharing and responsible stewardship within the Congregation.
2. The 1992 General Chapter mandates the Superior General in Council to create suitable means for the implementation of capital sharing and responsible stewardship with a view to promoting financial autonomy within the Congregation.

5.

**CONSTITUTIONS
AND
RULES**

**I. Changes decided by the 1992
General Chapter**

1. *New Rule 28 A*

The Chapter adopted the following Rule, to be included in our text after Rule 28:

“Several religious and secular institutes have links to the Congregation because of their origin or because of their spirituality. Each Province shall seek to strengthen those spiritual bonds, and, if possible, to establish concrete forms of apostolic cooperation, with all due respect for the autonomy of these institutes.”

2. *Constitution 75* (English version only)

The English translation of the first paragraph of Constitution 75 was changed to read:

“The Congregation has four levels of organization: local, provincial, regional and general. While the aim of the regional level is one of inter-provincial coordination and collaboration, the other three levels are governmental. Our unity of mind and heart is assured by effective communication and exchange both at and between the different levels.”

Note: since the English translation is not "official", the authorization of the Holy See is not required for this change to become effective.

3. Rule 102

A new paragraph is inserted between par. 1 and par. 2, so that par. 2 becomes par. 3. The new paragraph reads as follows:

"The special statute will also determine forms of accountability and the financial competency of the Delegation."

4. Rule 106

Added to the text is a new sentence, which becomes the second paragraph. It reads as follows:

"The same principles apply to those members of the Congregation who are entrusted with the collection and disbursement of funds."

5. Rule 135 (French version only)

Here the English text is the correct one. The third phrase reads:

"When a new Council takes office..."

The French text was therefore changed by the Chapter to read as follows:

"Quand un nouveau conseil entre en fonction..."

6. Rule 148

Paragraph 2 of this Rule, speaking about the Provincial Treasurer, was changed by the Chapter to read now as follows:

"He will respect the financial autonomy of local houses. In assisting local communities, he will promote a spirit of collaboration, accountability, exchange of information and sharing. The Provincial may delegate him to assist local communities in financial matters."

7. Rule 149

The first sentence of this Rule was changed to read now as follows:

"A Finance Committee is to be established at the Province and Delegation levels (cf. C 103). An Assistant Treasurer..."

8. Appendix to the Constitutions and Rules, Article 2

The Chapter decided to introduce suffrages for a former Superior General in the same manner as for the actual Superior General. The text reads now as follows:

"Each Oblate priest shall celebrate one Mass and each Brother attend Mass upon the death of the Superior General or of a former Superi-

or General, or of any member, novices included, of the Province to which he belongs. It is recommended that this Mass be a community celebration."

II. **Confirmation of Changes introduced to the Rules by the 1986 General Chapter**

Rule 119 states: "Any change in existing Rules which is approved by the Chapter is immediately effective. If the subsequent Chapter maintains the decision, the amendment is then inserted into the printed text of the Rules."

The 1986 General Chapter introduced a number of changes both in the Constitutions and in the Rules.

The changes in the Constitutions were approved by the Holy See on August 29, 1987.

As far as the 1986 General Chapter's changes to the Rules, the 1992 General Chapter:

- a) **ratified** - the changes made to Rules 3, 47, 81, 82, 90, 104, 112, 118;
 - the deletion of Rules 46, 48;
 - the addition of the new Rules 17A, 52A.

- b) **made an additional change** to Rule 49, which now reads:

"Temporary vows are made for one year at a time. The Superior General in Council may grant an indult to leave

the institute before the expiry of the vows."

- c) **called for** the French text of Rule 3 to be brought into better conformity with the English. The French text of Rule 3, paragr. 2, now reads:

"Partout les Frères participent a l'oeuvre missionnaire de la construction de l'Eglise, spécialement dans les territoires ou la Parole est proclamée pour la premiere fois. Envoyés par l'Eglise, leur service technique, professionnel et pastoral, tout comme le témoignage de leur vie constituent leur ministère d'évangélisation."

- d) **did not ratify** the interpretation of Rule 111. Experience has shown that while the principle of not having the same person counted twice is appropriate, the wording of the 1986 Chapter's interpretation is not appropriate and does not address the issue adequately. The Post-Chapter Committee on Structures will further pursue this matter.

6.

**ADMINISTRATIVE
STRUCTURES**

Introduction

- The Congregation has functioned with the present organizational structures since the 1972 General Chapter. However, its membership has decreased by approximately one third since then.
- Regional structures have evolved significantly since their establishment.
- A number of proposals were made to the 1992 Pre-Chapter Commission relating to these structures and questions raised concerning the effective functioning of some components.
- Requests have been made, in some instances, for the modification of certain structures.

In the light of these observations the 1992 General Chapter took the following decisions.

I. Chapter Decisions related to structures

1. *Representation at the 1998 General Chapter*

The 1992 General Chapter decided:

- to delegate to the Inter-Chapter Assembly of 1995 the right to determine representation at the 1998 General Chapter;
- to have the preliminary work on this issue

carried out by the Post-Chapter Committee on Structures.

2. Major Officials of the Congregation

The 1992 General Chapter decided:

- Until the next General Chapter, and pending the report of the Post-Chapter Committee on Structures, Rule 135 which calls for the Superior General with his Council in plenary session to appoint the Major Officials, will be understood to mean that the Major Officials need not necessarily be persons distinct from those who hold elected office on the General Council.
- The Superior General with the consent of his Council in plenary session may, if appropriate, establish other Major Offices (see C 121).
- A report on any changes introduced in the Major Offices will be presented and discussed at the Inter-Chapter Assembly in 1995.
- The Post-Chapter Committee on Structures will take into consideration the results of the discussion held at the 1995 Inter-Chapter Assembly when preparing its report for the 1998 General Chapter.

II. Post-Chapter Committee on Structures

The General Chapter also decided to have a Committee set up in order to evaluate, during the next six years, all the organizational structures of the Congregation.

1. Mandate to the Superior General in Council

The 1992 Oblate General Chapter mandates the Superior General and Council, acting collegially, to establish a Post-Chapter Committee on Structures with the following terms of reference.

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 The composition of the Committee

The Committee should be:

- a relatively small committee;
- with the right to consult other Oblates or resource persons;
- and be directly accountable to the Superior General and Council.

2.2 The Committee's tasks

The Committee's tasks are:

- to examine the present organizational structures at all levels of the Congregation; and
- to prepare appropriate recommendations to be examined for decision by the 1998 General Chapter.

2.3 The modalities of functioning for the Committee

2.3.1 PHASE ONE

Through a process of study and consultation, to establish the basic values,

principles and criteria that are to characterize our organizational structures.

This process, taking into account the decisions and recommendations of the 1992 General Chapter, would include:

- an analysis of our present structures;
- a consultation of Oblates at different levels of the Congregation regarding their experience of our structures;
- a review of the proposals for change already submitted;
- the elaboration of a preliminary "basic rationale statement" including:
 - * expectations of the various organizational levels in the Congregation;
 - * specific responsibilities for life and mission involved at each level;
- an exchange with the Superior General and Council on the results of the above.

2.3.2 PHASE TWO

The drafting of a document for the 1995 Inter-Chapter Assembly. This document should include:

- in the form of proposals, points on which the participants would be asked to pronounce;
- in the form of questions, points the participants would be asked to clarify;
- the Committee should also prepare a working Document on "Representation at the 1998 General Chapter" for action at the Inter-Chapter Assembly.

2.3.3 PHASE THREE

At the 1998 Inter-Chapter Assembly,

- to report on its activities thus far;
- to submit its proposals to the Assembly for its approval or revision;
- to receive clarification of specific questions;
- to share its future plans and receive advice from the Assembly;
- to present for approval the proposal for representation at the 1998 General Chapter.

2.3.4 PHASE FOUR

Consultation of the Congregation, including:

- preparation of an adapted text of Part III of the Oblate Constitutions

- and Rules along with an appropriate rationale statement;
- distribution throughout the Congregation of these documents along with an evaluation instrument;
- analysis of the evaluation data;
- an exchange with the Superior General and Council on the results of the above;
- preparation of a revised text to be presented to the Pre-Chapter Commission for the 1998 General Chapter; and
- assuring that suitable prior arrangements are made with the Holy See regarding the approval in principle of those matters requiring its intervention.

2.4 The Committee's time line

1993 Establishment of the Committee
 1993-94 Phase One
 1995 Phases Two and Three
 1996-97 Phase Four
 1998 General Chapter

2.5 The Committee's budget

The financing of this project is the responsibility of the General Administration and

should be a line item in its extraordinary budget.

In developing the Committee's budget, the following items should be considered:

- travel and meetings
- consultancy fees if necessary
- secretarial assistance
- translating of text
- xeroxing and printing
- postage

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION:

**FATHER GENERAL'S
CLOSING HOMILY**

Closing of General Chapter - 1 October 1992
St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Patroness of
Missions,

Homily by Fr. Marcello Zago, O.M.I.

(in French)

1. The closing of our Chapter coincides with the feast of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. This saint, patroness of missions together with St. Francis Xavier, reminds us that the quality of life exerts an influence on the life of the Church and of humanity, an influence greater still than activity. For mission, what we are matters more than what we do.

Thérèse's quality of life found its source in her experience of the Lord, expressed in a prayer that permeated her whole existence, also in a boundless confidence, one similar to that of a child for its parents. The quality of her life found its source as well, we should not forget, in her sensitivity for missions: she wanted to be the heart of the Church, and in fact she truly was. She wanted to be love. She was one sole heart with Christ, and therefore with humanity.

During the Chapter we emphasized that to be missionaries in today's world we must be witnesses in apostolic communities. We are witnesses by the coherence

between our being and our action, between our life and our words. Still more so are we witnesses if we reflect Christ who calls us to follow him as disciples and to share in his mission. We become witnesses in proportion to our identifying with him (cf. CC 2 and 15).

(in English)

2. During the Chapter we have discerned that in order to be missionaries in today's world we are called to witness in apostolic community. We commit ourselves to move in that direction during the coming years. Even though each one is responsible for his own life, we are called together to live the same charism and witness together in apostolic community. The apostolic community is a way of being evangelized and so becomes a sign of God's Kingdom accomplished by the Good News of Christ. "By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign" (C 37; cf. C 11). So "we fulfil our mission in and through the community to which we belong" (ib.). Community is not only a support and a means for our mission: it is itself mission, because it makes the risen Christ present and visible in today's world; it is a sign of God's Kingdom.

This community, built up by the presence of Christ, is apostolic. We come together both "to follow Christ and to share his mission" (C 1). Oblate community life, like the heartbeat, is a call to a continuous twofold movement. We return to the brotherhood of the community and are sent out again as missionaries. Both movements are forms of witness.

(in Spanish)

3. Witnesses in apostolic community. Authenticity of life in Christ and community commitment do not separate us from the people; instead they urge us to be present among them and to evangelize the poor. If we are not more engaged with the poor, it is because we are not sufficiently committed to the Gospel, because we are not sufficiently identified with Christ. Eugene de Mazenod is an example that shows us how witnessing in apostolic community and evangelizing the poor are well connected. His experience of Christ is what drove him toward community and service of the poor.

To live in this way as witnesses in apostolic community, we all need a new conversion, a first and ongoing formation more authentic and more centered on Christ the Savior and on gospel values.

(in Italian)

4. "Witnessing as apostolic community" was the central theme of the Chapter, a theme that expresses also the whole Congregation's commitment for the coming years, precisely in order to be missionaries in today's world. This will require formation and commitment on the part of everyone.

We are not however called to live these aspects of the Mazenodian charism all by ourselves. Now more than ever, the Spirit is calling other Christians to share this charism given to his Church. One of the Chapter's themes was precisely the sharing in the charism by other Christians through various forms of association or consecration. Faced as we are with a growing sensitivity

in so many countries, we are urged to promote and discern this participation so as to be witnesses together of Christ — members of one great community that shares the ideal and values transmitted by the Spirit through Eugene de Mazenod.

“People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in doctrine, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission” (RM 42). Mary gives us an example of this witness. She was blessed because she believed. She welcomed Christ with all her life, and for this reason is she missionary and the star of evangelization. To her we entrust the conclusions of our Chapter and the renewal of the whole Congregation. Under her protection we too commit ourselves so that we — as Oblates and associates — may become ever more witnesses in apostolic community.

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