

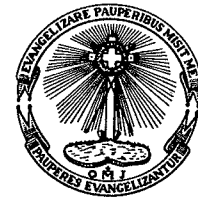
Acts of the 33rd General Chapter
(1998)

**EVANGELIZING THE POOR
AT THE DAWN OF THE
THIRD MILLENIUM**



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AT THE DAWN OF THE
THIRD MILLENIUM**



MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE
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INTRODUCTION

This little booklet is intended for every Oblate, a share in the fruits of the 33rd General Chapter of the Congregation (Rome, September 2nd - October 1st, 1998).

Several major decisions, fruits of the Spirit, shaped the unfolding of this Chapter. A new Superior General, Father Wilhelm Steckling, was elected, along with a new General Council, eight of whom are new members. Approval was given to the revision of Part III of the Constitutions and Rules dealing with the spirit and practice of government among Oblates. Official publication of the revised texts awaits approbation by the Holy See.

Two letters make up the heart of this booklet: one to the whole Congregation, the other to our lay associates. Together they give a good sense of what was in the minds and hearts of the Chapter members. They harvest fruit from recent Chapters, giving a growing sense of Oblate identity, called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ among the poor, in communities of disciples. Proper to this Chapter is a strong focus

on integral evangelization, in a world loved by God, but unequally shared by the human family. As letters they do not develop theses but inspire us to deepen and share with others the ecclesial charism recognized in the canonization of Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

In personal and community animation Oblates and associates might want to imitate these letters, putting into words their own experience of the Oblate charism, a profession of faith and hope for the new millenium.

1.

ELECTION OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL

Through elections held according to the prescriptions of our Constitutions and Rules, the General Chapter called the following Oblates to the service of authority:

Superior General	Heinz-Wilhelm STECKLING (Germany - General Administration) (Elected: September 16, 1998)
Vicar General	Eugene KING (Ireland - St. Joseph, Canada) (Elected: September 17, 1998)
1st Assistant General	Ryszard SZMYDKI (Poland - General Administration) (Elected: September 18, 1998)
2nd Assistant General	Baudouin MUBESALA (Congo) (Elected: September 19, 1998)

General Councillor for Europe	Clyde A. RAUSCH (U.S.A. - Scandinavia) (Elected September 22, 1998)
General Councillor for Canada	Ronald A. ROLHEISER (Canada - St. Mary's) (Elected: September 22, 1998)
General Councillor for U.S.A.	Thomas J. SINGER (U.S.A. - Central Province) (Elected: September 22, 1998)
General Councillor for Latin America	Loudeger MAZILE (Haiti) (Elected: September 22, 1998)
General Councillor for Asia/Oceania	Philippiah JESUNESAN (Sri Lanka - Jaffna) (Elected: September 22, 1998)
General Councillor for Africa/Madagascar	Jabulani Adatus NXUMALO (South Africa - Natal) (Elected: September 22, 1998)

2.

LETTER OF THE 1998 GENERAL CHAPTER TO THE OBLATES

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The "Letter of the 1998 General Chapter to the Oblates" which was written and voted on during the Chapter, received many amendments at the time of the final vote. For this reason the General Chapter authorized the Superior General in Council to complete the work of editing this letter.

The Chapter's Mandate addressed to the Superior General and his Council was voted on September 30, 1998, and reads as follows: "The 1998 General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate authorizes the Superior General In Council to finalize the text of the Letter to the Congregation. If necessary, this could entail the appointment by the Superior General in Council of a post-Chapter editing committee."

The Superior General in Council did in fact establish an editing committee which revised the Chapter's text, taking into account the amendments that had been made.

The General Chapter's text, as revised by the editing committee and subsequently approved by the Superior General in Council, reads as follows:

EVANGELIZING THE POOR AT THE DAWN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Brothers,

1. This Chapter is drawing to a close. It is the first since the canonization of our Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, a man committed to the Church, who brought new energy to the work of evangelization. Now, at the dawn of the third millennium we in turn are sent to bring the Gospel to our world. The intent of this letter is to share with you key elements from the main theme which marked us, and the points which require our attention in the coming years.

We will do this around three major themes:

- I. Our world, a world loved by God**
- II. Our response - to evangelize**
- III. The challenges to us, as Oblates**

I. OUR WORLD, A WORLD LOVED BY GOD

2. Looking at the world within which we live and work, our perspective as Oblates is far from neu-

tral. Rather, as our Constitutions state: *"Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood."* (C.4) We wish to look at the Church and the world from the perspective of the poor. (Cf. MTW, 16) It is with the eyes of Christ that the missionary looks upon the poor whose life he shares. Ultimately we wish to see the world as God sees it.

3. God loves the world (Cf. Jn 3:16); Christ saves it; the Holy Spirit lives in it. In the heart of the world the presence of the Kingdom of God becomes a reality through the Church. The Spirit of God teaches us to love this world. So how could it be an alien place for us?

4. At the same time, we see that our world is a mixed reality.

On the one hand, we find in it rich springs of generosity, sincerity, creativity, and imagination. A positive and growing interdependence pushes us to break down age-old divisions and invites us to live in a new solidarity with people all over the world. Daily we are witnessing progress in knowledge and technology. News is accessible immediately all over the world; modern media is making education available to millions of people; and men and women from all parts of the earth are able to meet, speaking with each other, and getting to know each other. This, as we so often mentioned at the Chapter, is the positive side of globalization,

5. On the other hand, we see that the world is also

full of infidelity, injustice, and individualism. The image that spontaneously comes to mind is that of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem that he loved. Globalization, when driven by a neo-liberalism able to ignore virtually all frontiers, moral rules and spiritual values, results in more and more people being marginalised. New forms of poverty are arising and with them the disastrous consequences of wars and massive migration.

We can no longer celebrate the dignity of the human person without being conscious of a deep tear within our communal fabric; we can no longer offer incense to the unlimited progress of science without thinking about the sub-human conditions within which the majority of the world's people lives. We can no longer benefit from technological progress without denouncing its negative underside, namely, the loss of interiority, the degradation of women, the exploitation of children, the ever-growing opposition between rich and poor, and the explosion of violence in our world.

Moreover, the problems of countless young people need to receive special attention. Many sink deeper into poverty and become alienated. They are jobless, and seeing no meaning to life they are without hope for the future.

6. Faced with thousands and thousands of women and men who, for whatever reason, do not know Jesus Christ, nor even the ways of God — seeming to live without God — we experience a certain impotence and weakness. We recognize our limits,

our poverty, and vulnerability and can be tempted to give up. Just like our confused sisters and brothers, we too are waiting, we too are searching for salvation. However, the cross of Christ is planted at the centre of the world just as it stands in the centre of our lives. The cross reveals to us the unceasing love of God for us, whose confidence in us never runs out. God's plan for us humans is, indeed, ambitious.

7. This vision of the world is a reminder for us: our charism drives us to present the cross of Christ to the world, to proclaim that the one who is rejected — the crucified, poor, unnoticed, insignificant — is the cornerstone of the final triumph.

As Oblates, guided by the Spirit, mindful of both the goodness and sin in our world, we stand with the poor and the abandoned. We provide a voice for the wisdom of the poor in dialogues and forums where our world takes shape according to the plan of God.

8. If God continues to believe in women and men, how can we despair of them? Humanity, stands tall, alive, free, at peace within itself, at peace with creation, and somehow at rights with God. These are the people in our neighbourhoods, cities, and towns; everywhere giving us evidence that God still believes in us.

As witnesses to, and prophets of, God's love, we want to be men of hope, reflecting the attitude of a God who never abandons his people. As our Con-

stitutions so aptly put it: *"Members of a prophetic Church ... we announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born of his resurrection."* (C. 9)

Hence the challenge is to work with thousands of women and men towards something that might well be called solidarity on a global scale. This Chapter, even as it asks us to take stock of both the real pain that so often marks humanity today and of our limits, also brings to life in us an immense hope.

II. OUR RESPONSE - TO EVANGELIZE

9. *"Woe to me if I do not evangelize!"* (1 Cor. 9, 16)

Through his Word, Jesus Christ, God wishes to reveal himself to the world as its Saviour. We are called to cooperate with Him in this endeavour of love. We have heard this call and are sent to announce the Good News to the most abandoned. How do we do this? How do we creatively respond to today's situations and emerging cultures?

10. Experience and missionary practice in different contexts, convince us that in order to evangelize others we must, first of all, be evangelized through the word of God and contact with the poor. Simply put, we must first experience in our own lives the salvation we announce to others. A decision to

evangelize, as servants of the Gospel, requires attention to our own conversion.

11. In speaking of evangelization, a word that comes urgently to the fore is **dialogue**.

Dialogue means listening and speaking with attention to and respect for the other. It also means welcoming and accepting the other in his and her history and truth. Beyond this, dialogue leads us on ways of self-disclosure, going to the heart of who we are. To dialogue is to tell each other what we most cherish, what is most precious to us, and what inspires us. To dialogue, as Scripture puts it, is to be ready to give an accounting for our hope to anyone who asks it of us. (1 Peter 3, 15).

In this dialogue, Christians are led to eventually name Jesus Christ whom they love and who gives meaning to life. At the same time, however, they recognize and welcome that which is giving life to the other.

To enter into genuine dialogue presupposes being close, with a certain sharing of life, and the acceptance of the insights and questions of one's contemporaries. This supposes a common language, in more than one sense of the word common. Thus, for example, the need for precisely such a common language is what led our Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, to choose to preach in the dialect, the *patois*, of the poor. He understood that, if one wants to preach in a manner that is understood, one must have a language in common with the people. That challenge remains with us.

It is the community, the Church, that evangelizes

12. The Oblates work as a community, and in common with many others who proclaim the Gospel.

The first place where dialogue is necessary is among ourselves, in our own community, where we evangelize one another. A word is only true if it in fact reflects a truth within our own lives. Our conviction that evangelization is not the work of lone rangers, but is a community effort, of the Oblates and the entire Christian community, is grounded in the Gospel and our missionary practice.

It is the Church who evangelizes, and sends us forth on mission. We enter the ongoing dialogue between Church and world. We want that dialogue to be open and confident, knowing full well that our word is less credible when the wider ecclesial community and our own are perceived in a negative way.

In the Church, true dialogue finds its culmination in the Eucharist which is the summit of evangelization. For in the Eucharist, the marvellous exchange between God and humanity attains its plenitude.

13. The Church who evangelizes is the people of God including all its members — laity, priests, and religious. It is urgent that we accord to the laity their full responsibilities. It is equally urgent that we help form them for the mission. This must be a priority. Everyone who is baptized is called to be an evangelizer. Today we realize ever more clearly how the

laity are evangelizing us, how they are helping us to better understand the life of the poor and abandoned, since they often are closer to the poor. Moreover, by their vocation, the laity stand in the front line of the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, even as they are found in the new Areopagi of the mission such as the mass media. Within the mission of the laity, youth have a special role to play, particularly in ministering to each other.

14. Ecumenism is also an important element in evangelization. We must continue journeying down the road of ecumenism sparing no effort to foster Christian unity. In the new millennium, may our mission to evangelize fulfil the desire of Jesus: "That they all may be one." (Jn 17:21).

Integral evangelization

15. "*He has sent me to evangelize the poor.*" (Luke 4, 18). To evangelize is to announce the Good News of God's reign, a reign of justice, love, and peace. Our experience in mission teaches us that our evangelizing, must be integral: that is, that we proclaim explicitly Jesus Christ, that our lives witness to what we preach, that we be really involved in the transformation of the world. (Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22,31,42) Our evangelizing flows from all that we are, and what we say and do. Evangelization is as much a question of **being** the Good News as of **speaking** the Good News.

16. Rule 9 of our Constitutions and Rules states that "*Action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization.*" Hence, being engaged in the struggle for justice and peace is a non-negotiable part of the ministry of every Oblate. Granted that charitable deeds are always necessary, we know full well that commitment to justice, which is another expression of Christian charity, requires that we tackle the causes of poverty, injustice and suffering in the fabric and structure of society. This goes beyond a reductionist interpretation of the Good Samaritan parable, to clearing the roads of the world of all bandits. Evangelizing the poor requires not only our presence in hospital caring for the injured but also tackling the causes of suffering at their very source.

Daring for the Gospel

17. The urgency of the mission should make us daring in opening new ways of evangelization. In the Preface of our Rules, our Founder states: "*We must spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire*". Let neither faint hearts nor fear hold us back. Let us have no fear to find new means to answer new needs.

We need to have confidence both in the One who calls us and in our Oblate vocation. The Oblate charism is still alive.

18. Sensitive to the demands of our charism, as Oblates, our first priority in mission is to be atten-

tive to those on the margins of society and to those for whom the Church is most distant. (cf. C.5) Pope Paul VI recognized that religious are often precisely "the avant-garde" as regards the movement towards the marginalized. (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 69) Religious stand at the edges of society and the Church and, from there challenge the centre on behalf of those on the periphery. They make the cause of those on the periphery the concern of the heart and centre.

19. To evangelize requires a constant re-evaluation of our missionary practices. Hence our plea is this: at every level — personal, community, and congregation — let us take the time needed to evaluate and discern as to whether our evangelization is in step with the reality of today's world and with God's specific call to us through our charism. Unhealthy shifts and bad habits can imperceptibly seep into our missionary practices.

Interreligious Dialogue

20. In our mission, more and more we are in contact with the other religions of the world. Interreligious dialogue has become part of our evangelization. What is involved in interreligious dialogue? It is a meeting among believing persons so that, eventually, we all may be more profoundly converted in the truth. It is a journey of mutual discovery. In no way is it a capitulation of one's beliefs nor a false

irenicism; rather it is a reciprocal witness meant to overcome prejudices, intolerance, and misunderstandings.

21. In the end, interreligious dialogue is a privileged opportunity to participate in God's respect for human freedom and in God's patience towards creation where, all people in their own way are searching for truth and salvation. Such dialogue calls each of us to open ourselves to other ways of thinking and acting. It requires an attitude of humility.

Interreligious dialogue occurs at different levels: in the give and take of daily life and action in common; on the level of religious experience; and among specialists in the work of theological research.

22. Today interreligious dialogue must become a way of life. Irrespective of where we live and work, those who believe in other religions are becoming ever more numerous in our environment. Hence, interreligious dialogue is not just an activity for trained theological specialists, but a matter for all of us.

III. THE CHALLENGE TO US, AS OBLATES

23. Such is the missionary task that faces us as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. It is a task that calls us to our senses, to reflect on who

we really are. To preach the Gospel defines us as religious. "If only we could understand who we are," wrote Eugene de Mazenod.

Religious Life

24 Given the requirements of mission in today's world, it is opportune for us, both priests and brothers, to reexamine who we are as religious. It is clear that the world is changing.. To keep in step, we need to seek renewal, as the post-synodal exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, invites us to do.

Simply put, if we wish to live as apostolic religious so as to be a readable sign to our world, it is urgent that we honestly discern what forms religious life should take today so as precisely to be a credible sign to the world. This implies that we be open to new perspectives. This is especially true regarding the prophetic dimension of religious life, which points to the Reign of God present in the heart of the world. We assume our prophetic mission, both brothers and priests, when in community we live, witness to, proclaim and celebrate Gospel values.

25. The Chapter gave special attention to the situation of Oblate brothers. Lived out in a great variety of services throughout the congregation, 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.

26. Given the truth and importance of all of this, we recommend that the theological, spiritual, and professional formation of the brothers be as serious and as ongoing as that of the priests. Also the Chapter thinks it is important to conduct a probing theological reflection on the place of brothers within a clerical congregation.

Community Life

27. Both *Witnessing in Apostolic Community* and our mission today invite us to continue deepening our community life. Community is God's gift to us, and through us, a gift to all people. Among other things, it signifies the communal life to which all of humanity is called. (cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 1994) Community is good news for the Church and for the world and it is in this sense that community is itself already a form of mission. (cf. *MTW 109*)

28. This conviction is further reinforced by our experience of vulnerability and fragility, as spoken of in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. We truly believe that community is a great value and we invite you to make it both a source of, and place for, integral growth. And it will be that, a place for real growth, if it is built around Christ; if prayer permeates its life; if the sharing of faith and life is its normal practice; if we, its members, have the courage to live a healthy transparency; if our lifestyles are simple and conformed to the vows that we profess; if pardon and reconciliation are embraced as gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of discernment; if the ministry of each of us is shared and reviewed with the others; if each person takes an interest in the work of the others; and if it is full of compassion, sensitive to the trials of those around it, and actively engaged in trying to relieve their needs.

29. Understood in this sense, community embraces the full span of missionary life. For the young Oblates, it will be the place, the family, that welcomes their generosity and creativity; for the aged Oblates it will be the setting for their contemplation and their ministry of simple presence; for those Oblates living and ministering in the strength and health of their middle years, it will be what keeps them from falling into sterile activism; and for those passing through those crises that inevitably attack our lives, it will provide a support and a safeguard for fidelity tempered by trial.

30. Community life lived this way is a prophetic statement. By our living in fraternal community we give witness to the world that a communion of life is possible. God is Trinity of persons, God is Love: The Gospel we proclaim is credible. Our lives of sharing, graciousness, and our discernment in community contest the ways of individualism, of arbitrary power, of domination, and gives this world a reason to hope.

31. We encourage you therefore to esteem and cultivate the great gift of community. In it, we are given a foretaste of the life of heaven, God's life. With our eyes fixed on this ideal, we can seek ways to embody it ever more faithfully in all areas of our lives, well aware that our local community holds possibilities for sharing and witnessing that should not be sacrificed at just any cost.

32. The quality of a community depends very much on the qualities of its members and particularly on the superior who is called to animate it: "*For this reason, the Chapter considers the formation of local superiors to be a priority and it asks Provincials and the entire Congregation to develop appropriate instruments to render such formation effective.*" (WAC 23,6)

Internationality

33. Internationality emerged as one of the new themes of this Chapter. In effect, it was felt that in a world

that is becoming more and more international, and despite the resistance of isolationist tendencies, the fact that we are an international congregation is a real grace.

We are already living internationality in various ways: through financial sharing, through promoting meetings of Oblates in formation, and by being available for the mission everywhere in the world. A worldwide body such as ourselves can also be a powerful force to help protect and shield our confreres who are most exposed when they defend human rights and work for justice.

34. Admittedly, however, we have not yet taken full stock of the promise of internationality. We are far from having exhausted its rich potential. Deeper awareness of our internationality could lead us:

- to boldly face up to all the consequences of our demographic growth in the southern hemisphere.
- to live a true conversion in this regard; avoiding being stuck in such terms as *"my region, my province, my country"* so as to become more Oblates for the whole congregation, the church, and for the world.
- to be more adaptable, generous, and open to other cultures, in giving and exchanging personnel in function of the worldwide needs of the mission.

- to learn at the level of formation, to love our own culture, without making it exclusive, and at the same time to open ourselves to other cultures and languages. This goal is well served by apprenticeship, through experiences such as time spent in another culture, especially where one can learn in real contact with the poor, or through the establishment of international houses of formation.

The lay associates

35. A high point at the Chapter occurred at its beginning when a group of lay associates met and shared with us, entrusting to us a message. What hope was instilled in us as we heard these lay persons tell us: *"Your charism makes us live!"*

This sharing between lay persons and ourselves was an outcome of the Chapter of 1992 and is a testimony to the road that both, they and we, have travelled since. Aware of what a gift it is to have lay persons help show us the depth and fecundity of our own charism, we re-commit ourselves to continue the journey with them.

36. It will take time for us to fully digest what this experience signifies. Among other things, it will take time to overcome the resistance and the fears that can easily arise in us in the face of this new reality; it will take time to support and sustain those Oblates more directly engaged in the com-

mon journey and to learn from their experience; to cultivate the dialogue and reciprocity needed between the laity and ourselves in order to share with each other how the charism of Eugene de Mazenod gives us life. It will take time to work out ways of being in step together in mission, associates and Oblates, meeting the great challenge of evangelization at the dawn of the new millennium.

Formation

37. In his mercy, the Lord continues to call new men to join us for his mission. Our task is to collaborate with his action, both actively helping to call persons to our way of life and accompanying them in the process of their formation.

In his address to the Chapter, Pope John Paul II explicitly invited the Oblates to "*redouble their efforts in proposing their ideal to youth everywhere in the world, given that many young people are generous and have the desire to serve Christ and his Church.*" (No. 4)

When young men come to us, they arrive with the cultural baggage of our age, with all its peculiar mix of richness and fragility. We wish, however, to recognize in them the great generosity which motivates them to follow the Lord even when it means going against the dominant values of the time.

38. Many things surfaced during our discussions on formation. Clearly, we recognized the fundamental

importance in formation of focussing on the central task of preparing persons for an apostolic, vowed life. Nonetheless, we would like to highlight some particular points for special consideration:

- *The necessity of discernment:* The motivation of those entering religious life is often mixed - frequently including less positive elements, namely, the desire for security, prestige, and power. A lasting conversion requires spiritual direction, at the service of the Holy Spirit who purifies both heart and action.
- *Towards true missionary involvement:* Sometimes the lifestyle in our houses of formation is more comfortable than among the people we serve. The Chapter recommends that every effort be made to ensure that real involvement among the poor be part of formation. Two practical matters stand out in this search for missionary involvement: a responsible use of community goods, and accountability for personal expenses.
- *An effort at inculturation :* Formation should initiate (in the fullest sense of the word) candidates in the Christian tradition and surrounding cultures. If we fail to do this, we run the risk of forming young Oblates who are, in effect, strangers in their own land.
- *Acquiring competence - pastoral and professional:* Today's world frowns on mediocrity. Moreover, the Gospel merits being served with the same level

of effort and professionalism that is at the service of most everything else in our world. In this regard, the Chapter asks that the various provinces re-examine their formation programs, in respect to the training both of brothers and priests. We need to ask ourselves these questions: Are we sufficiently demanding as to the level of education and training we ask of our people? Do we evaluate and develop sufficiently the gifts and talents of the members of our province? Do we have any kind of policy in this regard or is this left to individual whim, luck, and circumstance?

- *Formation for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation:* Since our charism directs us towards the poor we must, in the area of formation, give particular attention to this component. Thus, our houses of formation should challenge those in them to have a respectful attitude towards all human beings and a love for the poor. (cf. *Vade Mecum on Justice and Peace, chapter 4*). Moreover, they should give our young Oblates a thorough knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church. They should give them an initiation to the workings of economic systems, and to ways of empowering the poor to take a hand in changing their own lot.
- *Proper use of media:* The power of the media in our world cannot be over-estimated. Therefore the Chapter recommends that, in first formation, we familiarize young Oblates with the technologies and techniques of the mass media. This for a dou-

ble reason: First of all, to insure that they are at ease with this new form of literacy; second, in the hope that they can in fact positively utilize some of the possibilities that these powerful instruments offer for evangelization. As *Redemptoris Missio* puts the challenge: A contemporary missionary must learn to integrate the message into a new culture that is created largely by the means of modern communication. (37c)

- *Pastoral internships for those in first formation:* During the course of first formation, we recommend some pastoral internships as an important component within a missionary formation. These periods help reveal different aspects of a candidate's personality; they give a taste of both the joys and difficulties of ministry; they allow the young man to live within a community that is engaged full-time in other forms of missionary work; and help open up the young Oblate to the international dimension of the congregation. The quality of these pastoral experiences depends very much upon proper preparation, evaluation, and supervision by those concerned with his training.
- *The importance of ongoing formation:* Formation must continue during the entire Oblate life. Ongoing formation must be a non-negotiable priority for us as Oblates. Its quality very much determines the quality of our community life and apostolate.
- *The importance of the early years of one's ministry:* We must pay particular attention to the early

years of an Oblate's ministry. The passage from the house of formation to an active life in the ministry is a very critical time in a person's life. The Chapter recommends that each province study this issue, namely, what special things should be done for a young Oblate during that critical period, namely, the first five years of his ministry? Special help should be given to young Oblates to help them evaluate pastoral experiences, adapt themselves positively to this new way of life, and ensure that they become sufficiently self-directed as regards their own continuing formation.

39. The Chapter wishes to thank all those Oblates who are engaged in the ministry of formation. This includes everyone involved, right from those engaged in the difficult task of trying to foster vocations down to those responsible for continuing formation. In addressing the Chapter, Father General emphasized that the selection of formators and their preparation, both remote and proximate, for this ministry must be a priority for provinces.

CONCLUSION

40. As we come to the end of our conversation with you, we would like to highlight one last point: During the course of the Chapter, the idea of the Jubilee year frequently arose. As it is revealed in Scripture, the Jubilee year is *the proclamation of a year of favour from the Lord*. (Luke 4, 19) As

Oblates, we want to appropriate as fully as we can this special grace, namely, this opportunity for conversion, for penance, for universal reconciliation, for a deeper living of justice and peace. To offer just one suggestion: During the Chapter, many times it was suggested that we, as Oblates, should be doing something to help work towards convincing the financially richer nations of this world to remit the debt that is owed them by many of the financially poorer nations. It is through involvements such as these that we invite all Oblates to prepare and celebrate the approaching Jubilee.

41. At this Chapter, we examined again our need of renewal. In that light we pledge ourselves:
- To refocus on the essentials, namely, on Christ and his Church, and to do this through a renewed community life which is animated by an ever-inventive missionary zeal.
 - To review all of our missionary commitments in the light of our charism.
 - To pursue a fuller partnership with the laity and encourage their association with us.
 - To commit ourselves wholeheartedly to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and to be well-informed so as to be competent in the dialogue.
 - To intensify our work for vocations and in the area of formation, giving these demands their required attention.

- To live more consciously and explicitly the internationality of our congregation with all the riches and challenges that this brings us.
 - In the face of a virtual explosion of poverty, we commit ourselves to a more radical way of living and working for, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.
42. Finally, as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate we want to recognize our Mother and Patron. Mary's total transparency within God's work, her human existence perfectly pure and without compromise, *prefigures the final victory of God over evil* (C. 10). She is truly *the glory of Jerusalem and the honour of our people*. She embodies our hope and sustains our missionary activity. As we approach the millennium, we recognize and honour her as the door of our salvation and the dawn of our deliverance, even as we rejoice in the knowledge that she is like us, a daughter of the common people and a humble disciple of God's son.

The Capitulars of the 33rd General Chapter
Rome, October 1, 1998.

3.

LETTER FROM THE GENERAL CHAPTER TO THOSE PERSONS WHO SHARE WITH US THE OBLATE CHARISM

**LETTER FROM THE
GENERAL CHAPTER
TO
THOSE PERSONS WHO SHARE WITH US THE
OBLATE CHARISM**

In response to the General Chapter's encounter with ten representatives of lay persons associated to the Oblates, the Capitulars of the 1998 General Chapter addressed a letter to all lay persons who share with us the Oblate charism. The General Chapter wrote and accepted the substance of this letter and, on September 30, 1998 mandated the Superior General in Council to finalize its text. This text, approved by the Superior General in Council, reads as follows:

Dear Lay Associates:

A very significant moment marked the opening of the 33rd Chapter of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Ten lay persons, coming from every region in the world, took an active part in our Chapter sessions. On the second day of the Chapter, they made presentations and shared in a discussion on the theme of lay association. In these persons, in effect, all of you were

present at our Chapter. This event, a first in the history of the Oblates, happened because both the General Chapter of 1992 and the first international congress of lay associates held at Aix in 1996 expressed a strong wish for it.

The message that these persons, your delegates, shared with us made a deep impression and influenced all of our subsequent discussions. We were very grateful for what they shared and were both stimulated and challenged by their palpable hope and missionary audacity. Their obvious zeal for the Oblate charism is a powerful impetus to us to appreciate that charism more deeply ourselves. We are very happy for this challenge. Their enthusiasm and your own for Eugene de Mazenod's charism pushes us to appropriate more deeply that charism that we, the Oblate religious, sometimes too easily take for granted. We congratulate you for your sense of co-responsibility for the Church's mission and your readiness to engage in it.

The Oblate charism is a living link between us, lay and religious. In it, we have a special mutuality and solidarity. What constitutes the basis for this communion? The same fire that warmed the heart of Eugene de Mazenod: A passionate love for Jesus Christ and the Church, a filial love for Mary who is the model of all discipleship, and a preferential option for the poor with their many faces. We both share in the same call, namely, to be evangelizers, to cooperate in Christ's saving work, and to help give a human face to God's compassion. We can be for each other a source of mutual encouragement, helping sustain each other in fidelity to the Gospel, and helping each other to more

fully actualize the charism of Eugene de Mazenod. Moreover, we can do all of this even as we respect the specific nature of each other's unique vocations.

Many times during the course of the Chapter, we reflected upon and rejoiced in the rich quality of our mutual association. We are partners. Among other things, you have helped keep us on our toes regarding our charism. Because of this, the Chapter has mandated a working group to further reflect on various forms of association and to search for better ways to express this in our Constitutions and Rules.

During the past few years, many of you, in an attempt to live more intensely the charism of St. Eugene, have formed together into groups. These groups, partly shaped by culture and milieux, have taken a multiplicity of forms. Such a plethora in fact manifests the richness of the Oblate charism and is a most positive stimulus to us to further promote lay participation within the Oblate charism. We are encouraging all the Oblates to recognize this as a manifestation of the Spirit.

During this Chapter, we added a new rule to our Constitutions and Rules. This rule (27) acknowledges the unity and reciprocity that exists first of all among yourselves and then between yourselves and ourselves as we share Eugene de Mazenod's charism. We commit ourselves to collaborate with you so that, together, we can explore various potential programs for a greater communion and collaboration within that charism. Eugene's charism will, we are confident, help you to appropriate your full vocation both in the church and in the world.

The canonization of Eugene de Mazenod was an exceptional grace for both of us. Under his patronage, we both hope to realize more fully the mission that Christ has entrusted to us. Thus, we are confident that by mutually assisting each other we can both gain a better vision of the world, one that will be to the advantage of the poor, especially those poor who are closest to us. Your collaboration is indispensable, especially in the promotion of justice, the safeguarding of the peace and integrity of creation, and in our attempts to be present within the media.

We end with an invitation: We will be happy to receive you in our communities so as to share more fully with you our life of faith, our prayer, and the bread of friendship.

May Saint Eugene accompany us as we journey together.

From the Oblate Capitulars of 1998
Rome, October 1, 1998.

4.

ON FINANCES AND SHARING

ON FINANCES AND SHARING

Calculating and Reporting "per capita" Patrimony

On September 29, 1998, the General Chapter passed the following motion:

As a condition to the acceptance of their report, we ask

that the General Finance Committee (or some other appropriate committee) be requested to examine the way that "individual patrimony" (per capita patrimony) is reported and that a new formula be created which would more accurately calculate per capita patrimony.

Recommendations of the General Chapter's Finance Committee

On September 29, 1998, the General Chapter, after having approved the financial report of the General Administration, also endorsed the following recommendations presented by the General Chapter's Finance Committee:

1. Due to the necessity for increased revenues for the General Administration, **it is recommended** that these revenues come from two sources: the contributions and a special fund. Specifically, it was proposed:

- a) that the contributions of Provinces and Delegations be calculated in five groups based on the per capita financial patrimony. The per capita income funds set aside for social security ought not to be taken into account in assessing the patrimony.
- b) A fund of 3 million US dollars should be established, the annual interest from which will help keep Province and Delegation contributions from assuming ever-increasing proportions.

This fund will be created through a contribution of 1.5 m USD from the General Administration itself and an equal amount to be taken from the Oblate Sharing Fund. Provinces and Delegations are invited to contribute to the Oblate Sharing Fund in order to help replace the 1.5 m USD that will be removed.

2. It is recommended that the amount of money still needed to meet the sum promised for distribution by the Capital Sharing Program be raised prior to the year 2004. (10.6 m. USD had been promised for distribution by the year 2004, in 1998, the Capital Sharing Program is 6 m. USD short of that goal.)

3. It is recommended that the Superior General in Council appoint a Project/Grant Director for the Congregation. (His specific role would be to assist and

guide Provinces and Delegations in their search for financial aid from sources outside the Oblate Congregation.)

4. It is recommended that the Oblate Sharing Fund and the Fernand Jetté Fund be merged into one and named "The Oblate Solidarity Fund."

5. It is recommended that the booklet "Listing of Oblate Sharing Agencies", prepared at the request of the 1992 General Chapter and revised in 1997, be once again modified in the interests of clarity and simplicity. (The new booklet should contain information concerning Congregation funds only and also indicate the most important provincial funds.)

6. Due to the difficulty of effective grant writing, it is recommended that the standard application format and procedure prepared by the General Finance Committee be used by all. (It can be of significant help in referring requests for the funding of development projects to appropriate agencies outside the Congregation. This standard application format can also be used as a liaison between funds in order to avoid double funding. The revised booklet, containing the common application form, is available from the General Treasurer's desk.)

7. (The 1992 General Chapter recommended that the General Treasurer visit each Province and Delegation in order to meet the local provincial councils and to establish better communications with them. This

was admirably accomplished since the last Chapter and has proven to be a very positive experience for all concerned. These visits have made Oblates in many areas more aware of the importance of good, accurate stewardship.) It is recommended that these visits continue and be repeated every six years, once during the term of a given General Administration.

8. Due to the large sums often involved in the sale or construction of Oblate properties, it is recommended that those involved in these matters take into account also regional concerns and needs, thereby unnecessary duplication and over-building may be avoided.

9. (The construction of houses of formation is a priority and in some respects a responsibility for everyone.) It is recommended that in the case of extraordinary revenue accruing to a Province, serious thought be given to helping the Oblate Credit Union in its efforts to assist needy Provinces and Delegations in their necessary building projects.

5.

CANCELLING UNJUST AND OPPRESSIVE INTERNATIONAL DEBTS

CANCELLING UNJUST AND OPPRESSIVE INTERNATIONAL DEBTS

On September 30, 1998, the General Chapter passed the following motion:

On the occasion of the Jubilee Year, as a missionary Congregation serving many developing countries, the General Chapter adheres to the request of the Holy See and other bodies concerning the cancelling of the foreign debt of these countries, and asks that the General Administration as well as all Oblate units and regional conferences appropriately use their influence by issuing statements and endorsing statements by others to bring about efforts to cancel oppressive and unjust international debts.

6.

**SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS
and
OBCOM**

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS and OBCOM

On September 29, 1998, the General Chapter passed the following motion:

That the report and recommendations from the OBCOM animation committee be referred to the Superior General and Council for their consideration.

The recommendations referred to in this motion read as follows:

1. That an OBCOM Secretariat be established at the OMI General House in Rome, operating under one of the Assistants General and staffed by an executive secretary.
2. That our multilingual OBCOM website be managed in Rome, while continuing to be hosted in its present location.
3. That a Media and Mission Fund be established to help finance promising communications projects in their early stages of development.
4. That the newly elected Superior General and Council meet with the OBCOM Animation Committee in Rome during June 1999 to discuss the future of our media efforts as a Congregation.

7.

THE NUMBER OF OBLATE REGIONS

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On September 22, 1998, the General Chapter passed the following motion:

- a) That the Congregation continue, for the time being, with six Regions, and
- b) That the Superior General in Council be mandated to investigate this matter, and, after consultation, make proposals to the next Inter-Chapter Meeting regarding the number of Regions.

8.

CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

PART III: Organization

On September 9, 1998, the General Chapter accepted as a Chapter Working Paper the text of Part III of our Constitutions and Rules that had been prepared by the Post-Chapter Structures Committee established by the 1992 General Chapter and the Superior General in Council.

After a systematic study of this Working Text, the 1998 General Chapter on September 14, 1998 took a final vote on the text of Part III that had resulted from its work. The question voted on read as follows: "Do you approve the text of Part III of the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate as voted on at the 1998 General Chapter?" The voting results were as follows:

Constitutions: 112 in favour
None against

Rules: 111 in favour
1 against

Because a post-Chapter editing committee still had to verify and unify the approved text, which text would

then by submitted to the Holy See by the Superior General in Council, the 1998 General Chapter on September 29, 1998 voted the following special mandate addressed to the Superior General and his Council:

MANDATE OF THE 1998 GENERAL CHAPTER

1. The 1998 General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate authorizes the Superior General in Council to make suitable arrangements to finalize the text of the Constitutions and Rules and to present it to the Holy See for approval. If necessary, this could entail the appointment by the Superior General in Council of a post-chapter editorial committee.

2. If, in preparing this final version, it becomes evident that there are errors, contradictions, or important omissions in the text, the Superior General in Council is authorized to make the necessary corrections.

3. If the Holy See proposes changes in the Constitutions or Rules, the Superior General in Council is authorized to make the required adjustments.

4. If, for some reason, it were necessary to have direct personal contact with the Holy See, the Superior General (or his delegate), with one member of the general council, is authorized to meet with the representatives of the Congregations for Institutes of Consecrated Life and to consent to any requirements.

N.B. The full text of the new Part III, as approved by the Holy See, will be published separately as soon as possible.

The 1998 General Chapter also amended several articles of the Rule, one article of the Constitutions, and confirmed a previous change in an article of the Appendix in the Rule-book.

RULE 9 (First paragraph)

On September 23, 1998, the General Chapter passed an amendment to the first paragraph of Rule 9, so that it is to read as follows:

Action on behalf of justice and peace and the integrity of creation is an integral part of evangelization.

RULES 26, 27, and 28

On September 25, 1998, the General Chapter voted the following changes to Rules 26, 27 and 28. As voted by the Chapter, these Rules now read:

Rule 26: Oblate houses and hearts are open to all who seek help and counsel. Priests and religious are always welcome, and other evangelical workers will be received so that they may share the bread of friendship, faith, reflection and prayer. At the same time, the community will respect its members' needs and their right to privacy.

Rule 27: The charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it

radiates throughout the world. Lay people recognize that they are called to share in the charism according to their state of life, and to live it in ways that vary according to milieu and cultures. They share in the charism in a spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates.

In order to live more intensely the mission of evangelization according to the Oblate charism, some lay people gather in associations. In concert with the General Administration, Provinces and Delegations will foster the development of such associations, will assure that they faithfully reflect the Oblate charism, will contribute to the formation of the laity by giving them access to the sources of the charism, and will specify the relations between the Congregation and the associations. In this regard the General Administration takes the initiatives that it judges opportune to promote communication between Province and Delegations and a common perspective (outlook) in the Congregation.

Rule 28: Faithful to Oblate tradition, the communities will have their heart set on promoting the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate for the formation of lay people and participation in Oblate spirituality and apostolate.

Several religious and secular institutes have links to the Congregation because of their origin or because of their spirituality. Each Province or Delegation will 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.

RULE 49

On September 29, 1998, the General Chapter passed amendments to Rule 49, so that it now reads as follows:

Rule 49: Temporary vows are made for one year at a time. Annual vows are to be understood as extending until the date of the subsequent profession which, at the discretion of the Superiors, may be anticipated or deferred but not by more than three months. If, however, the profession is deferred, a religious who does not wish to renew his vows may lawfully leave at the end of twelve months. Perpetual profession may be made only after the completion of three full years of temporary vows, but can be, for a just cause, anticipated or deferred up to three months.

Rule 49A: An Oblate who, during the time of his temporary profession, asks to depart from the Congregation, can be granted an indult to leave by the Superior General in Council.

CONSTITUTION 61 (1st paragraph)

On September 29, 1998, the General Chapter overwhelmingly passed an amendment to the first paragraph of Constitution 61, leaving it to a post-Chapter committee to establish the definitive formulation. Consequently, it now is to read as follows:

Constitution 61: The Provincial in Council admits or excludes to vows, whether temporary or perpetual. Admission to, or definitive exclusion from perpetual vows requires for validity the confirmation of the Superior General in Council.

APPENDIX TO THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES:

Confirmation of Change introduced to Article 2 by the
1992 General Chapter

On October 1, 1998, the General Chapter voted to confirm a change introduced by the 1992 General Chapter to Article 2 of the Appendix to the Constitutions and Rules. The confirmed article reads:

Each Oblate priest shall celebrate one Mass and each Brother attend Mass upon the death of the Superior General or of a former Superior General, or of any member, novices included, of the Province to which he belongs. It is recommended that this Mass be a community celebration.

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