



VADEMECUM ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

General Service of Oblate Communications

**VADEMECUM
ON SOCIAL MEDIA
FOR
THE MISSIONARY OBLATES
OF MARY IMMACULATE**

Rome, 2021

CONTENTS

PRESENTATION.....	iii
MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL	v
INTRODUCTION	1
PART I – UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA	5
1. Why should we care about social media?	5
2. Definitions and Concepts	7
Types of Social media	8
Most common social networking sites.....	9
PART II - OUR PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA	11
1. The understanding of the Catholic Church regarding Social Communication	11
2. Recent Popes on Social Media & Communication.....	12
Pope St. John Paul II	13
Pope Benedict XVI	13
Pope Francis	13
3. Examples of the use of media in the Church	14
4. Missionary Oblates and Social Communications.....	15
Experiences of the Congregation: Past and Present.....	17
Call of the Congregation	20
5. Proposals to be implemented within the Congregation	20
Personal level	23
Community level.....	23
Unit level	24

Regional level	26
General level	27
PART III - PRAXIS.....	29
1. A Practical guide to some Social Media Platforms	29
1.1. Facebook	29
1.2. Twitter	32
1.3. Instagram	34
2. Some General guidelines on the use of social media and the internet	35
2.1. Be responsible and prudent	35
2.2. Be honest and accurate	35
2.3. Be sensitive and selective	36
2.4. Be respectful and charitable	37
2.5. Get professional assistance	37
2.6. Set your priorities.....	38
3. Some other practical suggestions	39
CONCLUSION.....	41
APPENDIX I - GLOSSARY	43
APPENDIX II - MISSION AND SOCIAL MEDIA	44

PRESENTATION

Dear Oblates, welcome to this Vademecum! *Vade mecum* is a Latin expression meaning, “go with me”.

Therefore, this is a guidebook to “take with you” personally, as a community and even as a unit.

It is an effort to present the Oblate Congregation’s conviction that all media, whether printed or internet and, especially in these days, the social media, are gifts for us as Oblates to use positively and actively as means of spreading the Good News and especially the “Joy of the Gospel”.

This handbook was initiated as a response to one of the recommendations of the 36th Chapter (2016) which called for the Oblate General Administration to develop “a guide or companion in media” (#82.4) which has resulted in this text. The process in putting together this Vademecum has involved questionnaires and participation from many Oblates around the world who have taken time to give input and suggestions. We take this opportunity to thank all those who did give of their time and participate in this venture working in collaboration with the General Service of Communications.

How to use this Vademecum? Who is it for? These are essential questions. We know that in the use and knowledge of the internet and Social Media in the Oblate world there is a great variation from beginner to expert. Therefore, in this Vademecum, we describe some basic knowledge and principles for this present time. For some Oblates, who are less familiar with media, the names and terms might be difficult and technical, and so we have provided a useful glossary at the back. For others, the terminology and expressions used here will be familiar. The Vademecum also covers many issues that can become topics for discussion and material for decisions in our

Oblate communities, Oblate units and our houses of formation. We believe that it is essential that each Oblate should read and understand this Vademecum.

Enjoy, take with you, and please use this Vademecum as an Oblate tool. The General Service of Communication is welcoming further input and ideas in the area of Social Media. In other words, there will be more to include in this important and developing area of Communications and Social Media. Once again, we thank the Superior General and council and all those involved in giving input, suggestions and helping with editing and finalizing this edition of the Vademecum.

General Service of Oblate Communications

June 2021.

Copyrights

Permission is given to all Oblates to print and use as is or in part. For other persons we ask that they request permission to do so. Please contact: webmaster@omiworld.org

Imprimatur

Approved by the Superior General in Council on July 31, 2020
Rome, Italy

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

L.J.C. et M.I.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have always been involved in some form of communication since our beginnings. This urge to tell the Good news and to share what is happening springs from the very heart of St. Eugene de Mazenod. The sophistication of social communication in our present time requires a pastoral orientation, a guide, to help us communicate well, using in a proper manner, the modern technology which is currently available and always developing new frontiers.

Perhaps Pope Francis' words in his letter for the 2014 World Day of Communication, express in a most poignant manner the urgency of entering into this field: "Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ".

We are missionaries and our tradition is to enter the most difficult missions to bring the Gospel to the poor and most abandoned. The mission territory of social media and information technology are no longer new realities. They are already necessary for us and demand our engagement so that we are skilled in using these means of communication for the proclamation of the Gospel.

I am grateful to Fr. Shanil Jayawardena, OMI, our Director of the General Service of Oblate Communications and to the Internal Committee of Communications for preparing this Vademecum to encourage, assist and challenge all of us to be committed to engage in social media to announce the Gospel and to bring the values of the Gospel to this new Areopagus. In the precious

legacy expressed by St. Eugene de Mazenod in his *Preface*, may we live out his spirit to leave nothing undared in our efforts to expand the Kingdom of Christ through the use of social media.

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Fr. Louis Lougen, O.M.I.

Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General

June 27, 2020

INTRODUCTION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. This is Jesus’ missionary mandate as given to his disciples in the Gospel of St. Matthew (28:19). We, as Oblates, have been given a specific call within that Divine Call. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. (Luke 4:18) We are evangelizers of the Good News to the poor and the most abandoned, and our beloved Founder wanted us to be so wherever they are. He was so passionate about bringing Jesus to the most abandoned by any means that he would not hesitate to send his brother Oblates across the oceans to far distant lands. He himself as the Bishop of Marseilles, would even happily walk down the streets and visit the city’s fish market, in view of bringing Jesus to his people. That is exactly why we see St. Eugene de Mazenod, in the preface he wrote to our Constitutions and Rules, urging Oblates to be apostolic men who must “spare no effort to extend the Saviour’s empire”. In other words, he wants us to make Jesus known to the world using all the best available means of the day.

In line with that, for us today, it is impossible to ignore the power of the Internet in the palm of our hand as a means of evangelization. Thanks to social media, we have come to realize that we can reach the world also through a simple device we hold in our hands. This device can be a small computer that sits on our laps or a smartphone in our pocket. The world has changed, and there are great opportunities for the Church in our age.

This booklet came to its completion when the world was seriously hit by a terrible pandemic: COVID-19. However, it was during lockdown that more and more people experienced the value of social media. We as the Catholic Church also reaped its

benefits, as internet became the only means (in most cases) of communicating with the faithful. When people could not come to Church, the Church came to them, thanks to social media communications. During his Mass at the Casa Santa Marta on 06 May 2020, Pope Francis praised all those who work in the media in the time of pandemic: “Let us pray today for the men and women who work in communications. In this time of pandemic they risk so much and there is a great deal of work. May the Lord help them in this work of transmitting the truth always”¹.

Our Popes for the past fifty years or more have emphasized that there is a need for these opportunities to be harnessed in the service of God and the Church. On the first ever World Communications Day, in 1967, Pope St. Paul VI stated that, in the “vast and complex phenomenon of the modern means of Social Communications...we see the unfolding and the realization of a wonderful plan of God’s providence, which opens to humanity’s genius ever new ways of achieving his perfection and of attaining to his final end”².

More recently, Pope Francis examined the use of social media and said, “It is important to know how to dialogue and, with discernment, to use modern technologies and social networks in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses and encourages. Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment”³.

All of the above simply reiterate the fact that the Church must be present in the world of social media – not, of course, losing her

¹ Homily of pope Francis, Wednesday, May 6, 2020.

² Message of the Holy Father for the World Social Communications Day, May 7, 1967.

³ Address to the participants in the plenary assembly of the pontifical council for social communications, September 21, 2013.

integrity. The digital world is no longer an alternative social space. The so-called “virtual presence” cannot be ignored as an “unreal presence” anymore; it is real and true; here and now. Therefore, in this era of such an enormous technological advancement, it might sound almost ridiculous to describe the two realms by the terms “virtual world” and “real world” rather than “digital world” and “physical world”.

Therefore, if our call as Oblates is to labour with *all the resources* at our command to evangelize the poor, then social media should not be considered ‘an alien’ anymore. It is a call not just for the young among us, who were born in this era of social networks. Nor is it a call only to those Oblates who are passionate about social communications. It is a call to each Oblate – young and old alike. Wherever the people are, there we should be.

That is why the Acts of the 2016 General Chapter reaffirm that social media is “the new Areopagus of contemporary times. It cries out for the missionary presence of the Church”⁴. This booklet is an outcome of that Chapter mandate. The General Service of Oblate Communications, together with the Internal Communications Committee, decided to publish these guidelines to help every Oblate, first to appreciate social media as a new means of evangelization and then to recognize the ways one could be present in this new Areopagus. It is not just any sort of presence, but an integral presence that always has evangelization as the end-goal. Not a haphazard presence that brings harm to both the Oblate and the people with whom he interacts, but a wise presence that brings him and his people closer to God.

⁴ Acts of the 36th General Chapter (2016) no. 71, p. 48.

One might argue whether all this means that the Church is at the mercy of social media. On the contrary, what we should recognize is that social media is at the service of the Church – if only we know how to effectively make known our presence there. As Jesus did, let us become incarnational; finding ourselves with people wherever they are. By so doing, the Word will continue to dwell amongst us.

PART I – UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Why should we care about social media?

Human beings by nature are relational beings. We cannot but relate to one another. We always seek to communicate with all the means at our disposal. In this regard, social media is not an “appendix” or a “seasonal fashion” that can be easily omitted; rather, it is the contemporary manifestation and revelation of the communicative nature of the human being.

Today, social media is a main source of sharing information, engaging in conversation and even advertising goods and services.⁵ A simple observation at any public place would give us a pretty good idea as to how many of us are connected through our devices with the world around us at the same time. The world is closely knitted more than ever before, thanks to social media and the internet in general.

In this ‘global village’ that we live in, social media’s influence on public opinion and social behaviour is enormous. In the first decade of this millennium, when the recent wave of social media started, it became a very potent political tool, and turned out to

⁵ There were 4.48 billion internet users in October 2019 (58% of the world’s total population).

- There were 3.725 billion social media users in October 2019 (48% of the world’s total population), with the worldwide total growing by 288 million since this time last year.
- 3.66 billion people used social media on mobile devices in October 2019 (47% of the world’s total population), with a growth of 297 million new users.
- The average daily time spent on social media is 2 hours and 22 minutes.
- Youth between the ages 18-34 are the ones who use social media the most.
- Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp handle 60 billion messages a day.
- Everyday people watch over a billion hours of video on YouTube, and generate billions of views.

Source: www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-q4-global-digital-statshot.

be very powerful in organizing mass political revolutions and activism.⁶

Years later, the anonymous Facebook page created by Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google employee, helped to launch the Arab Spring in early 2011 that toppled President Hosni Mubarak.

Therefore, as evangelizers, shouldn't we consider social media as a blessing in disguise? It is a great way to reach the hearts of our people, especially the younger generations, and influence their opinions, belief systems and behaviour in a positive manner.

Of course, one must not deny that today social media is also being widely used to spread fake news, disinformation, misinformation and for political propaganda.

Years later, Wael Ghonim during a public speech stated, "Five years ago, I said, 'If you want to liberate society, all you need is the Internet.' Today I believe if we want to liberate society, we first need to liberate the Internet"⁷.

However, the wrong use of social media by some people does not make it something totally negative or a monster to be feared. It still remains a space where we can positively engage in profound discussions, raise awareness about social issues, and plant seeds of goodness in society. The only way to "liberate the internet" is by being engaged in it responsibly, and not by running away from it.

In this context, if we truly consider ourselves evangelizers of the poor and the most abandoned, we as Oblates need to equip ourselves with some basic understanding of social media, the

⁶ In the case of Oscar Morales of Colombia who in 2008 rallied a million people around the world using Facebook for the release of 700 hundred hostages being held by FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*).

⁷ Ted Talks: "Let's design social media that drives real change" - Wael Ghonim.

opportunities it provides and its impact on our people. Internet and social media are in need of evangelizers. Can we be that?

2. Definitions and Concepts

Very often, those who detest social media are those who have the least knowledge of it. Therefore, in order to understand social media better, it is necessary that we have a clear idea about certain important concepts.

a. Communication –

The Latin root of “communication” – *communicare* – means “to share” or “to be in relation with”. Through Indo-European etymological roots, it further relates to the words “common,” “commune,” and “community,” suggesting an act of “bringing together”.

b. Media –

Broadly speaking, “media” refers to all the various means or platforms of communication. This can include anything from *printed media* (newspapers, magazines, etc.) to *mass media* (television, radio, etc.), not forgetting the modern *virtual media*, such as computer networks and the internet.⁸

c. Social media –

Once media became available through the World Wide Web, media was no longer static. Tremendous social interaction capabilities became available to everyone. Therefore, the term “Social media” refers to all *web-based communication tools* that enable people to interact with one another by sharing and consuming information. In that sense, social media is a very broad term.

⁸ In this booklet, when we speak about media in general, we have used the term “media and communications”.

Types of Social media

- ***Social networks*** — Connect with people (and brands) online
 - Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.
- ***Media-sharing networks*** — Share photos, videos, etc. online
 - Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.
- ***Messaging Platforms*** — Allow instant messaging and voice over (VoIP) calls and services
 - WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.
- ***Blogging and publishing networks*** — Publish content online
 - WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger, etc.
- ***Bookmarking and content curation networks*** — Discover, save, and share new content
 - Pinterest, Flipboard, etc.
- ***Consumer review networks*** — Review brands, products, tourist destinations and help others
 - TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.
- ***Interest-based networks*** — Share interests and hobbies
 - Goodreads, Spotify, SoundCloud, etc.
- ***Video Conferencing services*** — Cloud based platforms that allow multiple ways of conferencing online
 - Zoom, Skype, WebEx, FaceTime, etc.
- ***Music/Audio Streaming Platforms*** — Interactive applications where audio files can be streamed. Used for podcasts as well.
 - Spotify, SoundCloud, Google Play, etc.
- ***Social Gaming platforms*** — video games that allow social interaction between players.
 - PlayStation, Nintendo, Xbox, etc.
- ***Online discussion forums*** — Allow people to contribute to any particular topic, question or article in discussion. They can edit or feed new knowledge freely.
 - Reddit, Quora, Wikipedia, etc.

d. Social Networks –

Many people view the terms *social media* and *social networking* as interchangeable. However, it is clear from the above categorization that, strictly speaking, **social networks are one type of social media**. “Social media” are all forms of internet-based communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas and other content, whereas “social networking” is an online platform for creation and maintenance of more personal and business relationships. Social media is a communications channel, whereas in social networking, the communication has a two-way nature. Social networking is an act of inter-personal engagement. People with common interests, or like-minds, associate together on social networking sites and build relationships through community. Sometimes, media-sharing networks like Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube are considered as “social networks” as well. Often social networks are mobile-based and popular via mobile applications.

Most common social networking sites:

Facebook – enables users to make their personal profiles, share photos and videos, and communicate with other users through replying, commenting or messaging.

Instagram – allows users to upload photos and short videos and add a caption to them. By using hashtags and location-based tags, one can make them searchable by others.

Twitter – enables users to post short “tweets” (limited to 280 characters) to keep their followers updated. By adding hashtags to a keyword, one can weave tweets into a conversation thread or connect them to a general topic.

YouTube – a free video sharing website that allows users to create, upload, or watch online videos. It is also interactive in many ways, where users can like, dislike or comment.

TikTok – a mobile app that allows users to create a short video of themselves, which often feature music in the background.

LinkedIn – designed specifically for business communities and professionals in various fields that enables users to communicate with different professionals and job seekers of a given field.

Snapchat – associate app for mobile devices that enables users to send and share photos of themselves doing their daily activities.

Pinterest – enables users to show photos of things found online by “pinning” them and sharing concepts with others.

*** The popularity of social networks can change from time to time. New ones can come and conquer the place of some of those platforms mentioned above. The names mentioned above are the most popular ones by the mid-2020.



PART II - OUR PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

1. The understanding of the Catholic Church regarding Social Communication

The second document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council was the Decree on the Means of Social Communication (*Inter Mirifica*), issued on December 4, 1963. It is extremely brief, and its essential concern was to enjoin upon all Catholics the importance of using media responsibly for the common good. Furthermore, from the document emerged 'World Social Communication Day', which annually falls on the Sunday before Pentecost. On this day, the Pope delivers a message to the believers and the rest of the world, based on a theme connected with communication.

Following *Inter Mirifica*, the last document of the Council on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) approaches Social Communication more from the perspective of human society, culture and new technical developments. Its chapter on Culture underlines a positive way of modern communication: "There are nowadays many opportunities favorable to the development of a universal culture, thanks especially to the boom in book publication and new techniques of cultural and social communication" (No. 61).

Many Church documents since Vatican II, during the last 50 years, have repeatedly voiced the willingness of the Church to embrace new developments in the field of mass communication, always having evangelization in mind.

- o *Communio et Progressio* (1971) - Systematically collects and exhibits what had been discussed at the Second Vatican Council.
- o *Guidelines for the training of priests concerning the instruments of social communication* (1986) - A document issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education, and intended to

provide guidance on the formation of candidates to the priesthood in terms of social communication.

- o *Aetatis Novae* (1992) - It updates the teachings of “*Communio et Progressio*” on the occasion of its 20th anniversary.
- o *Ethics in Communications* (2000) The Pontifical Council for Social Communications published this document mainly keeping in mind the communications professionals who gathered in Rome in 2000 for the Jubilee of Journalists.
- o *Ethics in the Internet* (2002). It addresses the new problems raised by this new mode of communication, that is, the Internet.
- o *Church and the Internet* (2002). It considers the use of the Internet within the Church. It discussed the opportunities and challenges that the internet brings with it to the Church.
- o *The Rapid Development* (2005). Apostolic Letter to those responsible for communications. The last document of Pope St. John Paul II, which is the executive summary and almost his “spiritual testament” in the field of communication for the Church.

2. Recent Popes on Social Media & Communication

With the birth of social media, the Church has even further deepened her knowledge and understanding of communications. The teachings of the three most recent Popes have contributed to it immensely. Pope St. John Paul II underlined, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), that “the first Areopagus of the modern age is the *world of communications*, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a ‘global village’” (RM 37 C). Pope Benedict XVI, in many of his annual messages for World Communications Day, considered the phenomenon of social networks, reflecting on them as “new spaces for evangelization”. He maintained that the so-called cyberspace is the new “digital arena” or the

“environment” where we live, and it allows us to encounter and to know each other’s traditions and values. Pope Francis, in his message for the World Communications Day in 2014, appreciated the internet as “something truly good, a gift from God”.

Pope St. John Paul II

- o “For the Church, the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potential to proclaim the Gospel message. This challenge is at the heart of what it means at the beginning of the millennium to follow the Lord’s command to “put out into the deep”: *duc in altum!* (Lk 5:4)” (WDC, 2002).

Pope Benedict XVI

- o “It falls, in particular, to young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this ‘digital continent’. Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries with enthusiasm” (WCD, 2009).
- o “Social networks, as well as being a means of evangelization, can also be a factor in human development. As an example, in some geographical and cultural contexts where Christians feel isolated, social networks can reinforce their sense of real unity with the worldwide community of believers” (WCD, 2013).

Pope Francis

- o “Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts” (WCD, 2014).

- o “The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God” (WCD, 2014).
- o “Often on communication platforms, instead of constructive stories which serve to strengthen social ties..., we find destructive and provocative stories that wear down and break the fragile threads binding us together as a society” (WCD, 2020).

3. Examples of the use of media in the Church

The Catholic Church has always been open to the new developments of the communication world, right throughout history. Already in the 19th century, the Church considered the press, and in the 20th century cinema and radio, to be powerful modern popular media that could influence worldviews and moral values. Thus, the Church often became one of the first in the world that would fearlessly experiment with modern media in Church projects. For example, already in 1896, just a year after the Lumière brothers invented the Cinematograph motion picture system Pope Leo XIII appeared in a short video documentary. It was titled “Pope Leo XIII in the Vatican Gardens”. He not only appeared before the film camera but also blessed it (and the spectators).⁹ Here are some of the media initiatives of the Vatican:

- o *L'Osservatore Romano* - the newspaper edited by the Dicastery for Communication which reports on the activities of the Holy See and events taking place in the Church and the world. It was first started back in 1861 (in Italian) and is now published in seven languages.

⁹ <http://www.comunicazione.va/en/filmoteca-vaticana.html>

- o ***The Vatican Publishing House*** – the official publisher of the Holy See, established in 1926. It is responsible for publishing official documents, including Papal bulls and encyclicals.
- o ***Vatican Radio*** – the official broadcasting service of the Vatican. Set up in 1931 by Guglielmo Marconi himself, who is widely known as the inventor of radio. Today its programs are offered in 41 languages.
- o ***Vatican Television Center*** – Established in 1983 by Pope St. John Paul II. The CTV mainly deals with filming Papal celebrations and public appearances, with the aim of conserving the films and distributing them upon request. Live broadcasts are also made available through various TV channels around the world.
- o ***Domain.va*** – First introduced in 1995, the Vatican’s official internet domain. Currently there are 23 websites inside the domain. Through the official website of the Holy See, most of the Church documents are made available online.
- o ***Mobile apps*** – The Vatican runs several mobile apps including that of “Vatican news” and “Click to pray”.
- o ***Papal Twitter account*** – First started by Pope Benedict XVI, using the handle @pontifex. It was already active in 2012, much before many political leaders and celebrities knew its importance. Pope Francis continues the good “tradition”, together with his engagement in other social networks, including Instagram.

4. Missionary Oblates and Social Communications

Saint Eugene and his commitment to communication

Saint Eugene did not live long enough to at least hear the term “Digital Media”. However, we can safely presume, had he lived in our times, he would have urged us to use all possible means, including social media, for the purpose of evangelization.

His interest in evangelizing the most abandoned made him break many barriers. First, he broke the communication barrier of language. Remember that his famous homily given in St. Magdalene's was not in French, but in the local language, Provençal. Then he broke geographical barriers, by sending his brothers to be missionaries in distant lands, disregarding challenges like extreme weather conditions.

Already the beginnings of the Missionaries of Provence (the first name of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate) were reported by the newspaper *L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi*.¹⁰ Considering the detailed description of many of the first missions preached by the young Society, it can be assumed that de Mazenod himself contributed to the writing of the articles by providing useful information. He also made sure that his Oblate missionaries wherever they were in the world would receive missionary reviews, magazines and newspapers for their reading.

One cannot forget the thousands of letters that he wrote to the Oblates around the world encouraging them and even rebuking them when necessary. As St. Eugene grew older, his demands for communication became more and more tender, insistent, almost touching. He wanted to know every detail of his missionaries' lives. Reading the letters coming from America and Africa, he wanted to follow every step of the missionaries, to share their emotions, apprehensions, discomforts, and joys. Most of the time he complained of long silences, of news that is too concise, of the blanks left in the letter sheet. He reproached Fr. Joseph Gerard (Blessed Gerard today) for always writing at the last moment, when the courier was about to leave, thus neglecting to communicate to him many aspects of the life of the mission.

¹⁰ Cf. Y. BEAUDOIN, *Eugène de Mazenod, Aix et Marseille, dans le journal L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi de 1815 à 1830*, « Oblatio », 1 (2012), p. 439-452.

It was not enough for Saint Eugene to know that Fr. Gerard had built a small church in Saint-Michel, but he asked for more details: “What is it actually like? How are you housed? Have you a big enough garden, and some land for cultivation? I cannot see your community from here”¹¹.

There was a second reason, for which Saint Eugene required an intense and detailed correspondence. Good communication was demanded so as to make the missionary reality of the Oblates known to a wider range of readers, and to make the faithful aware of the needs of the mission work in order to solicit financial aid to support travel expenses, the maintenance of missionaries, and the development of works.

Bishop Eugene received the reports written by the Oblates published on the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, a magazine founded in Lyon, making the Congregation and its works known to the public. It was widely read because of the interest the letters from the missionaries aroused.

Furthermore, St. Eugene’s commitment to daily oraison before the Blessed Sacrament was a deeply intimate and spiritual way to stay connected with his sons around the world. Staying connected was vital for him and he made sure his Oblate brothers also adhered to that conviction.

All these above-mentioned details should help us understand that what the 2016 General Chapter proposes is not anything new. It is a continuation of the conviction of our Founder: staying connected among ourselves as Oblate brothers and staying connected with the world as missionaries is a ministry and a commitment.

¹¹ 4 September 1860, *Écrits oblats* 4, Letter 32 (Africa), p. 221.

Experiences of the Congregation: Past and Present

Today, many Units have seriously considered setting up websites, blogs, YouTube channels and other social media accounts to share their mission experience with the outside world. Some Units have also started to have their own mobile apps. A considerable number of Oblates work in the field of media and communications at a professional level. Some Units have even established radio and television stations! Our contribution to Church communications may not be widely known, but one cannot bypass the contribution made by Fr. Pierre Babin OMI, world-renowned author, professor and promoter of the media as a means of evangelization.¹²

From our very beginnings, the OMI leadership has shown keen interest to be faithful to the Founder's request to stay connected. Here are some of those significant milestones in that long history:

"Missions" – A year after the death of St. Eugene, his first successor, Fr. Joseph Fabre, OMI, started a publication called MISSIONS. In introducing this periodical, the second Superior General spoke about the joy the Founder used to feel when he received letters from his missionaries and news of their joys and pains in carrying out the Oblate mission. The Founder had wanted to find a way to share this news with the whole Congregation. Various General Chapters had expressed the same desire. Therefore, MISSIONS was begun to fulfil this desire of the Founder.

¹² Fr. Pierre Babin OMI (1925-2012) was a French Oblate, was internationally known for his innovative vision for defining a new approach to catechesis in a media age. He founded an international research and training center in religious communications – CREC AVEX, Ecully (Lyon).

“AROMI” – *Agence Romaine OMI*, a newsletter (with photos at one point) that was published at the General House. It was begun in 1950’s and was made available in various languages.

“OMI Information”, “Communiqué”, and “OMI Documentation” – *OMI Information* is the General Administration’s unofficial newsletter to share news of the Oblate world. *Communiqué*, furthermore, shares all the information regarding the decisions made by the Superior General and his Council during a Plenary Session.

Oblate Communications Service – The Rome-based “Information Service”, a General Service that was limited to publications like *OMI Information*, *Documentation* and *Communiqué*, was transformed into “Oblate Communications Service” in the first decade of the new millennium. The idea was to expand our presence in media and enter into the new sphere of the World Wide Web.

Today, the role of the Oblate Communications Service is to help the Congregation to be faithful to the spirit of St. Eugene, and to share the lived experiences of the present and of the past, in its quest for unity, while respecting and appreciating differences. In other words, this Service renders an important support to the communion between the General Administration and the entire Congregation and, at the same time, among the different Units of the Congregation: it contributes to create and maintain a family spirit.

omiworld website – www.omiworld.org, the official website of the Congregation, initiated in 2002, has gone through various phases of updating over the years, and is now a very comprehensive resource to the Oblates around the world.

OMIapp – The official mobile app of the Congregation was launched in December 2017. It is still in its early years, but it has

certainly broken a barrier and announced the Congregation's entry into another area of digital communication.

Social media platforms – The Oblate Communications Service in Rome has been able to maintain its constant communication with the Oblate family on several social media platforms. These platforms include *Facebook* (OMI WORLD, Louis Lougen OMI and Oblate Voices), *Twitter* (omiworld), *Instagram* (omiworld_rome), *YouTube* (omiworld), *Flickr* (omiworld) and *SoundCloud* (omi world).

Call of the Congregation

The Congregation has recognized the need to be engaged in media and communications in almost every General Chapter since the Vatican Council II. However, for our purposes, it will be sufficient to know what the most recent Chapter Documents said about it. It will also be useful to remind ourselves of what our Constitutions and Rules have to say about our presence in media.

32nd General Chapter (1992) - In the Acts of this Chapter, entitled "Witnessing as Apostolic Community", Section III of Chapter 3 was dedicated to "Social Communications and Media". There the Chapter members categorically emphasized that *"the media have a determining influence on the contemporary person"* and that *"the use of the media is increasingly seen as an integral part of evangelization"* (Acts of the Chapter 1992, 3, III p. 44). The Chapter also stated that it

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 (Acts of the Chapter 1992, 3, III, pp. 44-45).

33rd General Chapter (1998) - In the Acts of this Chapter entitled "Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium", the Sixth Section was named "Social Communications and OBCOM". It made some useful recommendations to the Oblate Communications animation committee (OBCOM) to implement during the six years leading up to the next Chapter. One important decision made there was that the Superior General and the Council meet with the OBCOM committee regularly in Rome, to discuss the future of the Congregation's media efforts.

34th General Chapter (2004) - Speaking about our mission to youth, the Chapter members urged the Congregation to make conscious efforts to know, respect, and be sensitive towards youth in their own identity, and in their immersion in a culture of communication and technology. Further, in Chapter 6, under 'Additional Recommendations', the Acts of the Chapter spoke on Media and evangelization. The General Chapter mandated the General Administration "to initiate and find ways to connect those who are involved or interested in media, in greater understanding and use of media, and bring people together for the planning of future development in this area and to revive and foster media ministry within the Congregation". It also made suggestions for the Oblate Units to develop a program to foster the training of the Oblates in the appropriate use of and evangelization through mass media.

35th General Chapter (2010) - This Chapter once again recognized that Oblate formation for leadership must include, among other things, skills in communication.

36th General Chapter (2016) - Chapter V of the main document within the Acts of the 36th General Chapter sought to deepen our understanding of “Mission and social media”. It recognized social media as the new Areopagus of contemporary times. It brings out various suggestions to be implemented in different levels, to rejuvenate the missionary presence of the Church. [See Appendix II for the complete text.]

Constitutions and Rules

R 9a. Whatever their work, Oblates will collaborate, according to their vocation and **by every means** compatible with the Gospel, in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty.

R 66c. Since the means of social communication profoundly influence attitudes and values, Oblates should understand how public opinion is formed and ought to **develop their talents in the field of communications**. They can thereby help to make Gospel values present and powerful in society.

C 133. ... As the successor of St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Superior General will continually keep alive the missionary zeal at the heart of our charism, **helping to break new ground** at the service of evangelization.

R 149d. Through different means of communication, the **Oblate Communications Service** provides for an exchange and sharing of information throughout the Congregation and beyond and fosters the use of media in ministry.

5. Proposals to be implemented within the Congregation

Taking into consideration the recommendations of the Oblate experts on communications and media, and taking into account the last Chapter mandate (2016), we would like to present some key suggestions to be implemented at various levels of our Congregation.

Personal level

- Find out why the Congregation invites each individual Oblate to approach social media and communications with a positive outlook.
- See the connection between media and communications and our Charism to evangelize.
- Be keen to find out which social media platforms are most popular among the groups of people whom you serve. This can differ according to their country, age and profession.
- Try to understand the reasons behind people's choice of one media platform over another.
- Seek how best you could positively impact people's lives by being active on the same social media platforms that they are in.
- Commit yourself to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of such social media, especially about the best practices through which you could bring people closer to God.
- Train yourself for the correct usage of social media, and gain a pastoral understanding of the effects involved.
- Find out about the priests and religious in your area who are already evangelizers on social media. Do not hesitate to learn from their experience.

Community level

- Discuss in community how best the community can use social media platforms as an important and indispensable means of evangelization.
- Create a community blog/website/social media profile in the name of the community to share your life with people and be witnesses of true community life.
- Appoint an Oblate in the community as the one responsible for the community's social media management. Support him if he needs to be trained in this field and develop his talents.
- If the website/social media platform of your community/ministry is administered by a layperson, the superior of the community must oversee all the decisions that

he or she takes on your behalf. Sensitive matters like password/login details need to be under the guidance of the Superior.

- Our intellectual property has to be well protected and the Superior has to take into consideration any violations of copyrights.
- Share responsibilities for the smooth running of your social media platforms (e.g. members taking weekly or monthly turns to post something interesting about their pastoral activities, faith experiences, community life in general).
- Equip the community with adequate facilities related to social media (e.g. an Ethernet or a Wi-Fi connection).
- Be open to discuss and share issues related to the use of social media amongst members. (e.g. whether using certain types of digital accessories is a challenge to live the vow of poverty).
- Continually remind the community that one's personal engagement on social media must not take him away from his quality presence in the community among its members. Also, remind members that one should not put the reputation of the whole community at risk by using social media unwisely without discretion.

Unit level

- Commit as an Oblate Unit to the task of being present in the digital social environment. Convince the members that our presence there is not an option but a mandatory requirement of the time we live in.
- Set up a **social media policy** as well as a **social media strategy** in accordance with the specific requirements of the geographical area where the Unit is present.
- See that your Unit has a (simple and responsive) webpage/blog through which you share your life with the rest of the Oblate world and beyond.

- Units are also encouraged to engage in social media for sharing our missionary endeavours with people, very especially in vocation promotion.
- Appoint someone, an Oblate or a layperson (in case of a layperson, supervised by an Oblate) as the Communications Director of the Unit. He (or she) is responsible to oversee the smooth running of the website/blog and other social media platforms which are the responsibility of the Unit.
- The Communications Director is expected to be in direct contact with the General Service of Oblate Communications and share interesting news/articles/photos/videos etc. with the office in Rome.
- If a layperson is given the responsibility to be the webmaster/social media manager/communications director of your Unit, the Major Superior must make sure that he monitors the work he or she does on behalf of the Unit.
- Regarding the accessibility to the website/social media platforms, the Major Superior needs to have a record of essential details and it is advisable that he acts as one of the administrators.
- Larger Oblate Units are also encouraged to establish a communications committee to make recommendations and seek ways to be positively engaged in media as a Unit.
- Identify Oblates, including those in first formation, to prepare professionally for ministry in social media through higher studies.
- Encourage all formation houses to organize training and workshops on social media.
- Invite Oblates presently working in media to engage with contemporary media associations within their respective Units and to learn from their experience.
- Promote a personal and communal discipline which helps all to grow in a responsible use of social media.

- The Major Superior is encouraged to have knowledge about good programmes/courses for the Oblates to qualify themselves in media literacy and social media management.
- He will also ensure that safe practices are established to maintain the integrity of internet usage so that Oblates will not engage in immoral behaviour via the internet (sexting, exhibition of nudity, child abuse, pornography, inappropriate messaging, etc.). He will also seek ways to help those Oblates who have addictions to internet contents (social media/pornography).
- Those Oblates in positions of authority in our institutions (especially schools and parishes) will ensure no abuse of the internet, such as obscene language, cyberbullying, inappropriate behaviour, etc. takes place inside the institutions.
- The Unit must protect sensitive data of the Oblates by not making them public. It is best that our websites have a reserved section for such sensitive data. The Unit should copyright its data, so that no one can illegally own them or use them.
- The Unit must ensure that it has a person who is knowledgeable regarding internet-related privacy policies of the country. He/she will be the resource person who will keep the Unit updated on these issues.

Regional level

- Communication directors and others who are actively ministering in the field of communications can meet regularly to exchange their knowledge and experience.
- Seek how best at a regional level we could make social media a way to promote vocations.

- Encourage Regional Conferences to have a liaison person to be in contact with the General Service of Oblate Communications and local Provincial offices.
- Encourage collaboration within the region to organize workshops and do research on the impact of social media in the region so that the Oblates will be more equipped to face the new challenges that come their way in this regard.

General level

- Develop a theological framework that empowers the Oblate engagement as part of our missionary endeavour.
- Support Oblate Units with professional knowhow to engage in social media ministries.
- Seek ways to use social media for vocational promotion.
- Establish a cloud-based portal in order to make audio-visual material available to the Oblate world which can be used as resources for evangelization.
- The Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning should discuss the topic of setting up regional centres or committees for communication.



PART III - PRAXIS

1. A Practical guide to some Social Media Platforms

Although there are a good number of social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be considered the most commonly used ones among Oblates. While many of us seem to use YouTube or Vimeo as our video-watching platform, WhatsApp, Viber, and Imo are very common among Oblates for instant messaging and photo/video sharing. If responsibly used, all those mentioned above can turn out to be useful communication tools for evangelization.

However, it is also very important and crucial to be responsible in the use of social media. Some zones that are inconsistent with consecrated life, not only those most evident such as pornographic sites, but also those more subtle ones such as dating apps like *Tinder* (a location-based dating service) must be avoided. Each Oblate is expected to act responsibly in this matter, taking into consideration the sociocultural sphere in which he lives in.

Here we wish to describe the three most common social networks in the world. However, there are other platforms, not considered here, which can be more popular in certain geographical areas. (E.g. *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki* in Eastern Europe, and *QZone* in China.)

1.1. Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media platform worldwide. According to statistics, there were more than 2.2 billion active Facebook accounts in the world by April 2020¹³. It has proven to be most useful in information dissemination, building online

¹³ www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot.

communities, advertising, and even in faith-based content promotion.

Presently, all other social media platforms are seemingly insignificant in comparison with Facebook. Its algorithm is constantly redesigned to adapt to the developing needs and versatility of its users. It has perfected its algorithm on audience targeting, clustering or echo chambering (see “Echo chamber” in Glossary). On the other hand, this platform has also been used for destructive purposes.

It is in this platform that the “trolls” and “bots” are most common. Trolls are fake accounts that are mostly used to advance a particular agenda. Bots (short for robots) are automated social media accounts run by an algorithm rather than a real person, though they act and respond like real people. In the business and political world, Facebook trolls and bots are heavily used to either promote or destroy personalities or businesses.

Strengths

- i. Remains the leading social media platform in the world.
- ii. User engagement on a daily basis is very high.
- iii. The concept of 360-degree photos, Facebook live

Weaknesses

- i. Negative impact of online advertising on user experience
- ii. Some complaints about data leakages

Best practices

- i. Create a personal Facebook account. Indicate or let people know that it is your “official” account, so as to discourage any third party from creating a fake account with your name.
- ii. Make sure that you do not forget your *username* and *password* by choosing one that you will easily remember or by writing it on a paper easily located.

- iii. There are three ways to ‘be present’ on Facebook: Profiles, Page, and Groups. By *profile* is meant a personal account where you connect with family, friends and colleagues by sharing information about yourself or other topics in which you are interested. You must have a *profile* to create a *Page* or help manage one. *Pages* are places on Facebook where organizations, public figures, businesses, brands, and non-profits can connect with their fans or customers. You may create as many Facebook *pages* as you wish, especially for a good cause such as evangelization or human development. Make them your new pulpit! Facebook *Groups* are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. *Groups* allow people to come together around a common cause, issue, or activity, to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos, and share related content.
- iv. Study the *settings* of your account or page. The configuration of your settings may actually make your page either safe or susceptible to the influx of bad content coming from your “friends”. Also, the proper privacy setting will keep your files exclusively to yourself.
- v. Be selective in inviting or accepting friends on your personal account, and in inviting friends to like your page. Whatever is posted in your friend’s timeline will also be seen in your personal Facebook.
- vi. Post *good content* as often as you have time. It is better to avoid both the extremes: being addicted to it, spending many hours a day, and not posting anything for month after month. For personal accounts, once a day is good or thrice a week at least.
- vii. If you intend to use Facebook more often for evangelization purposes, it is an advantage to stay connected. Like or follow other Facebook Pages and Groups that support advocacies similar to what you uphold. This may

strengthen your network and broaden your connections for the cause.

- viii. Be very careful in *liking* or *sharing* contents from your friend's timeline, or you could unknowingly become instrumental in disseminating destructive, unverified or false information. Whatever you like or share will create a trend in Facebook's algorithm for it to feed you with content that it thinks you are most interested in. On the other hand, it may isolate you into what is called an "echo-chamber" that will keep you out of other topics or ideas that you seem to be less interested in.
- ix. See to it that you do not "like" or befriend fake accounts that enter into your homepage. They will find a way to make comments on your posts. When you see them, do not comment back or they will make your comment viral. Better to delete them right away.
- x. Some people may use Facebook as a platform to ask important questions of you regarding the Catholic Faith or our catechism. Find time to engage. This may strengthen the mission of the Church to be inclusive. However, in case of a more sensitive matter, it is advisable to shift the conversation to a private chat rather than do so in public.
- xi. Make this your tool for evangelization by posting or sharing your homilies, reflections, prayers and catechetical materials. Do not post or share content that is copyrighted.
- xii. The use of photo messages or photo quotes are especially effective in communicating Church teaching, doctrine, catechism, or other especially complex or wordy passages.
- xiii. Keep posts as concise as possible. Statistics show the most shared posts have images with minimal text.

1.2. Twitter

Twitter is an online news and social networking service where users post and interact with short messages. Often referred to as

micro-blog, “tweets” are restricted to only 280 characters. Globally, Twitter has about 386 million users as of April, 2020¹⁴. Many prefer Twitter when looking for news because it is immediate. Twitter is best for aggregating trending topics through the use of what is called a “hashtag”. Through this hashtag, one’s post can spread fast and wide, even if your followers are just a handful. But, like other social media platforms, Twitter has also been used in spreading fake news and lies. Twitter is a very powerful tool for spreading the Good News, when used properly. Pope Francis has amassed over 48 million followers on his account @Pontifex (as of January, 2020). Satellite accounts are used to transmit and translate the Pope’s tweets into nine different languages.

Best practices

- i. Create a Twitter account for the nobler purpose of sending catechetical or faith-based messages across. The best way to defeat the proliferation of false or bad messages is to circulate good ones.
- ii. Configure the settings well for better design and functionality.
- iii. Make sure to keep and protect your username and password.
- iv. Make use of a hashtag (#) whenever you post, in order to have a wider circulation of your messages; one that is used by many people at a given time.
- v. Retweet messages only from known sources, such as those from established news agencies or personalities.
- vi. Tweet messages that are calling for immediate response such as during calamities or emergencies.

¹⁴ www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot

1.3. Instagram

Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing site that enables users to share pictures and videos either publicly or privately on the app as well as through a variety of other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr.

This is very popular especially among younger “netizens”. As of April 2020, Instagram had about 970 million active users around the globe¹⁵. This platform has not been used much by Church groups or individuals except for those who file their religious icons and photos for posting on Facebook and/or Twitter.

Strengths

- i. Mass audience reach.
- ii. High engagement levels
- iii. Usage of Hashtags to capitalize on real-time trends

Weaknesses

- i. There is no way to link to another site (restrictions on web traffic)
- ii. On a picture, you can only comment or reply to another person’s comment

Best practices

- i. In the event that you wish to make use of this facility, make sure to make your privacy settings very secure.
- ii. Post only photos or videos with catechetical or faith values.
- iii. Append catechetical texts when posting photos or videos.
- iv. Never post or use copyrighted photos or videos.
- v. Use hashtags (#) when posting for easy categorization and searching across social networks.

¹⁵ www.datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot

- vi. For your network to grow, learn to mention Instagram accounts that belong to the same category, group, or style as yours.
- vii. Be encouraged to post engaging and relatable, moving photos, because graphic illustrations catch more attention than mere texts.

2. Some General guidelines on the use of social media and the internet

2.1. Be responsible and prudent

- i. Be prudent in posting. What you post online will always be online. Do not forget that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum.
- ii. Seek the approval of your community members, when you publish something on behalf of the community, or when they appear on the photos/videos you would like to publish.
- iii. Make sure you become aware of the fact that social media is a public space. You need not go ‘public’ with certain matters that are ‘private’ to you or to your community.
- iv. Be prudent in “liking”, commenting, replying, or messaging. Many social networks share your “Likes”, comments and other actions with your friends and followers.
- v. Information that is confidential in nature should NOT be communicated through social media.
- vi. Avoid inappropriate personal interaction, especially in social networking sites.

2.2. Be honest and accurate

- i. If you make a mistake when posting information or news, correct it quickly. Be open about any previous posts you have altered.

- ii. Never post any information or rumours that you know to be false, or you are uncertain about - especially regarding parishioners, students, Church personnel, etc.
- iii. Be aware that posted words, comments, images, and videos can be easily misinterpreted.
- iv. Authenticity and transparency are the driving forces behind good social media usage. Do not use anonymous or fictitious names, identities, posts, or comments.

2.3. Be sensitive and selective

- i. Be sensitive and clear about the intended audiences for social media conversations on personal social media accounts. Every social media platform has a different audience, thus a different way of posting.
- ii. Your conversations containing personal views intended for a specific limited audience should not be presented as a representative viewpoint of the Oblate Congregation or the Catholic Church at large.
- iii. Be selective in accepting or adding 'friends' on personal social media accounts. People can 'abuse' your 'online friendship' for their ulterior motives.
- iv. Be selective and cautious about visiting and participating in online sites, forums and groups; your participation in some of them might be unbecoming of a Religious.
- v. Be aware of shrewd individuals who might purposely use your online platform to promote wrong ideologies or values through comments or post sharing. It is best, in such cases, to block them or delete their comments. You may ask those individuals to take the conversation off the public page and move it to a personal forum.

2.4. Be respectful and charitable

- i. Views expressed through social media should always be made in a respectful manner, with civility and Christian charity.
- ii. Respect the Church and her teachings. Your choice of language, photos and videos must be a carrier of the value system that the Church and our Congregation uphold and proclaim.
- iii. Pictures, videos, and all personal information should not be shared or posted without prior consent of the individual. Always be aware of your boundaries, particularly in communications with children and young people on social media. In the case of posting photos of a minor or a vulnerable adult, it is necessary to seek the consent of the parent of the minor or vulnerable adult.¹⁶
- iv. Do not post obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory, trolling, cyberbullying, or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links, and/or images, or materials that might put the good reputation of yourself and the Church at risk.

2.5. Get professional assistance

- i. Overall, when it comes to the social media platforms of your community/institution, have a knowledgeable person as the social media manager.
- ii. However, as the one who oversees, you should monitor his/her engagement regularly, as he/she does it in your

¹⁶ In general, there is no legal requirement to obtain someone's authorization to take his or her photograph. However, the way the image is used may give the person shown in the photograph a right to take legal action. These may include national security concerns, protection of children, ethical-cultural taboos, right of privacy, etc. Knowing the country's laws in this regard and one's legal rights, you will be in a better position to find solutions that minimize your legal risks.

name. You must always have full access to all account settings and must have complete access to all communications to and from the official site or account.

- iii. Appoint a trustworthy person who can keep the password of your personal social media accounts, in order to delete it in the event of your demise. Otherwise, someone can even hack it and use it for illegal purposes. For the official accounts of our institutes, it is better that both the one in-charge of a Unit's communications service and the major superior have the passwords of them all.
- iv. A practical knowledge about copyright laws (laws of data protection) as well as privacy policies of your country would help Oblate Communities use media properly and responsibly. (See "Copyright" under the Glossary.)
- v. Websites, apps, and other types of multimedia resources that you use, may have published their own set of policies about data protection and about safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons. If you are not aware of them, it is wise to seek assistance.

2.6. Set your priorities

- i. It is best that an Oblate who is interested in doing online evangelization has a strong prayer life with ongoing formation. Social media evangelization is no replacement for the sacramental and prayer life.
- ii. Be aware of the amount of time you spend on internet and social media. Let it not hinder your normal duties as a Religious. It is not the quantity of time that makes one a good communicator, rather it is the quality of time.
- iii. Never let the internet and social media take control of you. Do not allow it to indoctrinate or dictate to you those habits that are inappropriate to your Religious life.

3. Some other practical suggestions

- We can help spread the Good News by sharing the liturgy of the Word in our own languages through video or audio broadcasting using social media platforms. This type of communication ensures that we are present not only to those gathered inside our churches but also to a broader audience.
- Many young people today prefer watching a video rather than reading a book. Therefore, it is important to be present on audiovisual platforms as well. The clear advantage of this is that people can access these sites in their own leisure time, from anywhere.
- Evangelizing young people on social media means not only dealing with “holy” issues. It is to promote Gospel values without having to directly mention it as such. This is where the art of “storytelling” becomes handy.
- Our involvement in social media and the internet can even be a further proof to our “flock” that we really care for them and are available to them, if our purpose is to build effective relationships that will help them grow in their journey of faith.
- Nevertheless, the real danger is that there can be an inclination to consider ‘online’ presence as one’s main missionary presence. Our presence in social media as Oblates has to be incorporated into the goal of our mission, which is evangelizing the poor.
- Difficulties in community arise when Oblates become more attached to distant friendships, while not being sensitive to their own community. Therefore, it is necessary to use our wisdom and strike a healthy balance.



CONCLUSION

This handbook is certainly a fulfilment of the 2016 Chapter mandate, to produce an Oblate guide or “companion” for engaging in social media. It is a collective effort of the Internal Committee of Communications based in Rome, together with several other collaborators.

However, this document will always remain “a work-in-progress” as the world of media and social communications undergoes constant change every passing day. Therefore, for the next update of the Vademecum, your comments, suggestions and input are most welcome.

We hope that every Oblate will have an opportunity to read this handbook, so that in each one of us there would be created an interest in engaging in social media (and media in general for that matter) actively and responsibly for the purpose of evangelization.

GLOSSARY

Algorithm - An algorithm is a set of formulas developed for a computer to perform a certain function. This is important in the social sphere as the algorithm sites, like those that Facebook and Google use, are critical for developing content promotion strategies.

Blog - A blog (a contraction of the term “web log”) is a type of website with chronologically posted articles of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Copyright – It is the exclusive legal right to reproduce, publish, sell, or distribute the matter and form of something (such as a literary, musical, or artistic work). In other words, it describes the legal right of the owner (of a photo/video/song) for his/her intellectual property. A person who owns the copyright to a work is the only person who can copy that work or grant permission to someone else to copy it. It is always advisable to seek the permission of the owner before republishing it when copyrights are reserved, unless it is specifically labelled for reuse.

Chat - Chat can refer to any kind of communication over the internet, but traditionally refers to one-to-one communication through a text-based chat application, commonly referred to as instant messaging (IM) applications.

Comment - A comment is a response that is often provided as an answer or reaction to a post or message on a social network.

Cyberbullying - The use of social networks to repeatedly harm or harass other people in a deliberate manner. Cyberbullying

could be limited to posting rumours or gossips about a person in the internet and creating hatred in other people's minds. Or it may go to the extent of personally identifying victims and publishing materials severely defaming and humiliating them.

Echo chamber - In a "social media echo chamber", people can find the social networks they use and feed them with the same opinions they have expressed, supported and repeated previously, making their own convictions stronger. Gradually, they end up in a narrowly restricted space where everyone agrees with the given information (even if it can be false information) as outside input hardly reaches them.

Facebook Group - Groups provide a space for people to communicate about shared interests. Groups can be created by anyone.

Facebook Page - Pages allow real organizations, businesses, celebrities, and brands to communicate broadly with people who like them. Pages may only be created and managed by official representatives.

Follower - In a social media setting, follower refers to a person who subscribes to your account in order to receive your updates.

Friends - Friends is the term used on Facebook to represent the connections you make and the people you follow. These are individuals you consider to be friendly enough with you to see your Facebook profile and engage with you.

Hashtag - A hashtag (#) is a symbol used on a variety of social networks as a way to annotate or categorize a message. It can be a word or phrase preceded by a "#" (i.e. #News #Gospel #Love). Social networks use hashtags to categorize information and make it easily searchable for users.

Like - A Like is an action that can be made by a Facebook or Instagram user. Instead of writing a comment or sharing a post, a user can click the Like button as a quick way to show approval.

Meme - A meme on the internet is used to describe a thought, idea, joke, or concept that's widely shared online. It is typically an image with text above and below, but can also come in video and link form.

Mention - A mention is a Twitter term used to describe an instance in which a user includes someone else's @username in their tweet to attribute a piece of content or start a discussion.

News Feed - A news feed is literally a feed full of news. On Facebook, the News Feed is the homepage of users' accounts where they can see all the latest updates from their friends. The News Feed on Twitter is called Timeline.

Podcast - The name "podcast" combines the terms *iPod* and *broadcast* into a single catchy word. As the name suggests, podcasts are audio and video broadcasts that can be played on an iPod. However, today you do not actually need an iPod to listen to a podcast. Any device that is capable of playing an audio file can play an audio podcast. Podcasts are often distributed in "episodes".

Retweet - A retweet is when someone on Twitter sees your message and decides to share it with his or her followers. A retweet button allows them to quickly resend the message with attribution to the original sharer's name.

Streaming - It means broadcasting video to a website or mobile device as it is being recorded. Facebook Live, Periscope and YouTube are some commonly used platforms for video streaming. Sites such as Twitch have become popular outlets for watching people play video games.

Tag - Tagging is a social media functionality commonly used on Facebook and Instagram that allows users to create a link back to the profile of the person shown in the picture or targeted by the update.

Troll - A troll, or internet troll, refers to a person who is known for creating controversy in an online setting. A troll typically hangs out in forums, comment sections, and chat rooms, with the intent of disrupting the conversation on a piece of content by providing commentary that aims to evoke a reaction.

Viral - Viral is a term used to describe a content that spreads far and wide in so short a time.

MISSION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

SECTION V OF THE ACTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2016

71. Social media is like the new Areopagus of contemporary times. It cries out for the missionary presence of the Church. Among the numerous voices which fill this media and the many propositions it conveys, the Gospel must find its place to propose Jesus Christ.

Context

72. “Social media” is a term used to describe a variety of Web-based platforms, applications and technologies that enable people to socially interact with one another online. Very often they are called New Media. Social Media starts with blogs and podcasts and authorship-centric tools like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, FaceTime, Skype, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Vine, SlideShare and many others. This means the newspaper, the television, and the radio are already “Old Media”. In certain parts of the world these forms still exist as primary tools of communication. For example, in Bolivia, Zambia, Canada and many other places traditional media play an important role.

73. One of the defining phenomena of the present times which is reshaping the world as we know it, is the worldwide accessibility to the internet (1998). The child of the World Wide Web is social media, which comes in many forms, including blogs, forums, business networks, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming, microblogs, chat apps, and last but not least social networks.

74. Some people say that if you do not have your web page or your Facebook account, you do not exist.

75. Social media offers many opportunities. It is a way to promote social justice and to facilitate actions by groups. From the Oblate point of view, through the use of social media we can collaborate more with Lay Associates. At its best, social media allows us to connect and keep up with friends and people we do not see very often. It allows us to have short interactions with them that keep the relationships going when we do not have much free time.

76. At the same time, some challenges arise with social media. We could spend much time in virtual communication and have less time for face to face relationships. Even the relationships between formandi and formators are already affected by this situation. Being bullied in real life is bad enough, but bullying can actually get worse when kids are doing it on a social media site. Some people can end up with a “social media depression” caused by a high exposure to representations of peers who seem happier than oneself and whom one could envy.

Resources

77. “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15), says Jesus. The mandate to evangelize can be actualized in and through the realm of social media.

78. In the Oblate tradition, we can look to our *Constitutions and Rules* which give some orientations in social media:

78.1 R 66c. “Since the means of social communication profoundly influence attitudes and values, Oblates should understand how public opinion is formed and ought to develop their talents in the field of communications. They can thereby help to make Gospel values present and powerful in society”.

78.2 R 149d. “Through different means of communication, the Oblate Communications Service provides for an exchange and sharing of information throughout the Congregation and beyond and fosters the use of media in ministry”.

The Congregation has history, resources and experience in the area of social media that can be a contribution for this mission today. The Congress on the Oblate Charism in Context (2015) was held using media, as well as our 36th General Chapter where we have used some social media.

79. The World Communication Day has been an occasion for Popes Benedict XVI and Francis to give some insights on social media:

79.1 “The digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young”. Pope Benedict XVI, 2013 WCD.

79.2 “Social networks, as well as being a means of evangelization, can also be a factor in human development. As an example, in some geographical and cultural contexts where Christians feel isolated, social networks can reinforce their sense of real unity with the worldwide community of believers”. Pope Benedict XVI, 2013 WCD.

79.3 “In the digital world there are social networks, which offer our contemporaries opportunities for prayer, meditation and sharing the word of God. But these networks can also open the door to other dimensions of faith. Many people are actually discovering, precisely thanks to a contact initially made online (...)”. Pope Benedict XVI, 2013 WCD.

79.4 “Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology, which determines whether or not communication is authentic,

but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal". Pope Francis, 2016 WDC.

Calls

80. Oblates are called to educate our collaborators, especially the youth, in the ethical use of social media.

81. We also recognize a call to be present in the social media in order to use it as a tool for evangelization. "Evangelizare media misit nos Dominus".

Strategies

82. General level:

82.1 That the General Service of Oblate Communications promote greater networking in the Congregation among those involved in Media Ministry.

82.2 The General Service of Oblate Communications in consultation with the Central Government consider the viability of a congress on Mission and Media.

82.3 That the Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning discuss the topic of setting up regional centres or committees for communication.

82.4 The General Service of Oblate Communications in consultation with the Central Government produce a guide or "companion" for engaging in media.

83. Regional level:

83.1 Encourage Regional Conferences to have a liaison person to be in contact with the General Service of Oblate Communications and Provincial local offices.

83.2 Encourage collaboration in workshops and research on the role of media.

83.3 Encourage all formation houses to have special courses on social media and a focus on media and missiology.

84. Unit and local level:

84.1 Unit and local communities commit themselves to promote an Oblate missionary approach in the use of social media (in pastoral communication).

84.2 Encourage establishing a communications committee and/or appointing an animator on the Provincial level (that they organize seminars in media education or educating for media).

84.3 Encourage Oblates to prepare professionally for ministry in social media through higher studies.

84.4 Invite Oblates presently working in media to engage with contemporary media associations in our respective Units to learn from their experience.

84.5 Strive toward professionally made website pages (interactive with social media).

84.6 Major superiors make a commitment to promotion of good use of social media.

84.7 Superiors of each community promote a personal and communal discipline which helps all to grow in a responsible use of social media, as discussed at this Chapter.



This Vademecum is an effort to present the Oblate Congregation's conviction that all media, whether printed or internet and, especially in these days, the social media, are gifts for us as Oblates to use positively and actively as means of spreading the Good News and especially the "Joy of the Gospel."

This handbook was initiated as a response to one of the recommendations of the 36th General Chapter (2016) which called for the Oblate General Administration to develop "a guide or companion in media" (#82.4) which has resulted in this text.

