



Information # 436 (English)

October 2004

The 34th General Chapter closes!

Day 30 – September 28th: The reception area was buzzing with activity. Those with early flights were already waiting with their luggage for transportation to the airport. Hasty greetings and goodbyes were being exchanged. The secretariat photocopier was quiet and the computers were being packed. Boxes of all sizes and shapes filled the corridor. The Chapter was drawing to a close.

There was a festive mood in the Chapter Hall as the delegates gathered and exchanged pleasantries while waiting for the bell to call the 40th plenary assembly to order. Morning prayer opened with Psalm 64 – a thanksgiving song – and ended with the rousing Spanish hymn “Alabaré”. After a few brief announcements, Father General descended from the podium to be the first to sign the official Acts of the Chapter. All the delegates followed and affixed their signatures after his.

Thirty days, countless hours of meetings and discussions, 200,000 printed pages, now it was time to get on with the mission of “Witnessing to hope.” After expressing his thanks to one and all, Father General asked the assembly if it was ready to close the Chapter. After the rustle of raised hands he continued: “It seems to be unanimous (laughter). I therefore declare the 34th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate formally closed!”

Homily at the Mass of Thanksgiving at the General House

by Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, Superior General, September 27, 2004

Give witness to hope – a call, our mission – that is the theme of the General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate that will come to an end in one more day. Give witness to hope – our hope is Christ. A call – we are first of all disciples of this Christ. Our mission - being disciples, we become missionaries.

Everything depends on our vital relationship with Christ. Without Him, we can do nothing. But how can we gain access to his person? How can we make of Christ the center of our personal lives, the soul of the renewal of the Congregation, the vital source of our missionary activity?

During the Chapter we have identified some of the obstacles that impede our access to Christ. They are obstacles that exist both in the world around us and within ourselves.

There are economic systems that insult the poor, the sacrament of Christ, and we as religious can also be part of this. There are instances of ethnic pride that separate us from persons we should consider brothers, and this can exist even in the Congregation. In a secularized world we can have the impression that, without reference to God, one can live very well, even in convents.

The prophet of Nazareth, in today’s Gospel, upon whom the Spirit of God descends, is greater than

these obstacles. But how can our eyes be opened to see in this simple itinerant preacher from a distant time the Anointed One of God, the one and immense hope of all peoples? Who can make us feel all the depth of the Church, his Body, which continues his work, that continues to be realized today?

We need signs and persons who open the way for us. Let me mention some of the signs that speak to us as Oblates.

At the beginning of the Chapter, the participants made a pilgrimage to Santa María in Campitelli, a place which reminds us of the approval of our Rule of life. Almost at the end of our assembly, here we are in pilgrimage again, having walked to this chapel, a true sanctuary of the Oblates. There are a number of visible signs here that can open our eyes and our heart, that can bring us to see Christ, the Anointed by the Spirit, with the eyes of a disciple and bring us to proclaim Him with the ardor of the first witnesses of his resurrection.

First of all in this chapel we find the memory of the saints of our Congregation. In the chapel at the left of the entrance, the heart of Saint Eugene, our Founder, is preserved. Then we have in the rear nave on the right, a painted portrait of Blessed Joseph Gérard, apostle of the Basuto, and, on the opposite side another portrait of Blessed Joseph Cebula, martyr of the priesthood. There is also a stone from the concentration camp of Mauthausen where he died.

Then to the right of the entrance is conserved an old altar, brought from Aix-en Provence. We might say that it was at this altar that our name "Oblates" took its origin. At that very altar Saint Eugene de Mazenod and Fr. Francis de Paula Tempier made their first vows, in Aix, on Holy Thursday in the year 1816 at the beginning of the Easter celebrations.

What do these signs tell us? They tell us that we cannot gain access to Christ by means of a simple effort of the mind, a theoretical conviction. Something more is needed. What is needed is a totally new birth, the participation in his pascal sacrifice on the cross, in other words: the oblation, which is the total gift of my person even unto martyrdom. Our hope must pass through the crucible of death with Christ; only in this way can our hope become immense and have the power even to resurrect the dead.

The third and last sign in this chapel that I will mention is the statue that we have before us in a very prominent place, the woman with the crown of twelve stars over her head the moon below her feet. The statue was brought from Aix, as was the altar of the first oblation. According to an oral tradition, on the 15th of August of 1822, this statue gave a tangible sign to Saint Eugene that his small congregation was pleasing to the eyes of God.

Mary is the most direct path to gain access to Jesus. She is the perfect disciple, the Immaculate. We recall this in a special way this year because it was exactly a century and a half ago, the 8th of December, 1854, the Church recognized the privilege of her totally pure holiness. Saint Eugene, who was present in Rome, must have felt like a prophet; he was right when he changed the name of his congregation to Oblates of Mary Immaculate 28 years before the dogma.

Mary explains for us today, in her own way and in harmony with the other signs, the theme of our General Chapter. In order to be witnesses to that hope who is Christ, we must first of all be attentive to his call, just as she was. There is no apostolate without holiness. Only then will she send us to mission. Once again she will tilt her head as she did for Saint Eugene in 1822 as if to say to us: now,

forward, my children, go and be in mission. Be witnesses to hope: it is a call, and it is our mission.

We will continue now the celebration of the Eucharist in this very special chapel where we have come in pilgrimage. The bread we will receive is for the voyage; it will give us the strength to carry out all the good resolutions of the Chapter. Even more: this bread will unite us into one apostolic corps, composed of people from more than 60 nations and cultures. The word internationality was used frequently during our assembly. There are no more international frontiers for witnessing to hope. In each Mass the Congregation becomes the Body of Christ, each evening, at the hour of oraison we are reminded of this anew. The mission of the anointed One of God has been passed on to this apostolic corps present in the whole world. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us. - This is the call! He has sent us to give the Good News to the poor. This is our mission! Amen.

Chapter Journal

DAY 2 – AUGUST 31ST

As it will every day, the Chapter day began with morning prayer in the Chapter Hall. The two liturgy coordinators, Yoland OUELLET and Chinnapan SANDHAPPAN, again proved their expertise in leading a multilingual assembly of this size in meaningful prayer.

The Chapter lost no time in getting down to serious work. It began the process of putting in place the structures it will need to do its work and of gathering the information from which it will choose the issues it feels must be dealt with. One task for the capitulars today was to review the Chapter Directory in view of approving it later this week.

Meeting in regional groups during the morning, they reviewed the written reports from each of the six regions and prepared questions they wanted to put to the Regions during the oral presentations that began in the afternoon. They also discussed possible candidates for the Steering Committee and submitted two names to the president. The election of this committee will take place on Friday.

The oral **presentation of regional reports** began in the afternoon. They have been available to the capitulars and all the Oblates for some time already on the web site.

Africa-Madagascar and **Latin America** presented their reports this afternoon. Serious socio-economic problems are characteristic of both regions. Both also note an increase in vocations and the challenges that brings in terms of providing formators and finances for this growth. Notably, 228 of the 820 Oblates in Africa-Madagascar are in formation. The need for greater collaboration among the units of the region was stressed by both.

DAY 3 – SEPTEMBER 1ST

The presentation of regional reports by Asia-Oceania, Canada, the United States and Europe concluded the first step in this phase of the Chapter that focuses on gathering information. The question and answer period that followed each presentation was an important moment of affirmation, accountability and challenge.

The **Region of Asia-Oceania** (630 Oblates) is not only geographically vast, but marked by a diversity of cultures, languages, religions, economic and political systems. The majority of the world's population lives in Asia-Oceania, and the region has some of the world's richest and poorest countries. Christianity remains a minority religion in most countries except the Philippines and Australia. While evangelisation is not always possible in many places, inter-religious dialogue is seen as a necessary area to be further developed

in order to promote human development and societies where all, without regard to race or religion, can live in peace and harmony.

The **Canadian Region** report did not hide the state of crisis of the Church and the Congregation in that country. A decline in religious practice points to the challenges of a new evangelisation at a time when personnel continues to decrease in number and increase in age. The radical restructuring of the Canadian Provinces is seen as part of a process of refounding that will permit a pooling of resources to focus on the most urgent needs. An appeal was made for personnel from other regions. Mrs Joanne Chrones, lay associate and honorary Oblate, presented part of the report.

The **United States** Province feels that the period of transition from five provinces to one is over. It expressed its thanks to the last General Chapter for permitting it to remain a Region for the past six years. This permitted it to focus on the complex process of restructuring. Acknowledging that many members are involved in parishes (84), it was noted that a high proportion of these minister primarily to immigrant peoples. Thirty-two are primarily Hispanic parishes. Blessed with two dynamic fund-raising centres, the U.S. has been very generous in sharing its blessings with other Oblate Units.

The “old” **Europe** still has 1,350 Oblates. While certain units are suffering from ageing and decreasing personnel, they still continue to send many missionaries abroad (Poland, Italy, Spain). Even Belgium-South and Germany, which are home to many “returning” missionaries, still maintain many missionaries in other countries who are supported by vibrant mission societies. The European Region is convinced that the sharing of personnel across national borders will be part of its future.

The day ended with the presentation of the **seven lay people** who were **invited to be present for the first days of the Chapter** as representatives of the major Oblate associations: honorary Oblates, Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, and lay associates. They met as a

group during these days and presented an address to the plenary assembly this evening.

DAY 4 – SEPTEMBER 2ND

The main work of the day centered on the **Superior General’s report** on the state of the Congregation. Fr. Steckling presented his report in the morning and answered questions from the Chapter members in the afternoon. This report is one of the important sources from which the Chapter will choose the topics for its agenda.

The opening paragraph sets the tone for the whole report. “If I had to highlight two essential words in this report, I would choose faithfulness and change. We Oblates exist to evangelise the poor and it is only by remaining faithful to our mission that we have a right to exist. As a Congregation we are experiencing an exceptional time of change. In such a time faithfulness cannot mean to continue the same as always. Paradoxically, today, if we want to remain faithful to what we are, communities of missionaries to the poor and abandoned, we need to change.”

Father General used the following image to describe the state of the Congregation today. “We could use the image of a garden. Paradoxically, one part of this garden has moved into winter, or into the dry season, and so much seems to be dying away; in another part, spring or the rainy season allows for luxuriant growth.”

The entire report is available on the website in Acrobat PDF format.

DAY 5 – SEPTEMBER 3RD

Election of the Steering Committee

This morning, Sept. 3rd, the General Chapter elected Michael FOLEY (Zimbabwe), Oswald FIRTH (Sri Lanka) and Thomas KLOSTERKAMP (Germany) as members of the Steering Committee. Fr. General is an ex officio member of the Committee. They assume the overall responsibility for the material and technical aspects of the Chapter.

This election saw the tellers called to duty. By tradition they are the four youngest members of the Chapter by order of oblation: Lindomar DE ABREU DANTAS (Brazil), Noel GARCIA (Philippines), Anibal CAZURIAGA (Paraguay), Joseph PHIRI (Zambia).

Treasurer General's Report

Fr. Rufus Whitley presented the report on the state of the Congregation's finances. He began by referring to the changed demographic reality outlined by the Superior General in his presentation yesterday: a general decline in personnel in the northern hemisphere and an increase in the southern. As a result fewer financial resources will be available from the financially independent Units as they will have to devote more of their resources to health care and retirement, and their sources of revenue will diminish with the decrease in personnel. The amount of assistance in personnel and financial resources that the dependent areas can expect from them is already rapidly diminishing.

The results of this changed demographic reality underline the need for the financial self-sufficiency of each unit and greater financial solidarity at all levels. Considerable efforts towards this goal have been made through the Capital Sharing Program and the Missionary Resource Program.

Greater financial self-sufficiency, he insisted, requires long range planning. This plan must include efforts to increase and nourish all the four basic sources of revenue: Oblate work, local gifts and fundraising, foreign gifts and fundraising, prudent distribution from investments.

In closing, Fr Whitley, pointed out a number of specific issues that may require directives from the Chapter: health care within the Congregation, the viable size of mission units, the financing of the De Mazenod Center in Aix, the General House and the General Administration. He stressed that if this or future Chapters place new responsibilities on the Administration, additional and new sources of revenue will be required.

DAY 6 – SEPTEMBER 4TH

The Chapter ended its first week of work with a **pilgrimage to the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli** in the center of Rome. Fr. Eugene KING presided the concelebrated Eucharist in this church where St. Eugene de Mazenod assisted at nine Masses while waiting for the Cardinals meeting across the street to approve the Constitutions and Rules. They apparently forget he was there!

Reflecting on the wedding feast of Cana, which was chosen as the Gospel reading, Fr. King said:

“Why not imagine the Chapter as a month long wedding feast - celebrating the marriage and remarriage of the Oblate family to its first founder, not St. Eugene, but Jesus Christ in his gracious work of salvation. We have heard the assessment of the headwaiter - our Superior General and his chief vintner - the Treasurer General. In many situations we are critically short of wine, of resources to meet the thirst of God's world and people. At the same time, they have voiced the good news of the young Eugenes who are ready to start over in Birmingham and Québec, in Havana and Bulawayo, in Kiev and Jolo. Hearing their needs, how can we do other than live this Chapter as a time of incessant prayer for the re-founding of Oblate apostolic community where our arms have grown weary, for the re-inspiring of Oblates who await Pentecost behind closed doors, for re-sending every one of us to claim our their Christian and Oblate place in God's world.”

DAY 8 – SEPTEMBER 6TH

While many members of the Chapter were able to rest or go on pilgrimage to Subiaco, Monte Casino and other holy places during the weekend, the Steering Committee was busy at work. This morning it presented an overview of the work for the next three weeks and proposed candidates for the last operational structures of the Chapter, the Information and Communications Committee and the Legal Committee.

The Chapter approved the **Information Committee**: Fabio CIARDI (Italy), Allan MOSS (Natal), Roberto DURETTE (Bolivia) and the **Legal Committee**: Warren BROWN (USA), Gilberto PIÑON (Mexico), Luc TARDIF (Canada). The Procurator General, Roberto SARTOR, is the *ex officio* head of this committee.

After a week of listening to reports, today the Chapter began the process of identifying and choosing the main elements to be studied. The first step in this process was the presentation by the Immense Hope Task Force of the work done throughout the Congregation on this project.

At the end of the day the Chapter Secretary, Thomas Coughlin, presented a new prioritisation of the Major Elements that came out of a consultation of the Congregation.

DAY 9 – SEPTEMBER 7TH

The process of identifying the issues or elements to be considered by this Chapter continued into its second day. Oswald Firth, a member of the Steering Committee, opened the day with a brief summary of what he saw as the major elements emerging from the various reports presented so far to the Chapter by the Superior General, the Treasurer General, the Regions, the Immense Hope Task Force, and from the order of priority of the ten Major Elements.

The assembly then met for the rest of the morning in nine inter-regional groups to discern what might be the 2 or 3 more important issues concerning the Congregation as a whole. They were also asked how these issues converged with the ten Major Elements that surfaced during the consultation of the Congregation prior to the Chapter.

The nine groups reported back to the plenary assembly in the afternoon. The focus seems to be centred on the three areas of mission, formation, internationality and the implications of the demographic change in the Congregation on these three areas. The presence of the Brothers at Chapter was much in evidence this afternoon

as they presented five of the nine reports.

The day closed with a presentation by Francis Morrissey of the *Status Quaestionis* on matters relating to the composition of the General Council, the Regions and their representatives. This was offered to help the reflection on certain proposals that were submitted to the Precapitular Commission for changes in central government structures. He clarified the competency of the Chapter and which of these matters would have to be submitted to the Holy See, if adopted.

DAY 10 – SEPTEMBER 8TH

The Chapter is hard at work. This is not a capitular speaking, but the view from the outside of the one writing this news. It is a work that involves meetings in plenary assembly, regional or inter-regional groups, or still – in a less formal way – in groups of people who are in the same ministry. All this is in view of formulating the possible guidelines for the entire Congregation, that all here know they represent. So, careful listening is not “optional”. It requires respect and attention for diversity and care to grasp the direction in which the Spirit is blowing.

That is why on this 10th day there were still regional meetings in order to try to define at most 6 or 7 issues of major concern. The Steering Committee then presented the result of this work, which was a list of 11 elements, to the plenary assembly that was asked to select 5 by vote. Here is the result of that vote:

- * *Formation for Mission – Missionary Formation*
- * *Governance and leadership*
- * *Mission and Evangelization*
- * *Oblate Community and religious life*
- * *Youth work and vocational promotion*

The same plenary assembly continued with a description of the General Councillors role, based on the experience of the last six years, as had been asked yesterday. Ron Rolheiser, Councillor for Canada, was asked by the other councillors to present a synthesis in their name.

Likewise today, the presidents of the Regions were invited to present two candidates each, from which the members of the drafting committee will be chosen. This committee will have the meticulous task of expressing the mind of the Chapter, especially by drafting the final document.

A special celebration of the Nativity of Mary and the anniversary of vows and the ordinations of many capitulars closed the day for all but the Steering Committee. They continued to work after supper in order to form the five commissions that will work on each of the five issues chosen by the Chapter. Each member of the Chapter had been asked earlier to indicate on which Commission he would like to be present.

DAY 11 – SEPTEMBER 9TH

The Steering Committee worked late into the night yesterday to establish the commissions that will study the five major elements selected. The Chapter will work today and tomorrow in these commissions and are expected to report to the plenary assembly tomorrow afternoon on the progress of their work.

The presidents of each commission appointed by the Steering Committee are:

Formation for Mission

Jean-Marie Bulumuna (Congo)

Governance and leadership

William Morell (U.S.A.)

Mission and evangelization

André Boyer (Lacombe)

Omar Friedrich (Argentina-Chile)

Oblate community and religious life

Wojciech Popielewski (Poland)

Youth work and vocational promotion

Yves Chalvet de Récy (France)

DAY 12 – SEPTEMBER 10TH

The first business of the day was the approval of the nominees for the Drafting Committee: Glenn ZIMMER and Marcel DUMAIS (Canada), Gasner JOINT (Haiti) and Ramon Bernabe (Philippines). The Chapter spent the rest of the day in

Commissions working on the five major elements. Late in the afternoon they reconvened in plenary assembly to report back on the progress of their work and the important points they wished to develop.

Following are just some of the highlights of the commission reports. They will be developed further next week and concrete proposals brought before the assembly.

The **Commission for Oblate Community and religious Life** stressed the need to clarify the identity and understanding of Oblate religious life in the 21st century, and the care to be given to the “bringers of hope” who are suffering and do not persevere. That is, the young Oblates who leave soon after perpetual vows or ordination.

The **Commission for Formation and Mission** speaking of internationality noted the need to stress the missionary character of the Congregation. This has practical consequences like the consolidation of existing formation houses and the creation of more international centers of formation.

The **Governance and Leadership Commission** had many practical proposals for changes in the organizational structures. These will be discussed and voted on in plenary assembly next week.

The **Commission for Mission and Evangelization** had 30 members and consequently worked in four smaller language groups, each treating a specific theme: Justice and mission; Mission and evangelization in the new Churches; Mission and secularity; Proclamation – What or Who do we proclaim and How?

The **Commission on Youth and Vocation Ministry** reminded the Chapter that Founder’s first ministries centered on youth, prisons and preaching, and that ministry to youth was always included among the ends of the Congregation until the revised “ad experimentum” Rule of 1966. It has since disappeared from the text of the Constitutions and Rules. The Commission proposed its reintroduction as an important mission of the Congregation.

DAYS 13 and 14 – Sept. 11-12

The capitulars rested this weekend. Two groups visited respectively the historical cities of Ostia antica, near Rome, and Pompei, which is close to Naples. Others preferred to remain at the house.

Ostia gets its name from *Ostium*, which means mouth of the river. It is here, in fact, that at one time the Tiber finished its course before flowing into the Tyrrhenian Sea, that was much more closer then. Legend dates the foundation of the city, the first Roman colony and first river port in Italy, around the time of the fourth king of Rome, the Sabine, Anco Marzio. This tradition, however, is not supported by archaeological research. The discovery of material from the 13th – 10th century B.C. in Ostia is testimony that the area around the mouth of the Tiber was inhabited in remote times. It is sure, however, that Ostia had a prominent role in the history of Rome from the logistic and military point of view. It was the gateway to the Tiber, and for many centuries the primary route of communication, as well as the gateway to the Tyrrhenian Sea, that has always been of fundamental importance for Roman commercial and military policy.

Pompei rises on a picturesque plateau of volcanic formation, extolled in the Roman period also by Seneca. In the 2nd century B.C. with the dominion of Rome in the Mediterranean that facilitated the circulation of goods, the city knew a period of great economic development, above all through the production and the export of wine and oil. In the year 62 A.D. a disastrous earthquake caused serious damage to the buildings of the city; the succeeding years were used for the imposing work of reconstruction, which was still going on at the time of the fatal eruption of Vesuvius on August 24 in 79 A.D. when Pompei was buried completely and definitively by a rain of lapilli (volcanic ash and lava).

DAY 15 – SEPTEMBER 13TH

The Chapter **began its third week**, one that will

surely be an intensive one. Michael Foley, president of the Steering Committee gave an overview of the week which will include the election of the Superior General, the Vicar General and the Assistants; commission work leading to the consolidated first draft of an eventual “Chapter document”; and decisions on certain Government issues that could affect the election process.

As the Chapter **enters the election** phase, each Region elected a member of their Region for the Nomination Committee. The names will be announced later by the Steering Committee. Wednesday, the 15th, is foreseen as a day of prayer and reflection with the election of the Superior General planned for late afternoon. The elections of the General Councillors will be held next week.

The **five Commissions worked** throughout the day to finalize the draft of a Commission text that will be submitted to the plenary assembly tomorrow.

DAY 16 – SEPTEMBER 14TH

It was a long day in plenary assembly as the five **Commissions presented the first drafts** of their work and received questions and suggestions from the assembly. In late afternoon they met again in Commission to integrate these elements before presenting their material to the Drafting Committee.

The Chapter had its first chance to use the electronic voting machine today as it voted on three proposals from the Commission on Leadership and Governance concerning the number of Regions, General Councillors and Assistants. The proposals and results of the voting are as follow:

Number of Regions

In light of the request of the Regions of Canada and the United States to be joined together as one Region, **that there be five Regions in the Congregation**. The proposal was **accepted**: 94 Yes; 1 No; 1 Abstention.

Number of General Councillors

That **five General Councillors** be elected by the General Chapter. The proposal was **accepted**: 87 Yes; 3 No; 6 Abstentions.

Number of Assistants General

That there be **three** Assistants General. The proposal was **rejected**: 33 Yes; 58 No; 5 Abstentions.

New Region

In what was probably its shortest plenary session in history, the Superior General in Council decreed that the existing Provinces of Canada and the Province of the United States be joined in one Region to be known as the Canada-United States Region.

Tomorrow (Sept. 15th) the Chapter will proceed with the election of the Superior General. It will be a day of prayer and discernment beginning with a Mass of the Holy Spirit presided by Joseph PHIRI, the youngest priest at Chapter, as has been our tradition. All Oblates worldwide are invited to join in this prayer.

DAY 17 – SEPTEMBER 15TH

This day of prayer and discernment before entering the election phase of the Chapter began with a Eucharistic celebration presided by Fr. Joseph PHIRI (Zambia), the youngest priest at Chapter, in accordance with a long standing

tradition. After the Mass of the Holy Spirit, Fr. Bernard Dullier, Provincial of France, gave a meditation on the meaning of this day. /

After a day of quiet discernment and “murmuratio”, consulting with others in groups of two or three, the Chapter met in plenary assembly at 17.00 hours (5:00 p.m.) for the canonical election of the Superior General. There was a feeling of solemnity in the Great Hall of the La Salle Brothers’ Generalate as the ancient Gregorian melody of *Veni Creator Spiritus* filled the hall. In accordance with the directives of the Chapter Directory, Fr. Michael Foley, president of the Chapter Steering Committee presided over the election.

After pronouncing an oath to elect the one they thought most worthy, the capitulars moved in silence to deposit their ballots in the election box in the front of the Chapter Hall. Spontaneous and sustained applause broke out as Fr. Wilhelm Steckling reached the required two-thirds majority of 64 votes. The count continued revealing Fr. Steckling re-elected for a second term as Superior General with a total of 86 votes from the 96 electors.

After completing the other formal canonical procedures the Chapter gathered for a celebration in the community room. Spontaneous songs and music from each Region, ranging from “For he is a jolly good fellow” to African dances and Latin American melodies, echoed through the La Salle halls.

FR. WILHELM STECKLING RE-ELECTED SUPERIOR GENERAL

(Rome – September 15): The 34th General Chapter reelected Fr Wilhelm STECKLING for a second term as Superior General of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He obtained the required two-thirds majority of votes on the first ballot.

Fr Steckling, who is 57 years old, was born April 23, 1947 at Verl in North Rhine-Westphalia, in the diocese of Paderborn, Germany. It was during a parish mission in his village that he came to know the Oblates. After his secondary education at the Gymnasium in Gütersloh, and then at the Oblate juniorate in Borken, he entered the novitiate at Engelpfort where he made first vows May 1, 1967. He did his scholasticate at Hünfeld and later at Mainz where he made his perpetual oblation on April 15, 1973. He was ordained a priest in his native parish of Spexard, near Gütersloh, on July 20, 1974. The same year, he received his first obedience for the then Vice Province of Pilcomayo and left for Paraguay.

His early ministry was among the rural Guaranis in the parish of Independencia, diocese of Villarrica. He later worked in Asunción as a formator, notably at the pre-novitiate which is located in a working class neighborhood. In 1986, and again in 1989, he was elected Provincial of the Vice Province of Pilcomayo. He had just finished his term of office and returned to his work at the pre-novitiate when the 1992 General Chapter elected him second Assistant General.

This new post made him a very close cooperator of Superior General, Fr Marcello Zago, in all that regarded the ordinary and extraordinary government of the Congregation. During those six years as Assistant he was responsible for the formation portfolio. In that capacity he visited the Oblate houses of formation throughout the world, directed the revision of the “Norms for Oblate Formation”, organized sessions for formators in several languages, as well as a session for novice masters....

He was elected the twelfth Superior General of the Congregation in 1998, succeeding Marcello Zago, who had become the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

His reelection by an overwhelming majority (86 votes) is testimony to the trust and confidence he has inspired during the past six years.

DAY 18 – SEPTEMBER 16TH

Fr Eugene KING re-elected Vicar General

After a day of prayer and discernment of candidates for the office of Vicar General the 34th General Chapter re-elected Fr Eugene KING to that post on the first ballot with 65 votes.

Fr King was born July 22, 1940 at Cootehill, Ireland. After his first vows on September 29, 1959 at the Anglo-Irish novitiate in Cahermoyle, he studied philosophy at the scholasticate in Belmont (Dublin). He was sent to St. Joseph Scholasticate in Ottawa, Canada for his theological studies and was ordained there on December 18, 1965.

His first obedience was for his Province of origin, the Anglo-Irish Province, where he was assigned to teach theology at the scholasticate in Piltown. That was the beginning of a long career of teaching. In 1972, Fr King received an obedience for St. Joseph’s Province in Canada. He taught pastoral theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. He also served as director of the Pastoral Institute and Rector of Saint Paul University Seminary. He was serving in that capacity when elected Vicar General of the Congregation by the 33rd General Chapter in 1998.

DAY 19 – SEPTEMBER 17TH

The two Assistants General were elected today.

Fr Oswald FIRTH, currently Provincial of the Colombo Province (Sri Lanka) was elected 1st Assistant General on the first ballot with 51 votes. Fr. Firth was born on September 13 1942, in Nugegoda. He entered the novitiate at Kalutara in 1960 and made his first vows the following year. After studying philosophy at the scholasticate in Kandy and his perpetual oblation in 1964, he completed his theological studies at the International Scholasticate in Rome, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1967. He holds a licentiate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome and a degree in Philosophy from the University of Strasbourg.

After some years on the formation team of the Province, much of his energy has been directed to social issues. He has actively promoted justice and peace initiatives through his work at the Center for Society and Religion and its monthly review, *Social Justice*, of which he is one of the editors. In 2001 he was invited to evaluate the Justice and Peace Portfolio of the General Administration and cooperated in setting up the General Service of Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation. He is a member of the Task Force of this Service. During recent years he has been particularly active in promoting inter-religious initiatives for peace in war-torn Sri Lanka. He also served as a member of the Provincial Council from 1987 to 1997 and was appointed Provincial of the Colombo Province in Sri Lanka in 2002.

Fr Paolo ARCHIATI was elected the 2nd Assistant General on the first ballot with 54 votes. Fr Archiati was born November 22, 1951 at Brescia in the diocese of Brescia (Italy). He made his novitiate at Marino and his first profession of vows on September 29, 1971. He was ordained a priest in 1978. That same year he was assigned to the staff of the International Scholasticate in Rome and began specialized studies that would lead to a doctorate in patristic studies in 1983. He published a thesis under the title *Evangelizare Pauperibus: A Patristic Reading of Isaiah 61:1*.

After returning to the Province of Italy for one year, in 1984 he received an obedience to the formation team of the Kintambo scholasticate in Zaire (today the Congo). He returned to Italy in 1991 to join the formation team of the Italian Province's scholasticate at Frascati, on the outskirts of Rome. He also served on the Provincial Council during those years. He successively became superior of the Italian scholasticate (1996-1999) and then of the International Scholasticate in Rome. He was in his second term as superior when elected Assistant General.

In the afternoon, the Chapter Finance Committee presented its report and a number of recommendations that will be voted on next week.

The day closed with a Eucharistic celebration presided by Fr. General, his Vicar and the new Assistants.

DAYS 20 to 22 (SEPT. 18-20)

After the excitement of the recent elections, the Chapter moved into a quiet weekend. Today, Saturday the 18th, the Drafting Committee reported on its work. The assembly then worked the rest of the morning in Commissions to discuss the Committee's work. From noon Saturday until Tuesday (Sept. 20th) the Chapter is in recess. While many capitulars will use the opportunity for a pilgrimage to Assisi or to the catacombs, this recess permits the various committees to finalize their work and to prepare for the last week of the Chapter.

DAY 23 – SEPTEMBER 21ST

After a long weekend, the Chapter settled down – or it might be better to say “sat down” – for four plenary assemblies to receive proposals from various commissions and committees to be voted on later this week.

In preparation for the last part of the election phase, the five Regions met separately and prepared, by secret ballot, a slate of at least two candidates for the General Councillor for their Region. The Chapter will proceed with these elections tomorrow.

DAY 24 – SEPTEMBER 22ND

An important part of the day was dedicated to the election of the General Councillors. Three were elected in the morning and two in the afternoon.

General Councillor for Africa-Madagascar

Fr. Jean-Bosco MUSUMBI was elected General Councillor for the Africa-Madagascar Region on the first ballot with 89 votes. He has been Councillor for the region since September 17, 2002, having been elected by Father General and his Council, in accordance with Rule 147a, to replace Fr. Jabulani Nxumalo who had been named auxiliary bishop of Durban, South Africa.

Born at Bembele-Yassa on July 18, 1956, Fr. Musumbi made his first vows on September 8, 1978. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1986 he was appointed socius of the novice master in Ifwanzondo (1986-1989). In 1989 he was sent to Rome for studies in Spirituality and was granted a licentiate from the Claretianum University in 1992.

Returning to the Congo, Fr. Musumbi was assigned to the formation staff at the Oblate scholasticate at Kintambo/Kinshasa. He also lectured on the theology of spiritual life at the St. Eugene de Mazenod Institute. He served several years as a Provincial Councillor and Vicar Provincial for the Congo Province, prior to his election to replace Bishop Nxumalo.

General Councillor for Asia-Oceania

Fr. Federico LABAGLAY was elected General Councillor for the Region of Asia-Oceania on the 1st ballot with 82 votes. A native of Buayan-Mlang in the Cotabato area of the Philippines, Fr. Labaglay made his first profession in 1969 at the Tamontaka novitiate and was ordained a priest in 1976. Much of his priestly life has been in pastoral activity, where he is a recognized leader of process methodology as well as a facilitator and group animator. From 1988 to 1998 he was a member of the Provincial Council and Vicar Provincial for the Philippine Province. He was appointed Provincial of the Philippine Province in 1998 and was nearing the end of second term at the time of his election as General Councillor.

General Councillor for Latin America

Fr Loudeger MAZILE was re-elected General Councillor for the Region of Latin America on the first ballot with 87 votes. He was born July 10, 1957 at Côteaux in the diocese of Les Cayes, Haiti. He made his first vows at the novitiate in Port-au-Prince in 1983 and was ordained in 1987. While pursuing his theological studies, he attended courses in sociology at the State University of Haiti and obtained a masters degree. After several years in parish ministry he followed a course for future formators in Bolivia and was appointed Superior of the scholasticate for theology at Turgeau in 1991. He was elected General Councillor for Latin America by the 1998 General Chapter.

General Councillor for Canada-United States

In its afternoon session, the Chapter elected **Fr Marcel DUMAIS** (Notre-Dame-du-Cap) the General Councillor for the newly created Canada-United States Region. He was elected on the first ballot with 53 votes. In 2003, he had been appointed to replace Bishop Claude Champagne as Provincial of the former St. Joseph Province in 2003.

Born in 1936 in Drummondville, Quebec, Canada, Marcel entered the novitiate at Richelieu

in 1955. Following his first profession, he completed his first formation in Rome, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1963. He continued his studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1964-66) and then at the Institut Catholique in Paris (1966-67 and 1972-74), where he obtained a Doctorate in Biblical Theology. His principal ministry has been teaching at St. Paul University, where he has been Vice-Rector and Director of the Institute of Missiology, as well as authoring numerous books on biblical and missiological topics. He is a former member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. He had been a Provincial Councillor of the former St. Joseph Province and was currently a member of the Council of the new Notre-Dame-du-Cap Province in Canada.

General Councillor for Europe

Also this afternoon, **Fr. Luis Ignacio ROIS** was elected General Councillor for Europe on the first ballot with 73 ballots.

Fr. Luis Ignacio ROIS. He was born in Madrid in 1963, and made his first profession at Pozuelo de Alarcón in 1982. Ordained to the priesthood in 1988 in Madrid, he spent several years in youth ministry and formation work. Fr. Rois became superior of the Malaga community and Provincial Councillor in 1994. He was Superior of the scholasticate at Pozuelo when appointed Provincial of the Province of Spain in 2000 for a first term. He was reappointed to a second term in 2003, and currently in the middle of his second term.

Chapter Finance Committee Proposals

The day closed with voting on several proposals from the Chapter Finance Committee. The proposals concerning the Congregation at large will be communicated in a manner yet to be decided by the Chapter.

DAY 25 – SEPTEMBER 23RD

With all the elections finished there is a definite feeling in the air that “the end is near.” Airline

tickets are being re-confirmed; cases line the walls of the atrium to collect the papers and documents that are no longer needed; instructions are being given on the date and time to vacate the rooms.... But the Chapter is far from over. There is much to be done and a sense that time is running out. In several long plenary assemblies today the capitulars continued to piece together a “Chapter document” containing their recommendations for the coming years.

DAY 26 – SEPTEMBER 24TH

The Chapter went to Castel Gandolfo for an audience with the Holy Father. (*See page 14 for the Pope’s message.*)

DAYS 27 and 28 – SEPT. 25TH and 26TH

The last Saturday of the Chapter found the delegates sitting for four plenary assemblies. The day could be entitled “Dealing with unfinished business.” In the morning there was a discussion and vote on proposed changes to Rules 7b, 88a and 128a. An overwhelming vote of 92 to 3 reintroduced “**mission to youth**” into Rule 7b as one of our traditional apostolates. The other two Rules remain unchanged.

Special questions submitted by Oblates prior to the Chapter or by capitulars during the Chapter were presented and discussed. They included, among others, creation of a permanent committee to promote the life and vocation of the Brothers, networking of Oblate institutes of higher education, communication and media, and an official language for the Congregation. Voting will take place on Monday.

DAY 29 – SEPTEMBER 27TH

While several members of the Chapter braved the cold Sunday night to attend the Milan-Lazio soccer game, some of the translators and

secretarial staff worked into the wee hours this morning (2:00 a.m.) to finish the documents that must be voted on today.

This morning, the Chapter put in place the structures for the follow-up of its work. It authorized the Superior General and Council to complete the work of editing the Letter of the Chapter to the Congregation and a document entitled “Witnessing to Hope.” It likewise mandated the establishment of a permanent committee to foster the vocation of Brothers within the Congregation, as well as a post-Chapter committee to review government structures at all levels. Other recommendations concerned promotion of the use of media for evangelization; examination of the urgent needs of the Oblates in the First World in terms of personnel, mission and life; reflection on the place and role of Oblate institutions of higher learning in formation.

The Chapter also approved by an almost unanimous vote a petition to the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship to place the memorial of St. Eugene de Mazenod on the universal liturgical calendar. Appropriate materials will be prepared by the General Postulation to help the units engage the support of local Ordinaries and Episcopal Conferences.

In the evening, all the members of the Chapter and auxiliary personnel gathered at the General House with the local Oblate communities and invited guests – more than 200 people – to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving for the successful conclusion of the Chapter. This was followed by a buffet supper for all present. It was the biggest Oblate gathering at the General House since the Founder’s canonization. Official closure of the Chapter will take place tomorrow morning. (*See page 1 for the text of Father General’s homily.*)

John Paul II's Address to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Your Presence Must be a Sign and Seed of Hope

Beloved,

1. On the occasion of your Institute's General Chapter, I receive you with joy and assure you of my spiritual closeness in prayer. I greet in particular the General Superior and the members of the Congregation's new General Council, to which I wish good work in its difficult assignment.

I thank all of you for the affection you show the Successor of Peter, which I cordially return, and with greater reason because of the devotion I feel for your founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod, as well as for the esteem I feel for your Congregation, at once Marian and missionary.

2. "Witnesses of Hope" is the theme of this Chapter meeting, in continuity with the preceding. With the whole Church, you have entered the new millennium with the sign of hope, and from this perspective you want to continue your journey, trusting in Divine Providence. Your presence, animated by genuine religious and missionary fervor, must be a sign and seed of hope for those who are with you, whether in secularized environments or in contexts of the first proclamation.

3. I encourage you to persevere in the objectives you have set for yourselves, above all in a renewed fraternal union, in keeping with the will of your holy founder, who conceived the Institute as a family, whose members form only one heart and soul.

Today you are present with more than 1,000 communities in 67 countries worldwide, and this unity is a difficult challenge, but extremely important for humanity, called to journey on the path of solidarity in diversity.

In addition, I appreciate your reflection on the profound changes that are marking the congregation, whose center of gravity is moving toward the poorest areas of the world. This extremely significant fact leads you to update formation, distribution of personnel, forms of government and communion of goods."

Make clear choices in virtue of the priorities of your mission. Among the priority exigencies is certainly permanent attention to the spiritual life in order to live an ever renewed fidelity to the original charism. It is God, who with the action of his Holy Spirit, allows religious families to respond adequately to the new exigencies, by taking recourse to the specific gift that has been entrusted to them.

4. For all these objectives I invoke Heaven by the intercession of Mary Most Holy, for an abundance of light and strength. I ask her in a special way to watch over each one of you and your brothers with maternal solicitude, while I impart from my heart to all the Apostolic Blessing.

Castel Gandolfo, September 24th 2004

John Paul II

(English translation by Zenit.org)

Anniversaries – November 2004

65TH Anniversary of Ordination

1939.11.29	6306	Fr. Angel Villalba	United States
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60TH Anniversary of Vows

1944.11.12	8086	Fr. James Butler	Anglo-Irish
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50TH Anniversary of Vows

1954.11.01	9841	Fr. Josef Anthofer	Central S.A.
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1954.11.01	10399	Bro. Donat Daigle	United States
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1954.11.01	10400	Bro. Gérard Landreville	Notre-Dame-du-Cap
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1954.11.01	9847	Fr. Casimir Milan	Cameroon
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25TH Anniversary of Ordination

1979.11.17	12350	Fr. Neil Haight	Saint Peter's
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1979.11.24	12327	Fr. Antonio Camelo	Italy
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Suffrages for our Deceased

				(No. 74-83)
	Province	Date of Birth	Place of Death	Date of Death
Fr. Edward Swiatek	Assumption	05/10/1931	Toronto	06/09/2004
Fr. Wijnand van Baalen	Holland-Flanders	18/12/1916	Heerlen	06/09/2004
Bro. Joseph Kaintoch	Lacombe	18/03/1909	Saskatoon	12/09/2004
Fr. François Nadeau	N.D.-du-Cap	06/02/1916	St-Jean-sur-Richelieu	15/09/2004
Fr. Pierre Chevroulet	Thailand	02/09/1924	Bangkok	18/09/2004
Fr. Jean-Marie Ollivier	Haiti	06/06/1926	Gonaives	20/09/2004
Fr. Peter Moriarty	Anglo-Irish	01/11/1922	Dublin	22/09/2004
Fr. Maxime Sarault	N.D.-du-Cap	14/12/1914	Richelieu	23/09/2004
Fr. Pierre Le Vaillant	France	13/08/1921	Pontmain	24/09/2004
Fr. Martien Schram	Holland-Flanders	14/12/1924	Amsterdam	25/09/2004

*“We will keep alive the memory of our deceased and not fail to pray for them,
faithfully offering the suffrages prescribed on their behalf.! (Const. 43)*