

**Acts of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**  
(2004)  
**Witnessing to Hope**

- [1. Letter from the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter](#)
- [2. Election of the Superior General and Council](#)
- [3. Main Document: "Witnessing to Hope"](#)
- [4. Letter to the Capitulants from the Oblate Brothers present at the Chapter](#)
- [5. Changes to the Rules](#)
- [6. Mandates, recommendations, authorizations and suggestions of the Chapter:](#)

- [A. Editing of Chapter Documents](#)
- [B. A Post-Chapter Committee on Governance](#)
- [C. Finances](#)
- [D. Oblate urgencies in the First World](#)
- [E. Media and evangelization](#)
- [F. A committee to foster the vocation of Brothers within the Congregation](#)
- [G. A universal feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod](#)
- [H. Higher education](#)

**1. Letter from the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

Dear brother Oblates:

We greet you from the 34th General Chapter which has taken place at the Christian Brothers' Center in Rome from August 30–September 28, 2004. We also greet all associates of the Oblates everywhere. It has been a privileged experience of fraternity and prayer, a spiritual event within which we felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each evening, as was our Founder's wish, we sat in *Oraison* together, in union with all of you. As we discerned directions for the Congregation for the next six years, we took a number of things into consideration.

First, the vision and work of our last three General Chapters is still very much in front of us, a task begun but still to be completed. Throughout our days together, in the Chapter hall, in the chapel and in the meeting rooms, we heard echoes of our brothers in previous Chapters, urging us on in our task. The General Chapters of 1986 (*Missionaries in Today's World*), of 1992 (*Witnessing as Apostolic Community*), and of 1998, (*Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*) strongly challenged us to be missionaries, to live in community, to minister through community, and to form our vision and our priorities so as to better meet the needs of the poor and most abandoned. That call is still before us.

Second, this General Chapter was also an important moment within the Immense Hope Project, a process through which every unit within the Congregation was asked to evaluate and scrutinize its community life and its ministry in the light of our Oblate charism. This General Chapter does not end the Immense Hope Project. It endorses its work and urges every Oblate Unit to continue its efforts to see this as an ongoing process of self-evaluation and strategizing for mission.

Third, the Chapter also drew upon the discussions that had been facilitated by the Pre-Chapter Commission, rich exchanges which culminated in the drawing up of ten priorities to be discussed at the Chapter. As well, it drew upon the suggestion that this General Chapter focus its energies more on practical issues than on attempting to articulate a more refined ecclesial and missionary vision. Eventually the Chapter focused its discussions around six themes: *Mission and Evangelization; Oblate Community and Religious Life; Formation for Mission; Mission to Youth; Vocation to Oblate Missionary Life; and Leadership and Governance.*

Finally, and crucially, the Chapter drew upon the reports of the Regions, the report of the Treasurer-General, and the report of the Superior General. Those Reports helped name both our present weaknesses and our present strengths as a Congregation. Our discussions were enriched too by special liturgies presented by the General Service of JPIC, by a number of evenings given over to particular topics, and by the presence of the seven lay associates among us during the first week of the Chapter.

In terms of the present challenge, the Chapter Reports highlighted a number of areas that need to be addressed. Huge demographic shifts have radically altered the face of the Congregation.

Our community life is often weak. Our commitment to prayer needs to be strengthened. Youth ministry is at a dangerous low. There is serious shortage of vocations in parts of the Congregation. There is a chronic shortage of trained personnel for first formation. There is a need to define what it means to be a missionary in areas where the church is already established. We are too dispersed in small Units, small communities, and small formation houses that are not adequately resourced. Our understanding of social justice is still not fully integrated into our lives and ministry. There are serious financial problems in a large number of Units. The issue of governance at the level of both the General Administration and the Region needs to be re-examined. Animating and promoting the Brothers needs to be addressed. Our lay associations are asking for a closer cooperation. We need a new effort, perhaps even a radical new departure, in terms of dialogue with Islam. Christian fundamentalism and sectarianism are an ever-increasing threat in many parts of the world. And, as a Congregation, we have not done enough to respond to the deadly crisis of AIDS, particularly in Africa.

In terms of our strengths, the Chapter named a number of things: our closeness to the people we serve; our engagement with the poor; our growth in certain parts of the Congregation; our willingness to engage in the Immense Hope project; the wisdom of our elders; the special gift that the Oblate Brothers bring to our life and ministry; our growing awareness of internationality; our generosity in financial sharing; and a growing number of lay associations interested in our charism.

And then there is our special strength, which is our **hope** itself, our joy-filled sense that, at the heart of these difficulties, God who is Lord of this world, is still very alive, and worth giving our lives for. The Spirit of the living Christ is within us. The charism of St. Eugene is alive and well, not just within the Congregation itself, but also within many Oblate associations.

The series of action-oriented challenges that have issued forth from these discussions reflect the will of the Congregation as seen in the response to the Pre-Chapter Commission and as seen throughout the Chapter itself. We discerned that our task was to be practical, to offer some concrete challenges in terms of improving our community and ministry. Somehow, the hope engendered in the legacy of the Congregation at this time needed to be transformed into deeds of action for the sake of the community, for the sake of its mission and ministry. All of the recommendations of the Chapter are within the horizons of the furthered realization of the Immense Hope process. Through these commitments the Congregation would indeed be witnessing to hope in ways that mattered within the world today.

The recommendations that follow this letter address many of our key concerns. However if they were to be seen as colored by a common motif it would be that of **internationality**. Everywhere throughout this General Chapter we sensed an increasing heart for more internationality among ourselves. There is a growing desire to utilize more the strength of being a world-body in 67 countries. We recognize that if we share our resources more fully with each other this will work to the benefit of the poor and the well-being of the whole Congregation. Our future strength lies not just in increasing our numbers, but especially in increasing our solidarity. Every part of the Congregation is rich in some way. Our potential to serve the poor more effectively and to continue to thrive in all parts of the world is contingent upon our increased solidarity as an international body, including consolidation wherever needed and possible. Every part of the Congregation needs to offer its particular gifts for the good of the whole. In an increased solidarity we will discover new faces of Christ for ourselves and for the preaching of the Risen One.

But this does not come without personal cost and new vision. The new requires some sacrificing of the old; the new always belongs elsewhere. One of the major challenges this Chapter sets before every Oblate is the challenge that God gave to Abraham and Sarah when God called them to leave their homeland and set out into the unknown, into the unfamiliar. Like them, we too are called to set aside our own cherished strategies, languages, politics, and personal agendas, and, like pilgrims, leave behind all unnecessary baggage that can slow us down. We must be open to the unpredictability of God's plan. It asks us, as missionaries, to set out to a new country that will be shown to us as we move onward in trust, borne by our communion with God, and grounded in hope.

This General Chapter recognized too that the world we are called to love and minister within is radically changing. Like Jesus walking along the borders of Samaria, we too are standing before different understandings of culture, ethnicity, religion, and gender, invited into a new conversation. The world no longer works in the same way. Old borders are breaking down even as new boundaries are emerging. Our task is to be missionaries in this new pluralistic, sensitive, and complex reality where, like Jesus, we are invited to "cross over" and imitate his self-emptying so as to enter more fully into the life of the other, particularly the lives of the poor. The God we proclaim must be the humble, kenotic God that Jesus incarnated.

It is in this light that we, the 34th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, inspired by our Founder's love for the poor, and under the patronage of Mary, our Mother, set forth the challenges contained in our statement, "*Witnessing to Hope*." It is our heartfelt prayer that the Chapter, its direction and commitments respond to the thirst of our world for hope.

In Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Capitulants of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

Rome, Italy  
September 28, 2004

## 2. Election of the Superior General and Council

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

Superior General: Heinz-Wilhelm STECKLING  
Germany - General Adm.  
Elected: September 15, 2004

Vicar General: Eugene KING  
Ireland - General Adm.  
Elected: September 16, 2004

1<sup>st</sup> Assistant General: Oswald FIRTH  
Sri Lanka-Colombo, Sri Lanka  
Elected: September 17, 2004

2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant General: Paolo ARCHIATI  
Italy - General Adm.  
Elected: September 17, 2004

General Councillor for Latin America: Loudeger MAZILE  
Haiti - General Adm.  
Elected: September 22, 2004

General Councillor for Africa - Madagascar: Jean Bosco MUSUMBI  
Congo - General Adm.  
Elected: September 22, 2004

General Councillor for Asia - Oceania: Federico LABAGLAY  
Philippines - Philippines  
Elected: September 22, 2004

General Councillor for Canada-United States: Marcel DUMAIS  
Canada - N.-D.-du-Cap  
Elected: September 22, 2004

General Councillor for Europe: Luis Ignacio ROIS Alonso  
Spain - Spain  
Elected: September 22, 2004

## 3. "*Witnessing to Hope*" Recommendations of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

### **Introduction**

*In Ecclesiastes 3, one of the liturgy's scripture texts during the closing days of the Chapter, it is written: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven ... God has made everything suitable for its time." This has been the experience of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter; indeed, it is the experience of the entire Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

*The Chapter spent much of its time working in commissions on six themes: Mission and Evangelization; Oblate Community and Religious Life; Formation for Mission; Mission to Youth; Vocations to Oblate Missionary Life; Leadership and Governance.*

The commissions and other committees presented several recommendations that were approved by the Chapter for implementation at various levels of the Congregation in the coming years. It is through these concrete commitments, that we Oblates can be **"witnesses to, and prophets of, God's love ... men of hope"** (EPM 8). [1]

## 1 Mission and Evangelization

"Sensitive to the demands of our charism,  
as Oblates, our first priority in mission  
*is to be attentive to those on the margins of society  
and to those for whom the Church is most distant.*" (EPM 18)

Mission and evangelization carried out today in the Church and the world by the Missionary Oblates, point to the timeless need for the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Reign of God as Good News to the poor and the most abandoned. It is a message steeped in hope, as we engage a constantly changing world.

We find ourselves in situations of new evangelization and mission *ad gentes*; we are confronted by the growth of sects, fundamentalist groups, and spiritual movements that points to a deep hunger felt by great numbers of people today. Dialogue with other cultures and religions is a demand of the times that calls us to develop an attitude of listening to the world. The world continues to be afflicted by violence and injustice in all their forms, to which we must speak words of indignation. At the same time we are called to be the bearers of hope and transformation wherever the poor live and struggle. Diminishment in many aspects is a fact of life in the Church, especially in cultures of secularity, calling us to greater creativity and daring in our missionary presence.

Given these conditions and mindful of the sure and certain hope that we bear, the General Chapter recommends:

### Parish Mission Preaching

1. That Oblate Units affirm parish mission preaching and other forms of popular mission preaching as an important ministry belonging to the heritage of the Congregation. This ministry needs to be revitalized with new approaches and strategies. It is to be emphasized also that it is a ministry to be done in community in collaboration with the laity and religious. Given the key place of this form of ministry in our tradition, training for this ministry should be part of our formation programs.

### Revitalizing our Missionary Methods

2. That Oblate Units develop a program of evaluating and revitalizing our evangelization, catechesis, pastoral practice, and liturgies, in harmony with the local Church.

This involves ensuring that our Catholic communities are vibrant, where faith and daily life are integrated, where faith is lived and celebrated meaningfully, and where the community is truly present to its members especially in times of need.

### Mission and Secularity

3. That Oblate Units develop a program of continuing reflection on mission and secularity in order to engage this complex and pervasive reality, in a way that we let ourselves be challenged by its moral strengths, and that we challenge its moral weaknesses.

3.1 The General Council [2] and Oblate Units would continue to explore and facilitate the **establishment of new international pilot communities** of Oblates dedicated to meeting the challenges posed by secularity, fundamentalism and sectarianism.

3.2 The network of Oblates in **higher education institutions** would provide resources and facilitate the conduct of symposia to reflect on this issue of secularity, as part of first and on-going formation.

### Solidarity

4. The different levels of the Congregation would facilitate ways in which the **younger and older Units** of the Congregation could help to revitalize each other's missionary presence.

### Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

5. That Oblate Units develop a program of community life, formation, and ministry that will promote Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), particularly in the following aspects:

5.1 Living the values of JPIC in our own personal and communal lives, integrating all our various daily activities towards making an important contribution to the **construction of a more just society**;

5.2 Acknowledging that the **Oblate Brothers** have greater possibilities of inserting themselves into the secular context as witnesses to God's Reign, we encourage and support them in their presence in the Church and in society, particularly in promoting the construction of a world that is more just (Cf. F., page 66)

5.3 Integrating the study and practice of JPIC in all our **houses of formation**;

5.4 Forming people towards making an impact in the areas of **politics, public policy, and decision-making**;

5.5 Inviting the **General Service for JPIC to assist the Units** in the task of strengthening the Unit JPIC teams, highlighting the work being done already at the grassroots level, and collaborating more effectively with other groups to achieve greater impact, especially where decisions are made affecting the poor;

5.6 Asking the General Finance Committee, together with the Grant Directors, to seek **alternative sources of funding** for programs at the service of justice and human promotion beyond Oblate instances.

## Dialogue

6. That the General Council and Oblate Units explore, facilitate, and support the existence and establishment of communities and support groups of Oblates whose focus will be inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, particularly in Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist milieus, and among autochthonous peoples.

## Mass Media

7. That Oblate Units develop a program to foster the training in the appropriate use and evangelisation of mass media. (Cf. E., page 65)

## 2

### Oblate Community and Religious Life

"Therefore we choose community as a way whereby  
we are continuously evangelized  
and can be witnesses of the Good News  
in this graced moment of today's world."  
(WAC 7)

"It involves for us Oblates  
a conversion of thought, heart and action  
as well as a greater trust,  
openness and willingness to share power  
and responsibility with the laity...  
We are not the owners of our charism;  
it belongs to the Church."  
(MTW 74, WAC 40)

Given the importance and prophetic character of the consecrated life for the Church's life and mission in the world today; given the effects of secularity and other socio-cultural realities; and given the Immense Hope project which has brought much new life and deepened hope to Oblate mission and community, the General Chapter recommends:

### The Minister of Hope

8. That the General Council develop an animation process throughout the Congregation, the focus of which would be the needs of the person of the Oblate as a minister of hope.  
This effort, as part of on-going formation, would have two main dimensions:

- a. the nurturing of the Oblate in his community and religious life; and
- b. the formation of Superiors and others sharing in leadership at the local and Unit levels.

The **first dimension** could include such elements as, among others:

- personal and communal integrity;
- the viability and size of local communities (houses and districts);
- the fostering of transparency and accountability on all levels;
- the acknowledgment and ownership of the ministries of individual persons;
- the possible inclusion of laity and other associates within the community and its mission;
- the reflective feedback from those outside the community;
- the examination of life-giving structures for community life;
- the question of Oblates living alone;
- mutual support in difficult life circumstances which diminish hope.

The **second dimension** of this process would be formation for Superiors and others sharing in leadership, which would propose different models and practical skills needed for its exercise at all levels.

### Oblate Life Strengthened by our Associates

Given that as Oblates, "we will always be close to the people with whom we work, taking into account their values and aspirations" (C. 8); and given the spirit and directives of Rules 37a and 37b, the General Chapter recommends:

9. That all Oblates discover the rich potential of the presence of associates who strengthen us in the Oblate vocation and mission, we recommend that:

9.1 The General Council invite each Oblate Unit to review and evaluate its own experience and commitments to forms of association in the areas of ministry, formation, community life, charism, and to study some possible ways of sharing leadership while respecting Canon Law and the Constitutions and Rules.

9.2 The General Council establish a commission of Oblates and associates to explore structures that will promote the many aspects of association in its various forms.

9.3 The General Council convoke a gathering of Oblates and associates (an "Aix Congress 2"). This gathering of associates could coincide with a possible Inter-Chapter Meeting of provincials, and include some time with the participants.

## 3

### Formation for Mission

"Encounter with Christ and interiorization of values  
are at the heart of this life-long process."  
[WAC 25]

"...to learn, at the level of formation,  
to love our own culture,

*without making it exclusive,  
and at the same time to open ourselves  
to other cultures and languages.”  
[EPM 34]*

Taking into account the heritage of our Congregation as a multicultural apostolic body, we recognize and choose the crossing of cultural and national borders as one of the essential components of our missionary formation. This option acknowledges that such formation requires a certain level of personal maturity and rootedness in one's own cultural identity.

Thus the General Chapter recommends the following:

#### **New Programs for Formation**

10. That the General Council and Oblate Units facilitate the establishment of new programs for the formation of Oblates and other people who share the charism of St. Eugene, that will help them to:

- deepen their living of the Oblate charism;
- understand and live a missionary ecclesiology of solidarity and communion;
- to be in mission within local cultures, especially those marked by secularity.

As much as possible, the potential of the Centre de Mazenod in Aix will be maximized for these programs.

#### **Formation to Internationality**

11. *The strengthening of formation to internationality.* In the post-novitiate stage of formation, creative ways need to be devised to foster internationality in collaboration with other Units. In addition, serious consideration needs to be given to the possibility of Oblates in first formation doing a part of their formation in a culture and a Province other than their own.

#### **Consolidation of Formation Houses**

12. *The consolidation and regrouping of existing formation houses.* Entrusted to the responsibility of the Units concerned, these multicultural formation houses will be more suitable to missionary formation and will be established in places which the Region judges to be important and strategic for formation and mission.

#### **International Formation Houses**

13. *The creation of international formation houses.* The preferred aim is the creation, in all the Regions of the Congregation, of international formation houses that gather young Oblates from different countries of the world. The contribution to formation for international mission of the International Roman Scholasticate should be assessed.

#### **Implications**

14. Some implications and consequences of formation to internationality are:

- 14.1 The learning of another international language of the Congregation in first formation;
- 14.2 The cooperation of the General and Regional Formation Committees in the formation of formators;
- 14.3 The furthering of an international network of available formators that will assist formation teams to become more multicultural and international.
- 14.4 Those who have received a formation of this kind should be asked to commit themselves for a minimum of five years in first formation ministry.

#### **Institutes of Higher Learning**

15. Greater attention from both the General Administration and the Regions be given to formation centres and university level institutions. (Cf. H., page 70)

#### **General Formation Committee**

16. That the General Formation Committee oversee the implementation of the above directives. This would include reporting at the next Inter-Chapter meeting on the progress of consolidation of existing formation houses, and a report at the next General Chapter on the progress of setting-up international houses of formation.

#### **Financial Responsibility**

17. The exploring of further ways of sharing financial responsibility for formation across the Units.

### 4 Mission to Youth

*"...The problems of countless young people  
need to receive special attention...  
Seeing no meaning in life,  
they are without hope for the future...  
(yet) youth have a special role to play,  
particularly in ministering to each other."  
[EPM 5 and 13]*

According to our Founder, our presence among youth is crucial for evangelization. The widespread poverty of today's youth is not just a question of material deprivation, but is also systemic (unemployment, drugs and addictions, manipulation, sexual exploitation, child labour, absence of hope for the future, broken families, HIV & AIDS, etc.). Despite this we believe that youth have enormous capacity to transform the situation through their embodiment of Gospel values, expressed in their generosity, commitment to face challenges, openness to internationality, thirst for spirituality, sense of justice, readiness for change, and much more.

We Oblates are moved by the situation of the youth and, like the Founder, we want to respond to these calls, affirming that mission to youth is a fully Oblate ministry. It is to this purpose that the 34th General Chapter has re-introduced mission to youth into Rule 7b of our *Constitutions and Rules*. The Chapter further recommends, and invites:

18. Oblates to develop a **Youth Outreach**, which would include such elements as:

- developing an authentic relationship with the youth;
- knowing, respecting, and being sensitive to them in their own identity, and in their immersion in a culture of communication and technology;
- promoting the values that help them to grow;
- challenging them to broaden limited horizons;
- winning their confidence and the confidence of their families;
- inventing new ways to reach out to them;
- being creative in our liturgies and celebrations.

19. Each **apostolic community** to:

- 19.1 ensure that ministry to the youth be a community endeavor rather than an individual initiative;  
 19.2 develop a missionary project orientated to youth, with a specific person appointed to animate this.

20. Each **Oblate Unit** to:

- 20.1 establish a mission plan for the youth;  
 20.2 emphasize the personal accompaniment of youth as an important ministry and sensitize and train Oblates for that ministry;  
 20.3 include mission to youth in the period of regency in first formation;  
 20.4 collaborate with others working with youth.

21. Each **Oblate Region** to:

- 21.1 coordinate Unit youth initiatives; and create and support international communities of Oblates in strategic places (as in Lourdes).

22. The **General Council** to:

- 22.1 organize, together with the Regions, an International Congress on Mission to Youth (in order to promote sharing of information and dialogue, with youth, especially those who work with us, as our collaborators);  
 22.2 create a portfolio or service at the level of the General Administration for Mission to Youth.

## 5

### Vocation to Oblate Missionary Life

*"We believe in our missionary and religious vocation;  
 and confident in the generosity  
 of the young people of today,  
 we declare that they have the right  
 to hear the call to be Oblate missionaries."  
 [WAC 29]*

**Our ministry of vocation recruitment has a natural relationship to our mission to youth, for it is normally among the youth with whom we minister that we will identify young men who will join us in our mission as Oblates of Mary Immaculate.**

**We are aware of the growth of vocations in some areas while other areas experience a crisis confronting religious life. But as in the time of our Founder, the cries of the poor are heard everywhere. Our charism, following St. Eugene, is to hear these cries and to invite young men, with their natural generosity and idealism, to join with us in responding to the needs of the world in the mission entrusted to the Church: to evangelize the poor (cf. *Constitutions 52-53*). To this purpose, the General Chapter recommends:**

23. That Oblate Units

- develop quality communities and foster regular prayer for vocations;
- make an effort to be present in schools and universities, in juniorates, youth groups and movements, places of pilgrimage, parishes and places that produce vocations, and wherever young people gather,
- invite young people to such occasions as ordinations, profession of vows, and special vocation weeks in order to attract vocations.

24. That Oblates, associates, and those with whom we minister in parishes dare to call young people to join the Congregation.

25. That the leadership of each Unit appoint full-time vocation directors or teams (Oblate and/or lay), for whom this is their main ministry.

26. That Oblate Units meet to plan concrete strategies (e.g. formation of youth corps, etc.) for vocation ministry fashioned and adapted to each unique cultural and ecclesial reality.

27. That individual Oblates and communities favor gatherings of young people who share similar interests and concerns about the Oblate way of life, so as to support each other in their common journey of discernment.

28. That Oblate Units provide special training for Oblates to develop skills for spiritual accompaniment and discernment of vocations.

29. That Oblate Units recognize that young people attract young people, so that Oblate formation houses ought to be visible to youth. The consolidation of these houses should be considered in relation to vocation ministry.

30. That Oblates recognize that ministry to families is essential to vocation ministry.

## 6

### Leadership and Governance

*"So that we may continue to be alert and to advance  
 in communion and interdependence,  
 we must concretely and in truth  
 commit our lot to the life of the group." [WAC 22]*

*"...The fact that we are an international  
 Congregation is a real grace...  
 However, we have not yet taken full stock  
 of the promise of internationality.  
 We are far from having exhausted its rich potential."  
 [EPM 33 and 34]*

The General Chapter recognizes that governance is not an end in itself, but a service to give life and direction to the community. An effective leadership implies being a living sign of hope in a changing world. Faithfulness to the Oblate charism and to the Immense Hope Project contributes to the prophetic dimension of the Congregation.

Furthermore, the General Chapter affirms that the Oblate Congregation exercises responsible and realistic governance through the choice of Superiors and other leaders (Cf. C. 82):

- who dialogue and collaborate with the communities whom they serve;
- who define its vision with clear objectives;
- who identify and provide the necessary resources;
- who match vision and resources in establishing strategies;
- who are proactive, and respond in a timely manner, without undue haste; and,
- who establish and maintain a just and equitable relationship with Church and State (policies and laws, contracts, ownership of properties, personnel problems, etc.).

Therefore, it is firmly acknowledged that the Oblate mission and community can make its greatest impact when support and value are given to quality leadership and management. In view of this, the General Chapter recommends that:

#### **Call to Effective Leadership**

31. The General Council, all Regions and Units provide effective resources on leadership and governance that will include:

31.1 essential **training** in leadership and management skills to Oblates at all levels, commencing with first formation;  
31.2 the provision of **Administrative Policies and Procedures** which are updated periodically to be relevant and responsive to current needs. The following materials or manuals are an indispensable aid in good governance and must be developed at each level of governance:

##### **a. Vision and Planning or Strategy Document**

- describe to others the kind of future that can be created together;
- show how interests can be fulfilled by a common vision; and,
- clearly communicate positive objectives, hopeful outlook and an action plan; and
- endorse that visioning and spiritual animation are central and most important.

b. **Directories:** Administration, Temporal Goods, Formation, Code of Ethics and Professional Standards, Employment and Personnel Policies.

31.3 **support systems** to maintain effective leadership, as for example, the use of professional services, facilitators, spiritual directors, researchers, supervisors. A regular meeting and networking of Oblates who are in similar ministries or with common interests can:

- help to create and enhance an atmosphere of mutual respect and support;
- help clarify values and beliefs; and
- enable these values and beliefs to be practiced and lived.

31.4 a **regular evaluation** process as part of the structure of each Unit.

#### **Looking to the Future**

In view of the fact that over the past 30 years the Congregation has moved from expansive growth to overall decline, with some areas experiencing growth and others rapid decline; that the tasks and goals of government in the Congregation have changed; and that given the need for better organizational structures that would facilitate our life and mission, the General Chapter recommends that:

32. A **Post-Chapter Commission on Government**, representative of the different sensitivities present at the Chapter, be established that would:

32.1 review the structures and functioning of government in the Congregation at all levels; and

32.2 examine the possibilities of establishing structures and functions of government at the Regional level. (Cf. B., page 57)

33. The General Administration continue the Immense Hope Project by providing that a **periodic review of the life and ministry** of all Units be carried out, beginning immediately with Units renewing government and covering all Units over a five-year cycle. The review deals mainly with the implementation of the Vision Statement and Strategy Document, using peer visitation as its principal means.

#### **Conclusion**

The recommendations of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter represent the combined Congregational efforts of both the pre-Chapter preparation work and the Chapter itself.

In a world greatly changed since the last Chapter in 1998, during times in which fear seems so prevalent, in which the divisions between rich and poor continue to grow and in which religions all too often seem part of the fear and divisions, we are tempted to ask: what hope might the world receive from our few and often imperfect, incomplete courses of action? Realistically, what effective hope can one Chapter actually offer to its brother Oblates, to the Church and to the world?

Grounded in the Gospel hope, which most certainly has been the Spirit-led experience of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the words of Jesus speak to us with assurance and with power in ways that further deepen our hope: "*Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful in much*" (Luke 16, 10).

It is our hope that the implementation of the recommendations of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter will help us and all who share our charism to be "faithful in a very little" so that we may also be faithful in much.

The focus of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter has been to translate hope-filled words into concrete actions. The outcome of the Chapter is in the hands of all Oblates and of those who share in the charism. Through their joint efforts we can move beyond "hopes" to **Hope**. May Mary, our Patroness and Model of Hope, and Eugene, our Father and Founder, accompany us in our ministry of hope.

#### **4. Letter to the Capitulants from the Oblate Brothers present at the Chapter**

*To the capitulants of the 34th General Chapter  
of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*

Gathered in General Chapter during these weeks, the Brother Capitulants wish to express their joy and their pride in belonging to this great international missionary Congregation. We have gathered, listened, and together we have shared our experiences, our concerns, our weaknesses, our dreams and our hopes.

The Congregation is enriched by a diversity of gifts. The various meetings we have shared, the Forum concerning the Brothers, and our daily active participation in this Chapter manifest well the grace of unity amidst diversity.

Together, we seek to make a significant contribution to the life and the mission of the Congregation. We consciously seek to be a living expression of fraternity at the very heart of the Oblate charism. We are committed to witnessing to the Gospel in the daily life we share with the people.

The Brothers present in this Chapter **propose the creation of a permanent committee of Brothers**, representing the different regions, and charged with the animation of the life and the mission of the Brothers.

This permanent committee could explore the following questions:

1. The continuation of the theological reflection concerning Brothers in the Congregation (How to sustain the charism of fraternity? Certain

particularities: the spiritual, ecclesiological and missionary reality of the Brothers)

2. The formation of Brothers in the Congregation (first and ongoing)
3. The animation of the Brothers, especially in the Units where there are few Brothers
4. The representation of the Brothers at the next Chapter (one region less, one Brother less, while we are already few in number)
5. Vocation promotion for Brothers
6. Valuing and making known the Oblate heritage regarding Brothers. (the important figures in our history, the accomplishments, writings, etc)
7. The creation and maintenance of a Web page (link) about the Brothers
8. Other elements...

With Mary, the first disciple, we dedicate ourselves daily to live our fraternal charism and to place our collaborative efforts, our energy and our talents at the service of the common mission we share with our brother priests in the Congregation.

Thursday, 23 September 2004  
*Lindomar De Abreu Dantas, omi*  
*Raymond Carriere, omi*  
*Dominique Dessolin, omi*  
*Noel Garcia, omi*  
*Rex Harrison, omi*  
*Patrick McGee, omi*  
*Rabindra Rajapakse, omi*

## **5. Changes to the Rules approved by the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

(Text added or changed is indicated by *italics*.)

**R 7b.** The text is changed to read: "Preaching missions at home, *mission to youth*, and sending missionaries abroad have been traditionally central to our mission. (Approved by the Chapter on September 25, 2004.)

**R 37a.** A new sentence is added at the end of the previous text: "*As an initial step, each unit will submit to the Superior General for approval its criteria for the recognition of associations.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

**R 88a.** The text is changed to read: "The Treasurer will attend *all* council meetings, *unless otherwise specified by the respective superior*. His opinion, *and, where applicable, the opinion of the finance committee*, will be recorded when financial questions are discussed, although the Treasurer has no deliberative vote unless he is also a Councillor. (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

[**N.B.** After voting, on September 24, to reconsider the change to R88a, the Chapter again voted, on September 25, on a motion to adopt the text quoted above (amended as to omit the word "all"). In this second vote, the motion did not receive the requisite majority.]

**R 88b.** A new Rule is added: "*The ministry of the Treasurer of a Province or Delegation constitutes the primary ministry of the Oblate holding the office.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

**R 123a.** The text is changed to read: "Each Region will establish the type of secretariat it needs to coordinate its activities and support its ongoing animation. The personnel of the secretariat will be chosen by the members of the Conference and work closely with its president. *Each Region will have an executive secretary, other than the conference president, whose responsibility is to support the work of the Conference and further its activities.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

**R 123d.** The text is changed to read: "Details regarding the functioning of the Regions and their accountability to various governmental levels are spelled out in the Congregation's Administrative Directory. *In application of this directory, each Region shall develop a Regional Administrative Directory, approved by the Conference of the Region, and confirmed by the Superior General in Council.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

**R 128a. (1)** The text is changed to read: "Elected delegates will be determined on the following basis: *(1)The elected delegates will be one for each one hundred members of a Region, plus an additional delegate if the remaining fraction is sixty or more.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

[**N.B.** After voting, on September 24, to reconsider the change to R128a, the Chapter again voted, on September 25, on a motion to adopt the text quoted above. In this second vote, the motion did not receive the requisite majority.]

**R 144a.** A new Rule is added: "*The responsibility of coordination of associations will be assigned to the Vicar General or to one of the Assistants General.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 23, 2004.)

**R 162b.** The text is changed to read: "A General Finance Committee helps the Superior General and Council determine the financial policy of the Congregation and presents whatever recommendations it judges opportune. The committee is composed of the Treasurer General, his assistant and one Oblate chosen by each Regional Conference, confirmed by the Superior General in Council. *The Superior General in Council may appoint up to, but not more than, three qualified additional Oblates.* Persons other than Oblates may be invited *by the Treasurer General as advisers on specific issues considered by the General Finance Committee.*" (Approved by the Chapter on September 22, 2004.)

## **6. Additional Recommendations, Resolutions, Authorizations, Directives and Mandates of the General Chapter**

### **A. Editing the Chapter Documents:**

1. The 2004 General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate delegates to the Superior General and Council, acting collegially, the right to approve the minutes of the Plenary Session Assemblies of the Chapter which were not submitted for approval by the Assembly. (*Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.*)

2. The Letter of the 2004 General Chapter to the Oblates which was written and voted during the Chapter, as well as the Chapter Document, "Witnessing to Hope," were approved in general form by the Chapter. The Chapter did not vote on the actual wording of these documents, but on their content. For this reason, the 2004 Chapter authorizes the Superior General in Council to see to the completion of the work of editing these documents. (*Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.*)

3. The motion that the letter from the Brothers be included in the final Chapter document was passed by show of hands on September 27, 2004.

### **B. A Post-Chapter Committee on Governance:**

The 2004 Oblate General Chapter mandates the Superior General and Council, acting collegially, to establish a Post-Chapter Committee on Government with the following terms of reference.

1. The Committee should be a relatively small committee, directly accountable to the Superior General and Council, with the right to consult other Oblates or resource persons. It is to be representative of the various sensitivities of the Congregation.

A member of the Central Government would serve as liaison with the Superior General and Council, and the services of a Secretary would be



provided by the General Administration.

2. The tasks of the Committee include:

- a. reviewing the structures and functioning of government in the Congregation at the level of the General Government:
  - the General Chapter (composition, size, representation, preparation, duration, Chapter Directory, etc.)
  - the Central Government (Unit expectations, size of Council, composition, job descriptions, General Administration, place, languages, and so forth)
- b. examining the possibilities of establishing government structures or appropriate operating mechanisms at the Regional level:
  - secretariate, regular meetings
  - possibly delegated governmental powers
- c. examining, where appropriate, the structures and functioning of the various Units (Provinces, Delegations, Missions) especially where these impact upon the General Government:
  - appropriate size of Provinces, vision and planning, periodic review, performance evaluation, offices, portfolios and services, etc.
  - designation of Major Superior and Council (election, appointment) and term of office.
- d. preparing a text for presentation and study at the 2010 General Chapter.

3. The working method would be established by the Committee itself, but this method should include the following elements:

- an analysis of present structures;
- appropriate consultation;
- review of proposals for change previously submitted;
- provision for periodic exchanges with the Superior General and Council;
- preparation of a draft text, which would be submitted to the Congregation for consultation and revision, before being presented to the 2010 General Chapter for discussion and approval;
- if necessary, assuring that suitable prior arrangements are made with the Holy See regarding the approval in principle of those matters requiring its intervention.

4. The financing of this project is the responsibility of the Central Government and the Committee's budget should include, among other things, provision for travel and meetings, consultancy fees if necessary, secretarial assistance, translations of texts, printing, expedition and postage. *(Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

### C. Finances

1. That the Congregation embark on a **Capital Sharing II** program, to be completed before the Chapter of 2010. The goal of the Program will be to share between US\$10 and 15 million with the eligible Units.

The Chapter directs the Central Government to develop a **Capital Sharing II** initiative. In order to minimize costs, the Chapter suggests that the General Administration utilize the General Finance Committee as the prime agent in developing the plan and implementing the plan, subject to approval and modification by the Superior General in Council.

The Chapter recognizes that this endeavor will call for solidarity and sacrifice by some of the more "affluent" Units of the Congregation. However this Chapter mandates that one of the criteria to be applied by the Superior General in Council and/or the General Finance Committee in approving **Capital Sharing Gifts** be the efforts of the Units seeking the grants in adopting plans to encourage Oblate generated revenue and local fund raising.

2. That the Central Government and the General Finance Committee undertake a comprehensive study regarding **the possible sale of the General House** and the relocation of the personnel and services located there. This resolution will include the following:

- That the Provincials (and others deemed appropriate) be consulted before making a final decision;
- That the symbolic and historic value of the General House and its present location be considered in any decision-making process;
- That the convenience of the present location of the General House be considered, and that a central location in Rome or elsewhere be considered in establishing any new facility(ies);
- That other religious groups and/or the adjacent hospital (San Carlo) be approached about possible shared use of the 290 Via Aurelia facility;
- That the comprehensive study take into account the place and the value of the International Scholasticate and the Studium Generale as well as those members employed by the Vatican for the Congregation;
- That the comprehensive study consider the advantages as well as the disadvantages of having four communities under one roof including the formation value of having the International Scholasticate and the Studium Generale within the same facility as the General Government;
- That if there is a post-Chapter Committee on Governance, that post-Chapter Committee consider the results of this comprehensive study in their deliberations.

The bullets above are not intended to be exhaustive. The Central Government and the General Finance Committee may determine other considerations and criteria upon which to base the decision whether to retain or sell the present General House facility in Rome.

3. That the Superior General in Council undertake **the sale of the General House facility** if the comprehensive study concludes that such an action would contribute to providing a more efficient and effective service to the Congregation, reducing the costs of the present complex, and providing an endowment to be used to fund the General Administration and thus reducing the financial burden on the Congregation.

4. That growing Units of the Congregation that have experienced a **loss of Net Worth** and/or a decline in Oblate and/or locally generated revenue should develop strategies to reverse this trend. The Central Government along with the Office of the Treasurer General is directed to identify those Units that need encouragement and assistance in this effort.

The Central Government together with the Office of the Treasurer General is directed to assist these Units in their own efforts to increase local fund raising, to increase Oblate generated revenue and to decrease their reliance on foreign revenue.

Units should take steps to increase locally generated revenue, including reviewing all contracts with dioceses with a view toward seeking appropriate revisions including compensation, developing systems of accountability that will track local revenues and animating the Oblate membership of a Unit regarding solidarity with the Unit and Congregation.

5. That the Superior General in Council commission **a study of the financial strength of the Units of the Congregation**. This study would lead to an evaluation of the current placement of Units in the categories established to determine the *per capita* contribution to fund the ministry of the General Administration. Subsequent to the study, the Superior General in Council is directed to determine the placement for Units. Units will be consulted prior to a formal change of their category placement.

6. That the Office of the Treasurer General, subject to the approval of the Superior General in Council, continue its efforts to provide **comprehensive health care coverage** for all Oblates not currently included under various government and/or private insurance programs. This coverage should include not only catastrophic support but also long-term maintenance. In developing this program, a plan for financing the

scheme will also be suggested.

7. That each Oblate in First Formation receive **a basic introduction to financial management** and bookkeeping.

8. That the Office of the Treasurer General establish a designated fund (or trust) to ensure the continuing maintenance of the **Centre de Mazenod** in Aix. The Office of the Treasurer General will work with the General Finance Committee to develop alternative sources to generate funds for this purpose. Together with funding from the French Province, income from this fund would help meet the capital and educational costs related to this mission.

9. That the General Chapter redefine the expectation of the **33<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter that the Treasurer General visit each of the Units of the Congregation** during a six year mandate to require that the Treasurer General, or a delegate of the Treasurer General approved by the Superior General in Council, visit each of the Units of the Congregation prior to the next Chapter. At the same time, however, the Treasurer General will respond to specific requests from Provinces, Delegations, Missions or Regions for assistance in financial administration and/or animation. *(Approved by the Chapter on September 22, 2004.)*

#### **D. Oblate urgencies in the First World:**

The 2004 General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate recommends that the Superior General in Council examine "Oblate Urgencies in the First World" to see what measures, if any, could be taken to constellate a new critical mass in terms of new personnel, new mission, and new life. *(Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

#### **E. Media and evangelization:**

The General Chapter mandates 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. *(Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

#### **F. A committee to foster the vocation of Brothers within the Congregation**

The 2004 General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate mandates the Superior General in Council to establish a permanent committee of Oblates (R149f), to foster the vocation of Brothers within the Congregation.

The committee would function in accordance with statutes approved by the Superior General in Council. The following elements should be found in the Statutes, although not necessarily in the same terms as presented here.

##### **Name:**

1. The Committee, to be known as the "Standing Committee for Brothers", is composed of Oblates, chosen both by the Regions and the Superior General in Council. Its patron is the Servant of God, Brother Anthony Kowalczyk, O.M.I., 1866-1947.

##### **Membership:**

2. Each Region, through procedures approved by the Conference of the Region, selects one Brother to be a member of this committee. The Superior General in Council selects up to three additional Oblates – Brothers or priests – for membership on this committee.

3. The members are designated for a three-year term, renewable. If possible, membership would be staggered to ensure continuity. For this reason, two of the Brothers and one of the appointed members would initially be selected for a two-year term, in accordance with procedures confirmed by the Superior General in Council.

##### **Purposes:**

4. The primary purpose of the "Standing Committee for Brothers" is to enable all Oblate Brothers to make a significant contribution to the life and the mission of the Congregation, enabling them to become a living expression of that fraternity which is at the very heart of the Oblate charism.

5. Other purposes would relate to the animation of the life and mission of the Brothers. They include:

- theological reflection concerning the spiritual, ecclesiological and missionary reality of the Brothers;
- vocational promotion for Brothers;
- making recommendations relating to first and on-going formation of Brothers in the Congregation;
- the animation of Brothers, especially in those Units where there are few Brothers.

6. In addition, practical matters relating to the life and ministry of the Brothers would be studied and recommendations made, according to circumstances. Such matters could include:

- establishing a process for the representation of Brothers at General Chapters;
- making known the Oblate heritage regarding those Brothers who were outstanding in sanctity, and exemplary in their missionary apostolate;
- using modern means of communication to further knowledge of the Brothers and their various missions within the Congregation.

##### **Meetings:**

7. The Committee would meet at least annually, in a place to be determined by the membership.

##### **Officers of the Committee:**

8. The Committee would elect its President, for a two-year term, renewable.

9. The Secretariate would be situated within the Oblate General Administration, and would operate according to a budget approved by the Superior General in Council.

##### **Accountability:**

10. The Committee, through its President, would be directly accountable to the Superior General.

11. On the occasion of the General Chapter, a written report on its activities will be prepared and submitted to the Capitulars, in accordance with procedures developed by the Pre-Chapter preparatory commission.

##### **Financial Matters:**

12. According to circumstances, expenses related to the activities of the Committee would be the responsibility of the General Administration, with the Regions contributing where possible to cover travel and other expenses related to the holding of meetings.

##### **Statutes:**

13. Statutes shall be drawn up for the Committee, after appropriate consultation. Once approved by the Superior General in Council, they may not be changed except in the same manner.

14. The Committee may establish and approve general operating guidelines, provided they are within the parameters of the approved Statutes, and operate accordingly.

##### **Dissolution:**

15. If, with time, it becomes evident that another structure would better serve the purposes envisaged for the Committee, the Superior General in

Council could, after consultation with the members, suppress the Committee and replace it with another appropriate structure. *(Approved in principle by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

**G. A universal feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod:**

That on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his canonization, the 34<sup>th</sup> General Chapter request the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to place the memorial of St. Eugene de Mazenod on the universal liturgical calendar.

That the General Postulation coordinate the efforts of the local units to take the necessary steps to obtain the required support of the local Ordinaries and Episcopal Conferences for this application. *(Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

**H. Higher education:**

The General Chapter recommends to the new Central Government that it reflect upon the interrelated questions of:

1. The place of higher education (i.e. the component of academic education beyond the requirements of initial formation) within the charism of the Oblates;
  2. The place of our institutions of higher education within the charism of Oblates, and more practically, within our life and ministry at this time;
  3. How the Central Government might play more of a role in facilitating more cooperation between our various institutions of higher learning.
- (Approved by the Chapter on September 27, 2004.)*

---

[1] The documents of previous Chapters will be referred to with the following abbreviations: *Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* as EPM; *Witnessing as Apostolic Community* as WAC; *Missionaries in Today's World* as MTW.

[2] In this document "General Council" refers to the Superior General and his Council.