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Præfatio

A TRULY ORIGINAL CONGRESS

FABIO CIARDI, OMI

Have you ever worked on a jigsaw puzzle? On the table there so many pieces that on its own, one piece means nothing. But as you gradually manage to put them together, piece by piece, the image begins to emerge and to reveal itself. Perhaps a better image for us might be that of a mosaic, many colourful pieces formed to create one beautiful image.

That is what happened during our Congress. The image began to emerge more clearly and that was: sharing how our charism, throughout history, was adapted to the various cultures, to answer the challenges of the day, to continue to look deeper into new contexts, to prepare a future in which, the more we go deeper in relating with different cultures, the more we preserve the original charism, and also grow in communion and unity, remaining one family.

In presenting this Congress, we could have proceeded in more systematic, orderly manner: first theory, then history, current experiences, future prospects, going from one Region to another. But instead, we moved along like working on a jigsaw puzzle: we took a piece here, a piece there, according to the inspiration, and slowly the image began to emerge. Each day we tried to be as varied as possible, so as to express the richness that is present in the many aspects that were shared simultaneously from all over the world.

Eventually, we could ask; did the image appear in all its fullness? For some of us the pieces are already in place and the image is clear.

Others still have in their hands more pieces, but they need more time to piece them together. In any case, our Congress appeared very rich in its content. The reports collected, locally and worldwide, number more than a hundred. This will be a legacy that will continue to inspire us in the coming years. The Acts will be distributed in the upcoming issues of *Oblatio*, one for each Region. Each issue will carry the presentations of one of the days of the intercontinental webex connection. (The live-streaming recordings of these can be found on the official congregational website). Then, each volume of *Oblatio* will carry all the local presentations interventions, Region by Region. I hope this journal will become a common source where we Oblates continue our dialogue, a common space where we can meet. I hope this journal will become a common source where we Oblates continue our dialogue, a common space where we can meet.

IN CONTINUITY WITH THE CONGRESS OF 1976

“The Oblate Charism in Context”, from 30 June until 3 July 2015, was meant to be in continuity with the Congress on “The Charism of the Founder Today” which was held in Rome from April 26 to May 14, 1976. That Congress came as a follow-up to Bishop de Mazenod’s Beatification.

The character of the Congress “The Charism of the Founder Today” was indicated by the General Council: “This will be a small task-force of about twenty members and will meet for three weeks of research, fraternal exchange, reflection and prayer together on the charism of Bishop de Mazenod as it can be lived in today’s world”. Its principal objective was “to identify our Founder’s charism and then to situate it in Oblate life and mission”.

The lead-up questions were: “What does Bishop de Mazenod expect of the Congregation today? What was his charism, his Founder’s grace? And what does being faithful to his spirit mean for us today?” The composition was quite varied. It represented all of the Regions (Africa 4, Asia 5, Canada 5, Europe 7, Latin America 2, USA 3, and the General House 3). There were six categories of participants: 1. Oblates possessing a good knowledge of our Founder’s charism; 2. Oblates who are living out fully our Founder’s charism; 3. New Provincials; 4. Oblates engaged in basic and ongoing formation; 5. The Members

of the Commission for the Revision of our Constitutions; 6. An Oblate Bishop.

The method used was interesting: Experiential method (first week): how is our charism being lived today? Historical method (second week): how was the Oblate charism understood in the past? Hermeneutic method (third week): from the dialogue between the past and the present, what are the essential elements of the Oblate charism? In addition, which ones should we emphasize today to revitalize the Congregation? The fruit of this labor was the naming of the nine Essential Characteristics of the Charism¹. They were included in the first 10 articles of our Constitutions that define the Oblate mission.

After that Congress, there followed others, which addressed particular aspects of the Oblate charism

- Evangelization (organized by the General Administration in Rome, 1982),
- Apostolic community and
- Jesus Christ (organized by AOSR in Ottawa, 1989 and 1995).
- The last one was held at Hünfeld (2006), again organized by AERO.

In 2008, the AOSR had begun to work on a Congress on the Oblate Charism, meant to be a continuation of the one held in 1976. Everything was ready to hold it before the Chapter of 2010, but the economic crisis of 2008, together with other reasons, delayed it. Then the AOSR was dissolved and the General Service for Oblate Studies was created. The project of the Congress was then taken up by this new body which, in 2013, submitted a first proposal to the General Council.

Frank Santucci, the last president of the AOSR, wrote about it at the end of the 2015 Congress.

This charism congress was meant to happen in 2009, under the auspices of the Association of Oblate Studies and Research. While our committee had everything organized for Ottawa, and the speakers lined up, the Holy Spirit blew that all away...

This week I have understood why. The Holy Spirit had a major surprise in store for us in God's own time! The 2009 congress would have been a stuffy closed-in intellectual exercise for a few privileged participants – and others would have had to read about it in "Vie Oblate Life".

During this week of our congress, I have understood what St Pope John XXIII meant when he said, on the occasion of Vatican II, that the windows had been opened to let in a new life-giving wind – and after 50 years there is no closing them.

Thank you, Fabio and your helpers, for being instruments to allow God and Saint Eugene to blow new enthusiasm and immense hope into our experience of the charism. Thank you for having had the courage to impel us into the 21st century cyberworld and allowing the charism to touch so many during these days. I hear the words of St Eugene when he embarked on the adventure of foreign missions echoing again as he looks at our use of the media: “Here is a vast field that is opening up to our zeal.”

A NEW VISION

The Congress was organized so as to respond as much as possible to its very title. A “Congress on the Oblate Charism in Context” had to be held... in context! From this came the idea to hold the Congress at the same time in all the Regions of the Congregation, in eight places, via internet connection: San Antonio (USA); Mexico City (Mexico); Rome (Italy); Obra (Poland); Kinshasa (D.R. Congo); Durban (South Africa); Colombo (Sri Lanka); Manila (Philippines).

Every day, the Congress would have to be held in two time frames: a moment of connection among all the places where it is being held; a moment at the local level, with presentations prepared at the regional level and dialogue among the participants.

There were two decisive elements for the success of the Congress.

First of all, there was the technical network that was established among all eight points. Under the guidance of the Office of Communications of the Focolari Movement, and with the help of Fr. Pasquale Castrilli, local teams were established and equipped for the connections.

Secondly, there was a meeting in Rome, from March 2-7, 2015, of those in charge on the local level. Once they had returned home, they got to work preparing the Congress in their Regions.

Meanwhile, on the central level, contacts were made with the principal speakers who would be offering their conferences in the inter-continental part of the Congress. The ongoing contacts have created a

strong bond among all the organizers. A worldwide network has been created, in the service of the Charism.

The Congress took place on June 30 – July 3, 2015, on two levels: local and intercontinental. Those responsible on the local level were:

Fabio Ciardi: Rome;

Paweł Zając: Odra;

Romesh Lowe: Colombo;

Federico Labaglay: Manila;

Frank Santucci - Fernando Velazquez: San Antonio;

Francisco Martínez: Ciudad de Mexico;

Jean Baptiste Malenge: Kinshasa;

Neil Frank: Durban.

On the central level (General House, Rome), the Congress was led by the General Service for Oblate Studies:

Chairman, Louis Lougen Superior General;

Moderator, Fabio Ciardi, Director of the General Service of Oblate Studies;

On the local level, a Coordinator assured the direction.

Five persons assisted at the Congress, and offered their general evaluation and a synthesis of the most significant elements that have emerged, together with prospects for the future:

Ron Rolheiser (San Antonio),

Ray Warren (Rome),

Claude Perera (Colombo),

Alberto Montiel (Ciudad de Mexico),

George Iheanacho (Kinshasa).

On the intercontinental level, the connections worked well, from the technical point of view as well as for dialogue. From every corner, it was possible to follow and interact in an easier and more active way than foreseen. After every presentation, there was open dialogue among all the geographic areas. The various groups were able to be introduced, thus leading to a greater mutual knowledge among all the participants of the Congress.

The main language was English. When there were talks in French or in Spanish, the participants had the English translation available.

At the local level, some groups transmitted via Skype, so as to allow others to follow the event. On the intercontinental level, the Con-

gress was transmitted by live streaming and was followed by a thousand persons.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the Congress was to listen to the opportunities and the challenges to the Oblate charism from its being lived in different contexts, with a view to give a new impetus for the entire Congregation, 200 years after its birth.

We know quite well the content of our charism. Now we are called to ground it in our present situation.

The first objective was motivated by the fact that interculturality and globalization, contextualization and universality, diversity and unity are signs of the times which visibly touch our Congregation in every area of our life: Formation, Community Life, Mission, and Government... The charism is the same, but the context is different.

The Congress should have, in a particular way, touched upon the internal life of the Congregation, rather than directly on its mission. The Congress was not primarily a Congress on Oblate missiology. However, we could not, speak of our identity without talking about the mission, because if it is true that we act based on what we are it is also true that we are, based on what we do; the mission identifies us.

A second objective was to become more aware – especially the young Oblates – of the richness of Oblate life today, and to increase the awareness and sense of belonging to one apostolic body.

A third objective was to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the OMI Foundation.

CONTENT

The Congress will be divided into four sections:

1. Doctrine,
2. History,
3. Experiences,
4. Future prospects. 14 major papers were be offered during the worldwide connection. All the other papers were presented at the local level.

Doctrine

A first field of work concerned the doctrinal theme: Analysis of the terminology and different perspectives: inculturation, acculturation, contextualization...; Motivation, possibilities, ways of contextualizing the charism; How to ensure the contextualization of the charism and the unity of the congregation.

Another range of study was to read the signs of the times: To contextualize the charism, it is necessary to know its context critically. The foundational idea of St. Eugene was born from a careful reading of the signs of the times. The signs of the times also challenge us today.

Some guiding questions were: In view of our charism, what is our reading of the signs of the times today? How do they challenge the Oblate charism? How do they affect the life and mission of the Congregation?

History

A first field of work concerns our history. Pope Francis, in his letter *To All Consecrated People on the Year of Consecrated Life*, November 21, 2014, reminds us of the relevant necessity to look to the past with gratitude:

Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.

We were asked to learn from the great Oblate history. We were all aware of the importance of tradition and its retelling in order to have

and to cherish one's personal identity in the charism. The Congress has been an opportunity to tell stories of the inculturation of the charism in the various historical and cultural contexts in which it was lived from the beginning to the present.

It was important that the entire Congregation know of the lived Oblate reality in its various contexts: its errors, failures, difficulties, and positive experiences. This helped us to understand better the choices to be made and how to proceed.

The historical look embraced all dimensions of the charism: the life of prayer and consecration, community life, mission, Marian dimension ...

Some guiding questions were: How has the charism been lived in our context from its origins to today? What are the most significant experiences? What lessons can we learn from the successes and failures experienced throughout history?

Experiences

We learn from the past in order "To live the present with passion." (Pope Francis) The Congress has been an occasion for a critical sharing of the experiences of the contextualization of our charism, some significant experiences of how the charism (at the level of community, mission, closeness to the people, etc.) is lived today in different contexts in which the Congregation is present (about 65 countries,) and works in an even greater number of cultures and ethnicities.

The Congress was an occasion for reflection regarding the mission, pastoral and spiritual experiences, and the inculturation of the charism: What are the challenges in living our charism in the light of the society in which we are present; the poor and the Church we serve today? Are we able to answer them?

We also were called to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.

Again, some questions were: How can we live the charism radically, grounded in the context where we live and, at the same time, preserve the unity of the congregation? How does the community plan the mission within its context? What is the impact of the settings in which we are located on community life, the vows, and the life of prayer?

How does formation help one to live the charism in context (not only in one's own context, but also in very different contexts)? Sharing of formational experiences.

Future prospects

Finally, the Congress had to lead us “To embrace the future with hope: we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: “Be not afraid... for I am with you” (Jer 1:8).” (Pope Francis)

In its work, the Congress asked itself what the Spirit is asking of the Congregation today. How do we envision the future? Every talk had to be mindful of this goal.

Guiding questions were: How does the community plan the mission within its context? What is the impact of the settings in which we are located on community life, the vows, the life of prayer? How does formation help one to live the charism in context (not only in one's own context, but also in totally different contexts)? Sharing of formational experiences.

SOME REACTIONS

The many reactions, communicated by e-mail or with other social network instruments were all extremely positive. Above all, there was the surprise and the joy at being able to live directly an event that gathered, in the same arena, Oblates of the whole world, overcoming the barrier of space. Someone compared it to the event of the canonization of the Founder which brought together 800 Oblates from the whole world. Hence the experience of a sense of family in seeing familiar faces and meeting people hitherto unknown. This has strengthened the sense of belonging and the joy of being Oblates. Also appreciated were the content and method of wide-ranging dialogue among the participants from around the world.

Some comments from Oblates

An experience so graced that no one shall quickly forget it.
It was like being at a Chapter.

It was, truly, a moving experience of “fraternitá”.

It was a beautiful experience of Oblate family unity.

Thank you for all your hard work in pulling it altogether.

The presentations have been enlightening, they are very rich and they give us hope as a congregation that we are still faithful to our charism.

I am sure it will be a moment of change in the Congregation and its way of working. We are all “digital natives” now.

You have created a new and meaningful encounter between Oblates separated by thousands of miles. Surely, the Spirit has given confirmation to our charism.

It is quite moving to be in touch with so many in so many places! Blessings!

I felt and saw the beauty of the Oblate Congregation!

What a wonderful event. The charism is “alive and well” for another 100 years for sure! Many thanks to you and your team for this exciting event. I really feel energized - even at 75 years old!

I think the best way to summarize my reaction to this gathering as a whole is to compare it to an event from 1995. At the founder’s canonization in Rome, we had a celebration at St. Paul outside the wall on the day after the canonization. I recall looking around at these 800 or so fellow Oblates all vested and ready to process in for mass. It struck me very deeply that each one of these men was my brother, and that I was theirs. I was welcome in their home, and they were welcome in mine. It was a very powerful experience of the breadth and the greatness of our international congregation which has always stayed with me. I experienced that again during this convocation. A significant portion of my talk included the need to become an oblation, to give oneself over to someone and something larger than oneself. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the greatness of the “to what” and the “with whom” and the “to Whom” we give ourselves. I will be sounding the depths of this experience for a very long time to come.

The presence of the Lord has turned these days into an “event” of grace for the whole Oblate Family. A sign: the joy, and the union of our hearts; we were one big community, “to the ends of the world”, as the Founder dreamed. Every day, I seemed to see the Congregation grow in unity and apostolic passion, grow together; geographi-

cal distances disappeared and differences were accepted by all as a rich, multifaceted manifestation of the Oblate charism.

When we sang the Salve Regina, I thought it was the renewed experience of those missionaries who sang it leaving the port of Marseille towards the Missions. At the same time I felt I was sending back to Eugene this last prayer uttered by him. This time it was all his children (imagine that ... I think we were more than 1,300 singing ...) who were invoking our Mother. I was unable to hold back tears in this rush of feelings ... and I am not ashamed of that ...

I truly believe that it marks a major point in the life of the Congregation -- the experience of being very present to each other around the world in a visible and audible way. And the great variety and the very good content of most of the presentations.

This congress has been a unique eye opening experience. As a pre-novice, I've only come to know Oblates from San Antonio, TX, and Buffalo, NY. I've met others, but not as deep as I have met those through my life in San Antonio and my formation in Buffalo. This experience has truly deepened my understanding of the Charism of the Oblates. The video streaming shows the deep joy and love that Oblates have for one another across the world! This experience has been a true blessing in my formation.

I think that the Congress was a great event, almost like a mini-General Chapter. I congratulate Fabio - both for the idea and his leadership in its execution. This was a great event.

Some testimonies of technicians and laity

It was a distinct pleasure working with you all and I am really looking forward to the next one. Personally, I discovered the beauty of the Oblate Charism, a true gift in the Church for today's world.

You could understand at a glance the mosaic of cultures in which today the Oblate charism is embodied. It was a joy to meet over the Internet, despite the sacrifices of the times that coincided with the dawn for some and with the night for others... I really enjoyed the experience of Oblate fraternity and universality.

This conference on the Oblate charism, tossed up many strategies for the achievement of the necessary changes in missionary life and community of the Oblates.

I am a lay person working in education, and I was privileged to participate with you from the technical side to listen to the Congress. I noticed that there is a great connection of the subjects with education of young people all teachers should listen to this. By including information technology and communication to the charism of Eugene de Mazenod, it will spread more quickly in the world.

Listening to the various testimonies broadened my heart! Also on this occasion, I felt myself to be part of the family. I believe that the Oblate charism belongs to me and that you are my family. For me, this event is an incentive to move forward and always to do better.

It is indeed a great breakthrough from OMI to arrange a Congress in this way so that a lot of Oblates and associates can benefit from it.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The newness and the positive spirit of the experience make many wonder if we can continue to use this procedure for future programs. In fact, we have invested in equipment and personnel and we have gained some experience that will be useful for the future. I think it is important to continue to keep this body alive, as a way to develop and grow our research and study opportunities. Some expectations:

May we continue to “come together” through this web connection.

I found it to be a very courageous effort ... it’s the way things will be done frequently in the future.

To look at the technology available today and realize what it can do for us as a worldwide congregation, we would be absolutely blind to the signs of the times if we did not do this type of thing far more frequently. It need not be on this large a scale, but something could be done regionally on the charism or on Oblate ministry on an annual basis for ongoing formation. Perhaps such a larger event like this could be done every six years, during some year between the Chapters.

I believe the fact that the Congregation has been able to pull this type of Congress together and execute it is revolutionary and something we will see often in the future.

The intention, in preparing the Congress, was also to reach out to the young Oblates and to instil in them a passion for our life and mis-

sion and to encourage them to take up the systematic study of Oblate history, spirituality and missiology. I think the Congress has aroused great interest among some of them, especially because of the way in which it was held.

The Congress experience, **in addition to the deepening of the topics** discussed, was an instrument of great communion within the whole Oblate Family.

Dialogue bounced from one part of the world to the other. It is as if the world was all in one room (contextualization?). Or perhaps better still, maybe it is the room that has spread throughout the world (inter contextualization?). As has been said by many during these days, “We felt really one family; distances are no longer a barrier”. For years, I have dreamed of this Congress. Now I can tell you: the reality has been more beautiful than the dream!

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Worldwide Section

June 30, 2015

GREETING FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

LOUIS LOUGEN, OMI

I would like to welcome all of you to this great event, the Charism in Context Congress. This is a very significant event for us as we prepare for the 200th anniversary of our Congregation. The last time we gathered as a Congregation to reflect on our charism was in 1976. That was the first charism congress and the only time that we gathered as a Congregation to reflect on the Oblate charism. I hope that this present Congress will assist us in living more faithfully the Oblate charism in each of our many diverse contexts. This will help us to hear more deeply “the call to a profound personal and community conversion to Jesus Christ.”

I am grateful to Fabio Ciardi and all those who assisted him in organizing this world-wide congress with the technology that helps us gather in different parts of the world at the same time. Thank you for participating and let us pray for a Spirit-filled event for the life and mission of the Congregation. Welcome to everyone!

Je voudrais vous souhaiter la bienvenue à ce grand événement « Congrès sur le charisme ». Ceci est un événement très important pour nous qui nous préparons pour le 200^e anniversaire de notre Congrégation. La dernière fois que nous nous sommes réunis en Congrégation pour réfléchir sur notre charisme était en 1976. Ce fut le premier congrès sur le charisme et la seule fois que nous nous sommes réunis en Congrégation pour réfléchir sur le charisme Oblat. Je

souhaite que ce Congrès nous aide à vivre plus fidèlement le charisme Oblat dans chacun de nos nombreux contextes divers. Cela nous aidera à entendre plus profondément « l'appel à une conversion personnelle et communautaire profonde à Jésus-Christ. »

Je suis reconnaissant à Fabio Ciardi et à tous ceux qui l'ont aidé dans l'organisation de ce congrès mondial se servant de la technologie qui nous permet nous rencontrer dans différentes parties du monde en même temps. Merci pour votre participation. Prions ensemble pour un événement rempli de l'Esprit pour la vie et la mission de la Congrégation. Bienvenue à tous!

Quiziera darles la bienvenida a todos ustedes en este fabuloso evento del Congreso sobre el Carisma en Contexto. Es un evento muy significativo para nosotros que nos preparamos para el 200 aniversario de nuestra Congregación. La última vez que nos reunimos como Congregación para reflexionar sobre nuestro carisma fue en 1976. Ese fue el primer Congreso sobre el carisma y la única vez que nos reunimos como una Congregación para reflexionar sobre el carisma oblato. Espero que el presente Congreso nos ayude a vivir más fielmente el carisma oblato en cada uno de los muy diversos contextos. Esto nos ayudará a escuchar más profundamente “el llamado a una profunda conversión, personal y comunitaria, a Jesucristo”.

Estoy muy agradecido a Fabio Ciardi y a todos aquellos que lo asistieron para organizar este Congreso mundial con la tecnología que nos ayuda a reunirnos desde los diferentes lugares del mundo al mismo tiempo. Gracias por su participación y recemos para que sea un evento lleno de la presencia del Espíritu para la vida y la misión de nuestra Congregación. ¡Bienvenidos todos y cada uno de ustedes!

LE CHARISME OBLAT DANS SON CONTEXTE

FABIO CIARDI, OMI

Tu veux savoir la puissance contenue dans une semence ? Mets-la en terre et laisse l'arbre grandir, grâce au terrain, à l'eau, à l'air, aux soins de celui qui le cultive. Tu veux savoir un charisme dans toutes ses expressions ? Laisse-le se répandre dans le temps et dans l'espace, qu'il pénètre dans les contextes les plus variés, qu'il s'adapte aux diverses cultures.

Pour connaître le charisme de saint Eugène de Mazenod, il ne suffit pas de considérer les premières missions prêchées en France au dix-neuvième siècle, ni les débuts des premières missions démarrées par lui au Royaume-Uni et en Irlande, au Canada, Ceylan et Afrique du Sud. Pour mesurer ses potentialités, il convient de connaître les ministères auxquels des générations d'Oblats se sont dédiées et auxquels saint Eugène n'aurait jamais pensé. Peuples et nations évangélisés desquels il ne savait pas non plus l'existence ; missionnaires, pères et frères, qui ont vécu la sainteté de manière héroïque, jusqu'au martyre ; laïcs qui, tout en vivant la spiritualité oblate, se sont dédiés à la mission de la congrégation avec la même passion des consacrés.

Le charisme, grâce à la créativité apostolique et à la sainteté de tant d'Oblats, grâce à la rencontre avec les nouvelles cultures et à la réponse à de nouveaux défis, grâce à l'accueil de nouvelles impulsions ecclésiales, a pu se développer, s'enrichir, s'exprimer dans des modalités toujours nouvelles. Tout ceci a garanti sa vitalité et sa constante croissance.

A deux cents ans de sa naissance nous voulons nous interroger sur le chemin parcouru par les Oblats dans l'actualisation historique du charisme donné par l'Esprit à l'Eglise à travers saint Eugène de Mazenod. Nous pourrions ainsi connaître la grande variété d'expressions que celui-ci a assumée à des moments différents et dans divers endroits. C'est un bilan du en vue de rendre témoignage à l'action de l'Esprit et

à la généreuse réponse de beaucoup de nos frères. C'est un moment de réflexion pour nous interroger sur les conditions nécessaires pour que la semence initiale continue à porter du fruit et pour que l'arbre grandisse davantage en donnant naissance à de nouvelles branches. C'est la raison de ce Congrès sur le Charisme oblat en contexte.

LE CHARISME : UN DON PARTAGÉ

« Le “charisme des Fondateurs” (*EN*, 11) se révèle comme une “expérience de l’Esprit”, transmise à leurs disciples, pour être vécue par ceux-ci gardée, approfondie, développée constamment en harmonie avec le Corps du Christ en croissance perpétuelle » (*Mutuae relationes*, 11). Cette définition du charisme du fondateur me semble très utile pour donner le coup d’envoi à nos travaux sur le charisme oblat en contexte. Cela met avant tout en lumière le fait que le charisme donné à saint Eugène – son « expérience de l’Esprit » – n’est pas resté un don privé ; cela a une dimension collective, qui a donné naissance à une communauté capable de vivre la même mission et de la maintenir vivante et opérante dans l’histoire : c’est « une expérience transmise à ses disciples ». Il peut exprimer à lui-même et à ses disciples ce que Paul disait au Corinthiens (cf. *1 Cor* 4, 15) et aux Galates (cf. *Gal* 4, 19) : « Je vous ai donné la vie dans le Christ Jésus ». Saint Eugène affirme explicitement : Dieu « m’a prédestiné à être père d’une famille nombreuse dans l’Eglise »¹; « Je suis père et quel père ! »² En leur communiquant le charisme du fondateur, l’Esprit lui a donné la capacité de transmettre à d’autres, dans un processus génératif, son projet apostolique, avec toutes les richesses contenues dans celui-ci.

La transmission de son charisme s’est réalisée en de multiples façons, avec la parole, l’exemple, les écrits... La Règle demeure un instrument privilégié. Dans celle-ci est exprimée la raison d’être de l’Institut, sa physionomie intime, les finalités, les modalités de poursuivre les objectifs. Pour saint Eugène, en celle-ci « il y a tout ce qu’il faut » pour être un missionnaire oblat de Marie Immaculée comme il l’a pensé.³ Elle est une inspiration charismatique communiquée à nous, une expérience qui génère une expérience analogue, garantie de l’unité du corps apostolique.

Avec la mort du fondateur, se réalise la parabole évangélique du grain de blé qui doit tomber en terre et mourir afin de porter du fruit.

C'est la fin d'une expérience et en même temps le début d'une nouvelle fécondité. On a l'impression d'entendre retentir les paroles de Jésus : « C'est mieux pour vous que je m'en aille, autrement l'Esprit ne pourra pas venir à vous » (cf. *Gv* 16, 7) ; « Vous ferez des œuvres encore plus grandes » (cf. *Gv* 14, 12). Il semble que pour que le charisme puisse exprimer toute sa créativité qu'il soit le don extrême de la vie de la part du fondateur. Seule l'histoire toute entière de l'Institut, avec ses multiples et nouvelles œuvres, l'expérience de ses saints, les inculturations dans des milieux et des situations toujours nouvelles, donnera la raison de la densité, de la richesse et de la potentialité renfermée dans le charisme initial.

COMMENT RECEVOIR ET FAIRE FRUCTIFIER LE CHARISME

Ce don, en effet, une fois transmis, demande d'être « vécu », « gardé », « approfondi » et « développé ». Chacun des verbes mériteraient un approfondissement. « Vivre », parce que le charisme, avant d'être objet d'étude, est une réalité vivante et dynamique, comme l'est l'Esprit qui le donne à l'Église. Il doit donc être actualisé, nous laisser guider par lui. « Garder », parce que nous ne sommes pas les patrons : c'est un don objectif que nous avons reçu, et que nous devons, à notre tour, transmettre. « Approfondir », parce qu'il a toujours des choses nouvelles à dire, surtout dans les différents contextes culturels et historiques dans lesquels celui-ci s'incarne. De cette manière le Saint-Esprit qui a illuminé et animé le fondateur se répand maintenant sur toute la famille née de lui : le « charisme du fondateur » devient le « charisme de l'institut », presque qu'une réfraction collective du charisme du fondateur, développé à partir de la vie, de l'expérience, des apports personnels de tous ceux que l'Esprit continue d'appeler : la semence devient un arbre.

De là naît ce que le Concile appelle « patrimoine de l'institut » (cf. *PC* 2). Cela implique l'intention et les projets du fondateur d'une part – le charisme – et les « saines traditions » de l'autre – l'histoire entière de l'institut. Dans les « saines traditions » nous pouvons retrouver l'apport donné par les Chapitres généraux, les communautés, par chacun des membres de l'institut qui font fermenter le charisme du fondateur avec les charismes personnels, comme le rappelle toujours *Mutuae relationes* : « Les simples religieux eux-mêmes ne manquent certainement pas

de dons personnels, provenant aussi de l'Esprit pour enrichir, développer et rajeunir la vie de l'Institut dans l'union de la communauté et le souci de rénovation » (n. 12).

Au fur et à mesure que l'arbre grandit, les nouvelles générations ne doivent jamais oublier les racines. Aussi, ce message est évangélique. Tout de suite après sa mort et sa résurrection, Jésus donne, en effet, un important rendez-vous à ses disciples : il les rencontrera de nouveau en Galilée (cf. *Mt* 28, 10). Pourquoi de Jérusalem doivent-ils descendre en Galilée pour rencontrer le Seigneur ressuscité ? Parce que c'est là que tout a commencé et c'est de là qu'ils doivent repartir, apprendre de nouveau à le suivre, cette fois-ci d'une manière toute nouvelle : Jésus après la résurrection n'est plus comme avant, on ne peut plus le suivre sur les routes de la Galilée, il a franchi les barrières du temps et de l'espace en se rendant présent dans le cœur des disciples, partout où ils sont. Il vit désormais dans la dimension de l'Esprit, et est à chacun plus intime que jamais.

Saint Eugène aussi nous donne son « rendez-vous en Galilée » – à Aix ! aux origines charismatiques, parce que sa toute première expérience qui ne peut être répétée, a commencé par là et demeure pratiquement pour chaque siècle et pour chaque génération. Nous devons toujours retourner à cette petite grande histoire des débuts qui contient le tout, comme dans un grain fécond.

Quoique la vie de l'institut exprime et actualise l'expérience que l'Esprit a donnée au fondateur à travers les mutations historiques et culturelles, il y a une substantielle continuité entre le charisme du fondateur et le charisme de l'Institut.

LA CONTEXTUALISATION ECCLÉSIALE DU CHARISME

Dans sa définition du charisme, *Mutuae relationes* indique enfin une modalité particulière pour vivre l'ultime verbe : « développer ». Le développement de l'expérience fondatrice doit être réalisé « en syntonie avec le Corps du Christ toujours en croissance ».

Il ne suffit pas de prendre en considération les racines de l'Institut ou de circonscrire la recherche de son développement en se limitant à l'intérieur de l'Institut. Il convient que chaque famille charismatique lise son propre charisme à l'intérieur de la communion ecclésiale en lien avec toutes les composantes du peuple de Dieu, à la lumière de ce

qu'aujourd'hui l'Esprit dit à toute l'Église : « Celui qui a des oreilles, qu'il écoute ce que l'Esprit dit aux Églises » (*Ap* 2, 7, ect.). L'Église est toujours en chemin vers la réalisation de sa stature adulte, vers la pleine maturité, et nous avec elle, parce que nous sommes en elle et pour elle. On ne peut pas suivre un chemin parallèle à celui qui est le chemin de l'Église aujourd'hui.

L'Esprit qui a suscité le charisme oblat est le même qui aujourd'hui vivifie l'Église avec de nouveaux charismes, avec de nouvelles sensibilités, avec des nouveaux appels. Le souffle charismatique présent parmi nous doit continuer de vibrer à l'unisson avec le souffle charismatique qui anime aujourd'hui l'Église toute entière. Tout ce qu'il y a de bon et de neuf naît dans la communauté chrétienne qui est la nôtre, fait partie de nous, est don de l'Esprit pour nous, nous enrichit et nous fait grandir.

Une telle dimension ecclésiale du charisme, donné à toute l'Église et vécu en communion avec toute l'Église, a été fortement soulignée par pape François.

Cela vaut la peine de relire avant tout l'intervention au Synode sur la vie consacrée de 1994, quand M^{gr} Bergoglio, évêque auxiliaire de Buenos Aires, mettait en garde contre le fait d'« exalter les familles religieuses pour leur “charisme fondamental”, en ignorant l'appartenance à la totalité de l'Église. Le cadre c'est l'Église : la vie consacrée est un don à l'Église, naît dans l'Église, grandit dans l'Église, est entièrement orientée vers l'Église ». Bergoglio mettait en garde contre le danger de l'autoréférence, qui porte à une projection pastorale autonome, à des itinéraires de formation décalés du contexte, à se concentrer sur les problématiques internes aux Instituts au point d'en absorber les meilleures énergies. « On ne peut pas réfléchir sur la vie consacrée – affirmait l'évêque – si non à l'intérieur de l'Église », tout en prenant conscience que le cadre des relations avec toutes autres composantes du peuple de Dieu, « sera fait de tensions », parce qu'ainsi est la vie, tension dynamique et féconde. Seulement quand elle est perçue comme une composante d'une Église pluridimensionnelle, la diversité des charismes acquiert tout son sens. « Le charisme d'une famille religieuse n'est pas un patrimoine fermé qu'on a besoin de conserver, mais c'est plutôt un « aspect intégré » dans le corps de l'Église, attiré vers le centre, qui est le Christ. Dans un certain sens, une famille religieuse n'est famille

qu'en tant qu'intégrée dans la grande famille du saint et fidèle peuple de Dieu. Dans le cas contraire,... elle est une secte. »⁴

D'où l'appel adressé aux consacrés dans l'Exhortation apostolique *Evangelii gaudium*, à « s'intégrer de manière harmonique dans la vie du Peuple saint de Dieu pour le bien de tous » (n. 130), jusqu'à en faire un critère d'ecclésialité des charismes. « Un renouvellement de la vie religieuse – avait affirmé le Synode de 1994 – doit se réaliser toujours à l'intérieur du pèlerinage dans la foi du peuple de Dieu, à la lumière de son « sentiment », de sa « façon » de croire infaillible. Les élites religieuses ont été et sont encore dangereuses : elles portent en soi l'hérésie essénienne qui renaît à tout moment dans ces messianismes ».

En définitive, une des voies fondamentales pour le développement du charisme en syntonie avec le Corps du Christ est la communion avec tous les membres du peuple de Dieu : « C'est dans la communion... qu'un charisme se révèle authentiquement et mystérieusement fécond. (...) Diversité, pluralité, multiplicité et, en même temps unité » (n. 130-131).

En outre, le charisme de l'Institut se fait comprendre et « s'actualise » dans la mesure où il se laisse interpeler par les demandes et par les nécessités toujours nouvelles auxquelles il est appelé à répondre. L'insertion dans l'histoire est un facteur essentiel pour son herméneutique.

Demeure aujourd'hui encore, dans le magistère du pape François, l'inquiétude exprimée dans le Synode de 1994 : « on se préoccupe excessivement de son propre charisme au détriment de son insertion réelle dans le saint peuple de Dieu, en se confrontant avec les besoins concrets de l'histoire... et au lieu d'être « un don de l'Esprit à l'Église », la vie religieuse, ainsi configurée, finit par être une pièce du musée, ou une “possession” repliée sur elle-même et non mise au service de l'Église ». Dans ce sens, “être une Église en action”, le mouvement vers les “périphéries” et toutes les autres impulsions que le pape lance, représentent non seulement une méthode pastorale, une mise en acte du charisme, mais aussi une méthode herméneutique. Le charisme se donne à comprendre en se mettant en jeu avec l'histoire, en se laissant interpeler par elle, dans le contact concret et quotidien avec les personnes au milieu desquelles il est appelé à vivre et auprès desquelles il est envoyé.

En faisant appel aux nouvelles formes charismatiques contemporaines, le pape lance une invitation utile à toute institution charis-

matique, à la nôtre aussi : « Avant tout, il est nécessaire de préserver la fraîcheur du charisme : qu'elle ne s'altère pas cette fraîcheur ! La fraîcheur du charisme ! En renouvelant toujours plus le « premier amour » (cf. *Ap* 2,4). Avec le temps, en effet, grandit la tentation de se contenter, de se durcir en des schèmes rassurants, mais stériles. La tentation d'emprisonner l'Esprit : celle-là est une tentation ! (...) La nouveauté de vos expériences ne consiste pas dans les méthodes et dans les formes, qui sont aussi importantes, mais dans la disposition à répondre avec un enthousiasme renouvelé à l'appel du Seigneur : c'est ce courage évangélique qui a permis la naissance de vos mouvements et de nouvelles communautés. Si des formes et des méthodes sont défendues pour elles-mêmes, elles deviennent idéologiques, loin de la réalité qui est en continue évolution ; fermées à la nouveauté, elles finiront par suffoquer le charisme même qui leur a donné naissance. Il faut toujours tourner aux sources des charismes et vous trouverez l'élan pour affronter les défis ». Vous êtes « mouvement » ! « Toujours sur la route, toujours en mouvement, toujours ouverts aux surprises de Dieu qui viennent en syntonie avec le premier appel du mouvement, ce charisme fondamental ⁵ ».

UNE TENSION SALUTAIRE À L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA CONGRÉGATION

À ce sujet, ce qu'écrit le pape François dans *Evangelii gaudium* sur la tension entre globalisation et localisation me semble intéressant, d'éviter les deux extrêmes : un universalisme abstrait d'une part, un musée folklorique de l'autre. Le plus grand risque semble celui de se laisser piéger dans le particulier, jusqu'à être « condamnés à répéter toujours les mêmes choses, incapables de se laisser interpeller par ce qui est différent et d'apprécier la beauté que Dieu répand au-delà de leurs frontières ». Et voici l'heureuse conclusion :

Le tout est plus que la partie et aussi plus que leur simple somme. Par conséquent, on ne doit pas être obsédés par des questions limitées et particulières. On a toujours besoin d'élargir le regard en vue de reconnaître un bien plus grand qui portera des bénéfices à nous tous. Toutefois, il faut le faire sans s'évader, sans déracinement. Il est nécessaire d'enfoncer les racines dans la terre fertile et dans l'histoire du lieu, qui est un don de Dieu. On travaille dans son petit monde, avec ce qui est proche, mais avec une perspective plus large (n. 235).

Un cœur universel et des pieds plantés dans le particulier, le concret et adhésion à son propre contexte sans perdre rien du monde entier.

Le principe que « le tout est plus que la partie » pourrait ne pas être partagé et apparaître réducteur, s'il n'est pas lu en lien avec le contexte. En effet la partie peut contenir le tout. Nous ne sommes pas toutefois devant une affirmation d'ordre philosophique, mais face à une instance qui veut fuir toute myopie particulariste incapable de prêter attention aux exigences, aux instances, aux problématiques et aux apports enrichissants provenant de l'extérieur ; un égocentrisme qui empêche d'offrir son expérience, ses dons, son aide à celui qui vit dans d'autres contextes. C'est l'invitation à respirer dans le vaste horizon de la réciprocité généreuse et toujours enrichissante.

L'oscillation pendulaire entre l'accentuation de la dimension universelle et particulière est présente à l'intérieur de l'Église et de la vie consacrée. Aujourd'hui, le pendule est orienté vers la décentralisation. L'attention à l'inculturation, à la contextualisation, au projet local, à l'assomption de ses propres racines environnementales paraît décidément plus intéressante que le rapport à l'exigence d'un projet et d'une adresse unitaire, à une identité commune.

Cela a des répercussions sur beaucoup d'aspects de notre vie. Cette tendance est évidente surtout dans le domaine du gouvernement, toujours plus décentralisé. Beaucoup de compétences, un temps détenues par le gouvernement central, sont maintenant déléguée au échelons locaux. Le gouvernement central n'a souvent plus assez de capacité ou de force pour intervenir avec autorité dans les questions des diverses unités périphériques ; tout en pouvant le faire, il s'y abstient justement par respect des autonomies. Cela a comme conséquence les disparités économiques, avec leurs niveaux relatifs de vie très divers d'une région à l'autre.

Les programmes de formation, même en présence d'une *Ratio formationis* commune, de fait sont diversifiés, toujours plus en plus adaptés aux cultures et aux projets locaux. Pas seulement, mais on forme en pensant au contexte de la région ou de l'unité dans laquelle se trouvent les maisons de formation. On refuse une formation générale abstraite qui ne sait pas par la suite s'immerger dans le vécu de ceux que nous sommes appelés à évangéliser.

Nous ne pouvons toutefois pas oublier qu'un scolastique ou un frère formé en Amérique du Sud – mais cela s'applique naturellement à tous les autres Oblats en formation dans n'importe quelle partie du monde –, doit être prêt à travailler en Thaïlande ou au Kenya, ou en Hollande, et donc devra être ouvert à une vision universelle de la vocation oblate, et prêt à se contextualiser dans une autre culture, très différente de la sienne.

À l'occasion du centenaire du Scolasticat International, Père Jetté affirmait un principe qui est valable pour toute maison de formation :

à l'intérieur d'une Famille internationale comme la nôtre, à une époque de décentralisation et de développement plus marqué des diversités légitimes, il est indispensable de maintenir et, si possible, de multiplier les lieux de rencontre, de dialogue et d'échange qui sont les plus aptes à promouvoir l'unité entre nous... La Congrégation est universelle. Elle est engagée en plus de 50 pays et elle a le cœur grand comme le monde. Il faut qu'en son sein, certains jeunes expérimentent davantage cette dimension internationale et puissent la vivre avec plus d'intensité. En outre, la Congrégation vit de l'Église, pas seulement de l'Église locale mais de l'Église universelle. Elle a été approuvée par le Pape et elle reçoit mission du Pape pour aller partout dans le monde prêcher l'Évangile aux pauvres et travailler à l'extension du Royaume de Jésus Christ (24 octobre 1981).

Contextualisation

La force centrifuge apparaît décidément plus forte que la tendance centripète. Il s'agit d'un phénomène que nous pouvons lire de manière positive. Dans le passé, on a presque confondu identité avec uniformité, fidélité avec répétabilité, avec cette mauvaise excuse « cela a toujours été ainsi » stigmatisée par le pape François (*Evangelii gaudium*, 33). Le charisme demande d'être vécu de manière nouvelle, dans des contextes nouveaux, avec cette créativité et cette adaptabilité qui sont dans sa nature d'expérience évangélique historique.

D'où la nécessité de la lecture attentive des signes des temps. Le projet missionnaire de saint Eugène naquit de sa lecture particulière des « signes des temps », qui lui permet de prendre acte de l'état d'abandon de l'Église de son temps. Une telle lecture était le fruit de l'étude, de

la prière, de la confrontation avec la Parole de Dieu, de l'expérience personnelle, de l'attention aux appels de l'Église, de la grâce liée au charisme. Il nous est demandé la même chose aujourd'hui. Il ne suffit pas d'être dans un contexte géographique ou culturel donné pour être « inculturés ». On peut se retrouver à un tel endroit décalés des problèmes des gens, incapables de comprendre les appels de l'Esprit. La Règle nous demande d'être « très proches des gens » avec lesquels nous travaillons, « sans cesse attentifs à leurs aspirations et aux valeurs qu'ils portent en eux » (C 8), attentifs à leur mentalité (cf. R 8a; cf. R 47a, 49d, 51c, 115a). Sont aussi déterminants, aux fins de la contextualisation, l'attention aux indications de l'Église locale et universelle, et le discernement de la communauté locale qui se met à l'écoute attentive et qui réfléchit ensemble....

La sauvegarde de l'unité

La Congrégation, tandis qu'elle se contextualise et s'actualise en des lieux dans lesquels elle est appelée à remplir sa mission, se diversifie dans les expressions de la vie. En même temps, elle ne peut pas perdre sa vision unitaire, donnée à travers un unique charisme. La contextualisation peut porter autant à une telle autonomie qu'à faire apparaître notre Congrégation comme une confédération de Province ou d'entités locales analogues qui s'éloignent toujours plus les unes des autres jusqu'à ne plus se reconnaître. Elle est appelée à rester un unique corps apostolique, bien uni. Dans chaque communauté et dans chaque mission oblate on doit se sentir chez soi, on doit respirer le même air, une même famille.

Pour le maintien de l'unité nous possédons déjà de multiples instrument, à commencer par la règle commune et par un patrimoine historique commun qui contiennent et expriment le charisme. L'ignorance des origines communes, de l'identité charismatique et de l'histoire de la Congrégation de la famille religieuse est sa mort : si on coupe les liens avec les racines l'arbre meurt. Pour cela, il convient d'investir beaucoup dans la formation au charisme spécifique oblat et de garder en vie la recherche et l'étude sur l'histoire et la spiritualité oblate. Nos institutions académiques et les maisons de formation ont une grande responsabilité à ce propos.

Sont aussi en cours des expériences formatives particulières qui sont appelées à garantir ce sens de l'unique famille : le Scolasticat international, les Études supérieures à Rome, l'Expérience de Mazenod à Aix, les programmes de formation interprovinciaux pour la préparation aux vœux perpétuels, etc.

Les chapitres généraux, le gouvernement général et la personne du Supérieur général demeurent enfin les ultimes et définitives garanties de l'unité de l'Institut.

L'attitude requise est celle de s'ouvrir au don des autres expériences, de la diversité qui arrive des différentes parties de l'Institut, en vue de se laisser enrichir par celles-ci ; de s'ouvrir en donnant à son tour son expérience aux autres frères et sœurs de l'Institut des diverses parties du monde ; en vue d'un enrichissement réciproque, une connaissance toujours plus profonde des possibilités qui habitent le charisme.

Il faudra penser à des agents spécifiques d'échange et de communion, à une nouvelle façon d'exercer le gouvernement, à des icônes et à des symboles susceptibles d'être partagés, à des formes de narrations identitaires. Nous ne pouvons pas nous rendre davantage à des tendances unidirectionnelles qui affaiblissent l'unité ou qui la réduisent à l'uniformité. Il faut être pleinement ancrés dans son propre milieu et ensemble s'élargir à l'humanité toute entière : la communauté locale et un sens d'appartenance au corps unique.

Le Congrès devra affronter de manière critique ce thème dont la solution, quelle qu'elle soit, détermine la physionomie de la Congrégation.

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¹ Au p. C. Baret, 4 janvier 1856, *Écrits Oblats*, 12, p. 1.

² Au p. Mille, aux novices et scolastiques de Billens, 24 janvier 1831, *Écrits Oblats*, 8, p. 12.

³ Lettre circulaire, 2 février 1857.

⁴ XVI Congrégation générale (Rome, 13 octobre 1994).

⁵ Aux participants au III Conférence mondiale des Mouvements ecclésiaux et des Communautés Nouvelles, 22 novembre 2014.

SOMMAIRE : Ce texte introduit le Congrès et donne les pistes de recherche pour la compréhension de la contextualisation du charisme oblat. Pour connaître le charisme de saint Eugène de Mazenod, il ne suffit pas de considérer les premières missions prêchées en France au dix-neuvième siècle, ni les débuts des premières missions démarrées par lui. Pour mesurer ses potentialités, il convient de connaître les ministères auxquels des générations d'Oblats se sont dédiées, peuples et nations évangélisés desquels il ne connaissait pas non plus l'existence, missionnaires, pères et frères, qui ont vécu la sainteté de manière héroïque, jusqu'au martyre, laïcs qui, tout en vivant la spiritualité oblate, se sont dédiés à la mission de la congrégation avec la même passion que les consacrés. Le charisme, grâce à la créativité apostolique et à la sainteté de tant d'Oblats, grâce à la rencontre avec les nouvelles cultures et à la réponse aux nouveaux défis, grâce à l'accueil de nouvelles impulsions ecclésiales, a pu se développer, s'enrichir, s'exprimer dans des modalités toujours nouvelles. Le Congrès est un moment de réflexion pour nous interroger sur les conditions nécessaires pour que la semence initiale continue à porter du fruit et pour que l'arbre grandisse davantage en donnant naissance à de nouvelles branches.

ABSTRACT: This text introduces the Congress and provides avenues of research for understanding the contextualization of the Oblate charism. To know the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, it is not sufficient to consider the first missions preached in France in the nineteenth century nor the beginning of the first missions undertaken by him. To measure its potential, it is necessary to know the ministries to which generations of Oblates have dedicated themselves. Evangelized peoples and nations whose existence he did not even know; missionaries, priests and Brothers, who have lived holiness heroically, even to martyrdom; lay people who, while living Oblate spirituality, have dedicated themselves to the mission of the Congregation with the same passion as those in vows. The charism, thanks to the apostolic creativity and holiness of so many Oblates, thanks

to the encounter with new cultures and to the response to new challenges, thanks to the acceptance of new ecclesial incentives, could develop, enrich itself, express itself in ever new ways. The Congress is a time of reflection for us to ask ourselves about the conditions necessary so that the initial seed might continue to bear fruit and that the tree might grow further by giving birth to new branches.

RESUMEN: Este texto ha introducido el Congreso y da pistas para profundizar en la comprensión de la contextualización del carisma oblato. Para conocer el carisma de San Eugenio de Mazenod, no basta considerar las primeras misiones predicadas en Francia durante el siglo XIX ni los comienzos de las primeras misiones por él establecidas. Para tener en cuenta su potencia, conviene conocer los ministerios a los que se han dedicado generaciones de oblatos: pueblos y naciones evangelizados, de los cuales él no conocía ni su existencia; misioneros, padres y hermanos, que vivieron la santidad de forma heroica, hasta el martirio; laicos que, viviendo plenamente la espiritualidad oblata, se han dedicado a la misión de la Congregación con la misma pasión que los consagrados. El carisma, gracias a la creatividad apostólica y a la santidad de tantos oblatos, gracias al encuentro con nuevas culturas y a la respuesta a nuevos desafíos, gracias a la acogida de nuevos impulsos eclesiales, ha podido desarrollarse, enriquecerse, expresarse en modalidades del todo nuevas. El Congreso es un momento de reflexión para que nos interroguemos sobre las condiciones necesarias para que la semilla inicial siga dando fruto y para que el gran árbol siga creciendo, dando nacimiento a nuevas ramas.

REVISIONING OBLATE MISSION FOLLOWING THE MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY OF ST EUGENE. A CASE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT, KAIROS AND METHOD

Spiritual discernment is the gift we most require right now. When people are thrown into times of great socio-cultural and historical transformation then all kinds of signs and portents appear and all kind of prophets, healers and pundits proclaim a plethora of panaceas for survival and the fullness of life. Such ‘kairos’ times are very significant in establishing new understandings of human identity and priority.¹ We are in such a time right now in Southern Africa and, indeed, in the whole world, as the information revolution and globalisation transforms individuals and communities everywhere.

Faced with a title like ‘Revisioning mission’ we might want to begin by discerning the missionary needs of our time. But rushing quickly to the needs would be an error. The process of discernment should take priority over the declaration of the needs themselves. Without some articulation of method in our spiritual discernment we become susceptible to abandoning the process altogether in order to attend to the urgent demands of the day. This is because it is easier and, in the short term, more profitable, to engage with the familiar and the pressing. Another problem occurs when, for lack of a method, we substitute conventional wisdom, usually expressed as prudence, reason and practicality, for spiritual discernment. Sometimes these may coincide but often they do not. This is particularly the case in times of great change and a great danger for true discernment.

Christians have been promised a method for discernment by Jesus who says that ‘the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and when he comes he will convince the world

of sin and righteousness and judgement and he will guide you into all the truth (*Jn* 14:26, 16:8.13). We must understand that teaching, conviction, judgement and truth are spiritual matters.²

This gift of the Holy Spirit is manifest as fruits of faith, hope and love expressed in our lives. So we learn that we will connect most basically to the Holy Spirit when reflecting on our fundamental life commitments. These are vocational commitments, and individuals always make these commitments in the context of an ecclesial community since it is of the nature of Christian life that it is lived in community. Oblates of Mary Immaculate make this commitment in the context of a religious institute.³ This means that whilst the presence of the Holy Spirit is surely found in the personal lives of the Oblates, they should hear God's call and receive God's gifts more powerfully within the community and its life decisions.⁴ So as Oblates search for method we might do well by examining our own Oblate tradition.

A Method for discernment from Oblate Tradition

The Holy Spirit has called and led other members of our religious family through circumstances with similarities to our own. Because we are linked to them in our common commitment, we can learn from those who 'have gone before us marked with the sign of faith'.⁵ This is the value of tradition. To illustrate this, I want to examine how two significant moments in Oblate history have some links with our present context in Southern Africa. Though they are separated by 150 years and 8000 kilometres, the way these Oblates discerned God's Spirit reveals strikingly similar approaches. Understanding what they did, may cast some light on own method for spiritual discernment today.

Both of the two contexts were times of great social crisis, cultural contestation and ecclesial quandary. The first was post-revolutionary France during the life of the young St Eugene de Mazenod. And the second was the increasingly acute context of racial oppression and social upheaval during the 1970s in the Republic of South Africa. In the 1978 Congress on Oblate Formation, in Southern Africa, Richard Coté made a presentation on Oblate Mission using the founder's context and method as a metaphor for the situation then.⁶ I want to continue that tradition here by using both contexts as keys for the current Kairos.

St Eugene lived in a time of great social and ecclesial crisis. When we examine his method in discerning the will of God we find the following elements. First, he spent some considerable time and effort examining his own *personal experience* of this situation.⁷ Secondly he debated and discussed the issues with *others who shared his concerns*.⁸ Thirdly, he *prayed* about them. Fourthly he made use of *literature which examined the socio-cultural context of his time* and their impact on the Church.⁹ Gradually, through this process, he came to *identify the most significant factors impinging on social and Christian life* and developed a great blueprint for the way forward which was to lead to a new missionary band constituted through vows of religion. Eventually all this was *distilled into what we call the Preface* to our Constitutions and Rules.¹⁰

The preface is important for Oblates. It has been called an ‘unrivalled expression’ of the Oblate charism and a ‘rule of life’.¹¹ It reminds us that our congregation was born out of social and ecclesial crisis. This means that such times are foundational for us. The process that led to the Preface was a discernment process. I would like to analyse this process in terms of the following six steps, which describe what de Mazenod and those around him did. As such they are proposed as parameters of a Mazenodian OMI Missionary spirituality. They can be expressed as follows:

1. Our mission will be found in examining our context in mind, heart and soul.
2. This examination begins with the experiences of the Oblates themselves.
3. It draws on reading and research about of the social and cultural issues of the time.¹²
4. It examines the situation of the Church itself.
5. It searches for a blueprint for a response based on Apostolic Religious life.
6. Our mission will call Oblates to a new response comprising a commitment to change one’s current way of life and embrace the new.

EARLY HISTORICAL MISSIOGRAPHY OF OMI IN SOUTHERN AFRICA 1850-1950

This spirituality was the motivation which inspires t Eugene to send missionaries to Southern Africa in the face of a huge lack of personnel and the information that the mission had been refused by a number of other institutes. So in 1850 he responded to an unexpected request from Propaganda Fide to establish the Apostolic Vicariate of Natal which he accepted. And On March 15, 1852, Bishop Allard the newly appointed Vicar Apostolic of the newly created Vicariate of Natal arrived in Durban with four other Oblate companions. The beginnings were very difficult and there were many failures and setbacks but gradually the missionary activity bore fruit. The original Vicariate confided to Allard and his companions now comprises 46 separate dioceses in five countries of Southern Africa: South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia.¹³

As these dioceses grew and local leaders and clergy took them over, the role of the Oblates in Southern Africa had to change. By 2000 the congregation here was almost entirely indigenous with more than 280 members in southern Africa by far the biggest group of male religious (Siebert 1999: 91-93). However towards the end of the period leaders of the Congregation in Southern Africa found themselves in a context of a new form of social and ecclesial crisis: the enslavement of apartheid; the longing for liberation; the deplorable state of the life of the poor and the need for a more viable local church.

CHANGES IN 1950-80s: THE IMPACT OF APARTHEID

There were some major social changes in this period. Internationally there was a restructuring of the world into first world block of Capitalist free market economies a second world block of Marxist inspired nations constructing command structured economic systems and a dependent third world nations often under the influence of the two major systems. Linked to this was the ongoing political independence of the third world nations from former colonial powers. This was particularly striking in Africa.

In South Africa the political system of Apartheid emerged. From taking political power in 1951 it increasingly gained control of most of

society. Initially its ideology we constructed on the pillars of three ideologies of *Swart Gevaar* (*Black danger*), *Rooi Gevaar* (*red danger*) and the *Roomse Gevaar* (*Roman Danger: i.e. anti-Catholic*). But it gradually grew more sophisticated in trying to maintain white control in society. During the same period it was increasingly challenged both by African Nationalists inside and out of the country as well as by a liberal mainly white elite offended because of the abuse of liberal values but also because of the effect of increasing international sanctions on the economy. The struggle against apartheid was increasingly suppressed by the government up to the end of the 1960s but rose again in the 1970s, becoming stronger in the 1980s until it was crippled in the early 1990s and a negotiated solution to a new democratic society was achieved. The first democratic elections of all South Africans was held in 1994.

Changes the OMI world in this period included opening a facility for training Oblate Priests and brothers in South Africa though such a house existed before that in Basutoland. In 1942, St Joseph's Scholasticate opened in Pietermaritzburg and transferred to Cedara in 1952 where it still exist today and South Africans began their training as OMI priests and brothers.

During these years the Number of Southern African OMI grew beginning to outnumber foreign missionaries in the 1980s. This led to a change of ethos in the Oblates as local concerns about the injustice of the apartheid system were impinging directly on Oblates and their families and their home country.

SOUTH AFRICA IN THE CRISIS OF THE MID 1970S: NEW CHALLENGES SAME SPIRITUALITY OF DISCERNMENT

The six steps of the Mazenodian OMI Missionary spirituality described above can also be abstracted out of the discernment process of OMI leadership in Southern Africa during the acute crisis of the 1970s.¹⁴ This process can be abstracted out of three documents published between 1977 and 1978 by OMI leaders in Southern Africa.¹⁵ The most important is the first one, *Oblate Orientations*, which outlined vision and strategy for Oblate mission.

In this document we find the first and second steps of the process articulated above in this sentence: 'We tried to get a closer look at our fellow men who are in need of Christ and at ourselves charged with

giving credible witness.’ (n. 4) This raised a number of major issues including industrial development, (n. 4) separate development and racism (apartheid), migratory labour, African Nationalism, Black consciousness, and liberation. (n. 5)

Steps four and two appear in their examination of the ‘missionary outlook of the past’. Here they found many positive aspects such as making Christ known and working for human development. But there were also a number of negative matters such as the lack of respect for local culture (n. 4) and the difficulties of transition between indigenous clergy and foreign missionaries. (n. 6)

Step five is found in the blueprint for a new response articulated as ‘areas of concern’. (n. 4) These included developing effective communities of apostolic life, (n. 8) a focus on presence among the people, (n. 8-9) a greater focus on mission for ‘total liberation’, (n. 9-10) the need to incarnate the gospel in the local context, and the need to develop clearly defined relationships with local churches which have now been founded and no longer depend on us. (n. 11-12)

Step six is dealt with in the large number of suggestions for new forms of activity in each ‘area of concern’. (n. 7-12) The fact that this makes up the main part of the document clearly shows that the goal was a change in Oblate praxis.

Step three is almost entirely absent, a weakness of Oblate activity in general in Southern Africa where the study of theory is often sacrificed on the altar of being practical! But even here, there are some brief references to the need to study ‘important documents on social justice and liberation’ and for Oblate communities to ‘subscribe to relevant literature’. (n. 9)

Reading this document some 26 years after it was written, I am struck by how valuable it is. One gets the feeling that by being open to the Spirit these men lived the words of the scripture I quoted earlier. ‘He will teach you all things and when he comes he will convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgement and he will guide you into all the truth (Jn 14:26, 16:8, 13)’. One cannot but be impressed by the presence of God in our small band in those days.¹⁶

Oblate Priorities continued the discernment process in clarifying priorities for Oblate community life and mission. *Oblate Formation* emerged from a formation congress which tried to develop a forma-

tion programme that responded to these orientations and priorities. This document has probably had the most impact on the congregation in Southern and indeed most of Anglophone Africa. This document also includes an appendix entitled *Oblate Mission in Southern Africa*.¹⁷ This was the keynote address by Fr Cote which presented many of the socio cultural factors affecting Southern Africa at that time. This of course is step 3 of our method which appears for the first time here in regard to formation. The formation programme of the Oblates in Southern Africa has proved very successful and is still being used today in many parts of the African continent.

Clearly these fruits indicate the willingness and dedication of Oblates to change and embrace new missionary strategies to renew the Church and the congregation. Clearly the same Mazenodian missionary spirituality has helped the congregation he to respond to new horizons and new contexts.

SIGNS IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT: NATAL PROVINCE 1998-TODAY

The Southern Africa of this time is profoundly different to that of 1976. In 2014 we were celebrating twenty years of freedom in South Africa. Southern Africa is becoming somewhat more stable, somewhat more democratic and somewhat more prosperous though some significant pockets oppose these trends. The situation in Zimbabwe, for example, subjects the people to a society under many years of one leader. But this is an aberration in the Africa of today he will eventually go, one way or another, and that country will hopefully join the rest of the region in reflecting the new emerging realities.

Between 1998 and 2004 the Oblate congregation worldwide participated in the Immense Hope Programme which called the congregation to evaluate its ministries and revision for the future at the time of the new millennium. The immense hope project through its programme helped us reflect on our own personal experiences of the current context; to debate and discussed the issues with others sharing our concerns and to pray about them personally and communally. These are the first two steps of the Mazenodian Missionary discernment process identified in this paper. All this culminated in a congress focussed missionary discernment and planning in 2005 entitled *The World and the Way*.¹⁸

What are these new realities and what are their signs? What can we learn from them about Oblate Mission? Examining the very important step three of our methodology, the principal signs of these times, will help us answer this question. They will provide information to help us discern the mission of Religious institutes today. In presenting you with some material for step 3 of the discernment process I outlined above, I will limit myself to examining four principal signs of the ‘new realities’. These are:

1. The Information Revolution.
2. The African Renaissance and NEPAD.
3. The move from Mission Church to Local Church.
4. Special faces of the Poor in Southern Africa.

Before I enter into these signs in more detail I want to point out a few essential differences between these signs in 2004 and those in 1978.

Firstly, in 1978 the signs were focused principally on what was going on inside our region and on South Africa, in particular. In 2004 the signs are much wider than us and our context as they find their locus largely outside our region. This implies a major transformation from a vision and praxis centred on us and our Southern African exigencies, to a vision and praxis encompassing matters that affect people elsewhere as well as here. We are being called to lift our eyes from under our feet to the mountains beyond (*Ps* 121).¹⁹ This will demand an enormous change in mindset because we are used to seeing our countries as the centre of our world. If this attitude remains unchanged then there is little chance for our survival as a specific Religious institute with appropriate missionary goals for the time. We will identify more and more with the local churches and contexts where we work and we will become diocesan clergy. This change of mindset is one affecting all aspects of southern African social life: economic, political, cultural and religious. Mugabe’s intransigence in Zimbabwe is a metaphor, on the political level, for those unwilling to make this transition.

The second difference is that our mission will increasingly focus on the specific religious content of evangelisation. Matters of social transformation, though still important, will become less vital. What will become essential is demonstrating the value of Catholic Christian faith within the new, increasingly secularised, world that is emerging.

The third difference is that we will need to develop new forms of missionary outreach. These will entail some continuity with previous approaches coupled with experimentation in new methods of reaching the un-evangelised.

Finally, it is vital to understand that though these four signs are unpacked separately in the paper, they are, in fact, all linked together in a complex whole. Dealing with one may often mean responding to the others. The dynamics of our new social context are becoming very complex. Successful responses will have to accept this complexity. This could necessitate more effective resource accumulation and management. It will often require cooperation with other groups. Partial solutions may fail because of the growing reality of interconnectedness within our new context. This brings us to the first sign.

The information revolution

This first sign is the most important. It is affecting human beings everywhere. Though many in this continent are only beginning to see this sign, it will rapidly grow to become the most powerful social factor influencing the daily lives of even the most remote African rural dwellers. This is because the world is currently moving into a new global configuration that is transforming the structure, behaviour and beliefs of human life.²⁰

Manuel Castells' seminal work identifies a 'technological revolution, centred on information technologies' that is radically transforming the shape of human society leading to the emergence of new social structures.²¹ Such radical transformations of human society have happened before; for example, when human beings first began to dwell in cities around 5000 years ago. The social history of the world is not one of gradual change but rather 'a series of stable states punctuated at rare intervals by major events that occur with great rapidity and help to establish the next stable state'.²² St Eugene lived in such a period, the industrial revolution, and we are in another, the information revolution.

The principal factor driving this new transformation is 'the increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic, and social life of the peoples on this planet'.²³ Satellites have brought the media into the lives of people everywhere. The cellular telephone system is transforming even the African continent as it jumps rapidly into the global

communications culture.²⁴ The Internet has empowered individuals and groups both to inform and be informed on a scale that would have been unthinkable even ten years ago. New types of social space are emerging, allowing people to create new kinds of societies, both geographical and virtual. The way human beings interact is being radically transformed.²⁵

This revolution is having a profound effect on people. The socio-economic and environmental consequences are the most talked about, and I will return to these in examining the next sign, but here I would like to deal with a major cultural and religious consequence of the information revolution. This is the issue of human identity.

In the past, human identity was forged around symbols like clan, village, ethnic group, religion, nation and profession.²⁶ Usually it was tied to geographical space, the land. Even the guilds and trades of mediaeval Europe had their own streets and neighbourhoods. Today, the network provides new kinds of social space and new opportunities for social identity. Global travel has compressed geography, and cultural identities like the jet set, the business traveller and the commuter have emerged.²⁷ But the information revolution has also developed an entirely new form of social space. Cyberspace is a virtual reality accessible to all who possess an electronic interface like a computer, cell phone or television.²⁸ Within cyberspace, domains of human interaction are created with the inevitable result that social identity and culture will follow.²⁹ One consequence is the creation of social spaces where identities predicated upon controversial areas of human identity, such as sexual proclivity or racial prejudice, are acceptable.³⁰

Human identity is linked to beliefs and values that allow people to gradually understand and then transform the social space within which they live.³¹ The information revolution has led to a new entity, the network, which is extremely powerful and often overwhelming. People have to participate in the network because of the demands of their lives at work, in the economy and in State bureaucracy.³² However, the network treats connected people not as human beings but as digital entities.³³ This is just one way in which the network dehumanises people. As a result it is often perceived as threatening. Another threat is perceived in the power of the network. Many people fear that there are no social institutions powerful enough to transform its unacceptable face.³⁴ These

dangers lead people to respond by attempting to create local centres of human identity but these are insufficient since they are merely local and they tend to comprise aspects of defence, refuge and resistance against the perceived power of the network and its controllers.³⁵ So one of the human responses to the information revolution is the growth of human resistance identities. Castells identifies four principal ways in which such resistance identity reconstruction is currently going on. These are religious fundamentalism, nationalism, ethnic identity and territorial identity.³⁶ All are found in sub-Saharan Africa.

Most resistance responses contain a component of rejection together with a grudging use of the system when it can further local goals. Basam Tibi, the Islamic scholar, suggests that the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East is a clear example of this.³⁷ Castells characterises American Christian fundamentalism in the same way.³⁸ Schreiter sees parallels in some Catholic Marian movements.³⁹ More extreme resistance responses include the growth of ideologically based movements employing military violence to achieve their anti-globalisation goals. These include organisations such as the American Militia,⁴⁰ Al Qaeda,⁴¹ and *Aum Shinrikyo*.⁴² *Isis-Isil* is the most recent manifestation.⁴³

Religion is clearly an important site of identity construction and is being used to create resistance identities against modernity and globalisation. Such religions offer miracles, healings, purifications and safe, controlled, purified communities as in cults. Much of Christianity is being seduced by a kind of happy good news that offers prosperity, healings and miracles right here and right now. This form of Christianity is growing rapidly in urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa. In the city of Accra they claim as many as 25% of the population.⁴⁴

A missionary response to the identity challenges of the information revolution

If the quest for human identity is to be one of the prevailing issues of the information revolution, then the Church has a major mission in this area. The challenge will be to offer a coherent, comprehensive identity for humanity in the networked world. Such an identity should not just be a resistance identity but must provide a vision for transforming the network in a struggle against what dehumanises people.

The goal of this mission is the evangelisation of human social identity. The centre of this new identity is the paschal mystery. Without this centre Christian identity will not succeed. This is because the vision of human salvation through the paschal mystery is eminently appropriate to the task of humanising and transforming the networked world. It is not a resistance identity based on fear but a transformative identity, which accepts that God has the ability to redeem the networked world in the power of Jesus Christ. The paschal mystery embodies accepting the consequences of a gospel based struggle against evil, taking the side of the victims, and allowing God to create new life from passion and death. This truth empowers human struggle against evil and its consequences in suffering and dehumanisation. It is the reason why many Christians were involved in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Indeed our Southern African experience makes the mission of Religious here somewhat paradigmatic for our Institutes internationally. This is because many of us have experienced, in our ministries, the truth of suffering, death and resurrection through God's power. We can witness to this truth because we have lived it.⁴⁵

However, there are a number of factors militating against the emergence of such an effective Christian identity. Chief among these is the fact that in many highly networked societies, most people see the Church as old fashioned and no longer worthy of commitment.⁴⁶ This means that considerable effort will be required to construct new Christian identities that respond to the cultural challenges of globalisation and the networked world. This is the challenge before us and there are already some good signs. For example, there has been a huge growth in the use, by Christians, of information and communications technologies (ICT) including Christian television stations, websites and social media sites. *Lesedi* Radio in Mongu Zambia is a simple example of what Oblates in Africa have already done. St John Paul II was been, perhaps surprisingly, a major participant in evangelising the networked society. He has continually made use of global transportation to be a pastor to his people worldwide. His youth rallies employed symbols of popular youth culture and often resembled pop concerts. Pope Francis has continued and extended this ministry.

Popular culture is one of the beneficiaries of the networked world. It already contains within it religious texts which guide people around

issues of identity and the meaning of life.⁴⁷ These include music videos, movies, books and cult figures like Mother Theresa, Padre Pio, and the Dalai Lama. These are symptoms of the rise of spirituality as a powerful cultural form expressing social identity.⁴⁸ Religious institutes must get involved in this area providing real spiritualities of human and Christian growth for the poor of the new world. At present the dangers of many emerging spiritualities are that they become merely a set of techniques and guides for living a purposeful, meaningful, healthy lifestyle with self and others. This is merely ‘a religion where the self is at the centre’.⁴⁹ The massive growth of the New Age movement is part of this trend and so is the growth in African indigenous churches throughout the continent. The challenge to mission here is to recognise and accept the human and Christian value of such processes whilst recognising their limitations. All of this will demand great creativity on the part of Religious Institutes. The revival of the mission band, making use of the symbols of popular spirituality, may help to reach non-evangelised groups like youth and workers.⁵⁰ The acceptance and transformation of the Marian Sanctuary at Ngome by the Oblates since 2010 has been a major missionary success attracting large crowds every week⁵¹.

The African Renaissance

The second sign I would like to examine is expressed here in terms of the symbol: ‘the African Renaissance’. It refers to the emergence of a new consciousness and awareness expressed in realities such as the African Century,⁵² the African Union, and the Millennium Plan for Africa Development (MAP). The well-known African writer Mbulelo Mzamane notes that ‘The African renaissance in proper historical context is essentially the rise of Africans universally, on the continent and in the Diaspora, from slavery, colonialism, segregation, Apartheid, and neo-colonialism’.⁵³ In this sense it is a long ongoing process.⁵⁴

In my analysis of this sign I want to focus on the socio-economic factors around African development, which is a current priority.⁵⁵ Within the context of the African Renaissance, these matters are dealt with according to the programme of the ‘New Partnership for Africa’s Development’ (NEPAD). This is the vision and plan of the African Union for Africa’s future development. It aims to eradicate poverty, to halt the marginalisation of Africa in the world and to improve growth and

development in the continent.⁵⁶ NEPAD has been set up to counter the negative effects of globalisation on Africa which finds itself in the disadvantaged group of societies affected by the information revolution. This sign, then, is connected to the previous one.

Globalisation is rapidly increasing the total wealth of the world but significantly widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. It has increased the power of those social groups more able to use the network to achieve their goals. They include trans-national corporations, those nations able to exercise global hegemony through economic, military or cultural power and global criminal syndicates. Others are losing power mainly because they are tied to territoriality. The three main groups are Nation-states, organisations of civil society and societies that are not sufficiently connected to the network. African societies find themselves in all three and this means that Africa in particular can become a big victim of the information revolution as it was during the industrial revolution. The emergence of the African Union and NEPAD are signs that some African leaders are aware that they will have to work together to respond to the challenges of the world in the new millennium.⁵⁷

On the socio-economic level this sign points to the fact that human society will continue to be divided into two fundamental groups: the empowered and the exploited. However, the nature of this divide has changed. The industrial revolution was accompanied by colonialism. The benefits of production created wealth and power in European hands as resources were imported and transformed into products. Colonised peoples experienced slavery, racism, resource removal and loss of political control over their land. The arena of this activity was geographical and Africa was clearly a victim.⁵⁸

The information revolution promotes a new kind of colonialism in which the centres of power are not only strong nations but also other entities like multinational corporations, crime syndicates and global media organisations. Two hundred giant corporations now control over one-quarter of the world's economic activity. Of the world's hundred largest economies, fifty-one are corporations. Toyota is bigger than Norway. Wal-Mart is bigger than Greece and Poland.⁵⁹ In 1994, the Global trade in illegal drugs was estimated at \$500 billion; more than the global trade in oil.⁶⁰

The exploited are the new poor and a major consequence of globalisation has been the emergence of new categories of poor people including ‘poor countries’, the ‘victims of unfair trade practices’, and ‘social under-classes’ in every nation.

The poor as ‘poor countries’ are those countries that have few assets and little access to the network. The post-World War II development agenda relied on the incremental trickling down of wealth to poor countries, a view that informed the notion of aid for developing nations.⁶¹ It has been increasingly clear that this has not happened. In fact ‘The 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa spend approximately \$13.5 billion every year repaying debts to rich foreign creditors for past loans of questionable legitimacy’.⁶² The All-African Conference of Churches has called this debt ‘a new form of slavery, as vicious as the slave trade.’ The situation is worsened by the information revolution since poor countries have little or no access to the network. Because they are disconnected they become irrelevant to the system declining even further into misery. Many African countries are in this category. The United Nations Human Development Report for 2003 said that: “for many countries the 1990s were a decade of despair”. Fifty-four countries are poorer now than in 1990.

The poor as ‘developing nations’ are those countries that are the ‘victims of unfair trade practices’. Notions of human solidarity and the United Nations charter suggest that richer societies will help poorer ones. This notion of reciprocity is increasingly undermined in the networked society. Developing countries like India, Brazil and South Africa, are seen as a particularly dangerous threat to developed nations because they are able to produce more cheaply and the network opens up the possibility of global markets for them. To prevent this the network is now being used to serve the interests of powerful nations and groups like the United States and the European Union.⁶³ The International Food Policy Research Institute noted that ‘the farm policies of rich nations had cost agricultural producers in the developing world about \$24 billion in lost income each year with the European Union as the biggest culprit’.⁶⁴ It is for this reason that developing countries led by Brazil, China, India and South Africa are looking for ways to cooperate in trade and development and have formed the G20+ developing nations block to counter the interests of the developed nations.⁶⁵

Wealth and poverty extremes are found not only between countries but also within them. These are the poor as the ‘social underclass’. They are consolidating as ‘black holes of human misery in the global economy’.⁶⁶ The informal settlements and squatter camps of Johannesburg and Nairobi and the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro are replicated throughout the urban areas of our regions. Poverty here is people’s experience of life as the absence of power to change things for the better. They are often places where the church has little contact with people.

The Africa Renaissance and NEPAD represent a socio-cultural vision, underpinned by political and economic structures, which is attempting to respond to these expressions of poverty and underdevelopment affecting our continent. In the words of Thabo Mbeki:⁶⁷

Our vision of an African Renaissance must have as one of its central aims the provision of a better life for these masses of the people whom we say must enjoy and exercise the right to determine their future. That Renaissance must therefore address the critical question of sustainable development which impacts positively on the standard of living and the quality of life of the masses of our people.

Missionary responses to the African Renaissance and NEPAD

Jesus’ mission is clearly stated: ‘I have come that they may have life and life to the full’ (Jn.10:10). Clearly the goals, expressed in NEPAD and the African Renaissance, resonate with Christian mission, which is directed to the poor. Here then is a major change. In the past we were involved in a massive struggle for liberation against an intransigent political regime. Today we find ourselves sharing many goals with most of the leaders of our region. Without being too naïve we should look for ways to cooperate creatively in achieving goals that we share.

On the physical level we must continue to help poor people with food, shelter, and hope as we have in the past. On the structural level, it will be important to help people improve their social infrastructure in order to work for a better life. Small Christian communities and movements can play an important role here. We must continue to cooperate with mission development organisations like Oblate Sharing Fund (OSF), CMO in Canada, *Misean Cara* in Ireland, *Missio MIVA*, *Miser-eor* and others in Europe to support development initiatives.

Mission to the poor will continue to have a political dimension as expressed in Liberation theologies and South African Contextual Theology. This means attempting to transform social institutions into more just and more human structures, respecting of the dignity of all. The Church will also have to participate in the struggle for an international order that can respond to the deleterious effects of the networked society including unbridled capitalism and the rise of globalised crime.⁶⁸

But most of all we must recognise that the greatest poverty of all is not to know the Lord, be converted to him and live a life in the Spirit. In his reflection on Constitution five, Fr Jetté remarks on the debate amongst Oblates around the material and spiritual aspects of poverty. He insists that spiritual poverty ‘has always been the specific element of our mission’.⁶⁹ The poor and marginalized are ‘generally not reached by the Church’s ordinary ministry’. Our task is to find ways to connect with them in order to preach the good news of Christ crucified and risen for them in order that they may have life to the full. This will always be the centre of the specific mission of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

From mission church to local church

The third sign examines how the nature of the Church has changed in Southern Africa. Religious Institutes founded much of the Church in this part of the world. They were pioneers and give us a proud history. Most of these were confided to other Religious Institutes who actually began mission work in the new jurisdictions and so are themselves ancestors of what exists today. Most of these particular churches have been handed over to local structures. For example only seven of these 46 dioceses are now headed by Oblates: 3 in Lesotho, 3 in South Africa, and 1 in Zambia.

Yet we religious are still here some 3000⁷⁰ working in this vineyard.⁷¹ Some groups are growing and indigenising whilst others are declining and appear to have no future here. For those who will survive, the current context presents us with a danger and a challenge.

The danger is that we will restrict our missionary activity to pastoral activity within the general structure of local churches. This means that we will mainly offer ourselves to existing dioceses to help maintain already existing institutional and parish structures. This can often be easily justified in terms of our missionary visions. For example, there

is still a real shortage of clergy in the Southern Africa region and clerical religious institutes will continue to make a valuable contribution to building up of the local Church in this way.

However, opting principally for this strategy may compromise a vital aspect of our missionary charisms. Amongst Oblates, for example, this means going out into new and uncharted areas and searching for innovative forms of evangelisation. A strategy which ignores our foundational charism could well result in a loss of missionary passion, passion which was clearly evident in the two periods of our ancestors cited, including both the early missionaries, and those who committed themselves to the struggle for liberation from racial oppression.

The challenge for us, as it was for St Eugene and our Fathers of the 1970s, is to respond in new ways to the present context. It is a call to be pioneers, to be bold and to be daring. Passion is very important in missionary life. It fires our souls to commitment and zeal. It is the fire that defined Jesus' own mission (Lk 12:49). Passion defines our Preface: St Eugene's response to his own context. It defines the zeal of those Oblates who struggled for liberation from the evil of apartheid. The challenges of the present time will stir passion in those called by the Spirit to missionary activity. Will we be amongst them?

Mission occurs at the boundary where faith meets non-faith. Mission is about crossing that boundary to encounter groups and peoples who do not know the good news of human salvation. It has been traditional for us to understand this boundary in a geographical sense. Mission in the last 200 years of the Church's history was largely about going to new territories in order to preach the gospel and implant the church.⁷² There is no doubt that there are many territories which still need this form of evangelisation as our Asian brothers often remind us. But in many contexts, and certainly in our own Southern African region, this notion of mission must be reconstructed in order to remove its exclusive binding to territory. We are not alone in this endeavour. Indeed it has moved increasingly to the centre of the Church's missiological concern since Vatican II.⁷³

The concept of 'social space' might be helpful for the discussion. By social space I refer to an environment within which people create community and society. Traditionally we understand social spaces as geographical entities like towns, cities and countries. In the church

we speak of dioceses or Religious Provinces. Mission in this model is seen as taking the gospel from one geographic social space (the sending church) to another (the mission territory). That model is no longer sufficient because the boundaries between social spaces of faith and social spaces of unfaith are no longer just geographical. We saw earlier how the information revolution is transforming the notion of human identity and social space. This, coupled with increasing social mobility, means that we will find new un-evangelised social spaces both within geography and beyond it.⁷⁴ In a very significant paragraph in *Redemptoris Missio* (§37) the ‘*Missio ad gentes*’ is seen in terms of three social spaces: territory, new social phenomena⁷⁵ and new cultural sectors.⁷⁶

Indeed, I believe that the term ‘culture’ is being increasingly used in Catholic theology to describe new forms of social space. The evangelisation of culture has become an increasingly important focus of mission.⁷⁷ In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI, the concept of culture is clearly presented as a human space within which evangelisation must occur. The exact term used there is ‘the strata of humanity’.⁷⁸ They must be urgently evangelised ‘in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots’.⁷⁹

The evangelisation of culture has become a major theme in the pontificate of John Paul II. Initially it was usually tied to the concept of inculturation.⁸⁰ But a recent document from the Pontifical Council for Culture notes that evangelisation must: ‘address persons in their complex wholeness, spiritual and moral, economic and political, cultural and social’⁸¹ Startlingly, Rome enjoins us to a primary pastoral objective in which: ‘Conceiving everything anew, based on the newness of the Gospel proposed in a fresh and persuasive way becomes a major requirement.’ This should challenge us to identify the many cultures of the poor and abandoned found in many contexts that lie mainly outside the normal structures of the Church’s pastoral activity in established parishes. This is the way we will begin to identify new priorities for Religious mission in the future.⁸²

Missionary approaches to this sign

These new social phenomena and cultural sectors are clearly visible in our Southern African context. They are found in informal settlements, amongst migrants, youth, people with HIV/AIDS, African men,

and the unemployed amongst many others. They are all around us and we need to begin identifying them. A mission to these social contexts will require new ways of evangelisation. It will require creativity. Radio, television, rallies, pilgrimages, mission bands, street preaching are just some of many possibilities we could investigate.⁸³

Let me give an example. The Maronite Church in Johannesburg in the 1980s experienced a migration of many Lebanese South Africans to Pentecostal religions and other revivalist churches and cults. Many eventually became disillusioned with their new religions and stopped practicing Christianity. The Maronite fathers responded to this challenge by bringing in more priests, increasing facilities for Maronite Christians and targeting lapsed Catholics. This specific ministry has brought many Lebanese former Catholics back to the practice of the faith.⁸⁴

Developing new areas and ways of evangelisation will be a drain on financial resources. Mission within the ICT world is expensive but we must get involved in this if we are to participate on the boundary where this social space is located.

Similarly the setting up of pilgrimage centres will also require funds. Interestingly, the OMI pilgrimage ministry at *Ngome* has configured its website to social networking to build up its contact base.⁸⁵ New forms of collaboration and new models of sustainable development will be required in our congregations involving both rich and poor. We must also be careful not to divest ourselves of all our institutions which provide us with income in the name of some romantic notion of poverty which is not incarnate in this world where we work. Too much of this has happened in recent times. In this way sharing can occur between our various missionary endeavours.

Resource accumulation and management is not new. In the past we relied on resources from overseas. As the supply of foreign missionaries dried up, some Institutes read the sign and diverted resources and energies to set up vocations and formation programmes. Some of these groups now have a healthy inflow of human resources. That is a creative success. A similar resourcefulness and creativity will be required to find the financial reserves necessary to set new endeavours in operation. This is not the time for parsimonious and mean attitudes dressed up in pious sentiments about poverty. Boldness, daring and bravery will be

required to set up structures of financial accumulation required to effectively respond to the challenges that face us.

Special faces of the poor calling us today in Southern Africa

I noted earlier that most of the signs today are sourced from outside our region, which was not the case in the 1970s. Despite this, a number of issues particular to our context still confront us as part of the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. I have identified these signs before in a number of talks and papers so I will deal with them quite briefly presenting only three principal challenges.⁸⁶

1. Poverty and unemployment as apartheid legacy.
2. Social and cultural sickness as apartheid legacy.
3. The youth as the major social grouping where Catholic influence is declining.

Poverty and unemployment as apartheid legacy

Research has shown that the top development issues facing South Africa at present are: Unemployment, Crime, and Education and Training.⁸⁷ It has been said that ‘although South Africa suffers from an unemployment rate of about 35 percent of the workforce...it is estimated that there are between 300,000 and 500,000 vacancies for skilled people in the economy.’⁸⁸

The reality of millions of people looking for work and half a million jobs which cannot be filled is a gross reflection on the social irresponsibility of those who have had, and those who currently have, access to power in our country. What a stupid, indeed evil, state of affairs. Clearly the iniquitous apartheid system, and in particular Bantu education and the herding of people into unsustainable reserves where no effective quality of human life was possible, are the greatest culprits.

Unemployment, crime and education are patently interconnected. People turn to crime only if it benefits them. For many today, it’s the only occupation available and the only way to get access to resources. Yet this way must also lead to the destruction of the resources, for a society predicated on crime is a society descending into social chaos and a society in chaos cannot protect its own resources. Another solution is required and it will be found in education. If you want to respond

to poverty and unemployment, then provide people with education in the knowledge and skills which will enable them to get the jobs which are available, or to create new opportunities in society. The provision of effective education and training, which will produce people with the skills required and a value based commitment to society, is a critical necessity at this time.

Now the Catholic Church and Religious institutes in particular have a proud record in this regard. The education mission was a major Catholic mission in the past. It was a mission that was actively undermined by the Apartheid State leading to the Mission schools debacle in the 1950s. Perhaps we need creativity to see how we can respond to the solution of education for those who need jobs. A school like St Benedict's, for example, which serves the rich, might be rejuvenated in Oblate mission by examining what role it could play in a project like that. Could our other educational endeavours be examined to see what role we could play? Perhaps we could collaborate in the setting up of trades schools and skills training programmes to respond to the current crisis. I have often been inspired by the work of the Dominican Sisters in Belgravia who in the process of closing down the Belgravia convent in the 1990s began to reopen it as a response to the new social conditions turning it into a large complex serving inners city black learners today.

Social and cultural sickness as apartheid legacy

Our societies are beset with lots of sickness. HIV/AIDS is currently the most visible sign but beneath that there are many others. The reason why so many sicknesses are prevalent is also tied up with the legacy of apartheid that destroyed family life and cultural and religious value systems. The migrant labour system, to take just one example, forced thousands into all male hostels with the result that uncontrolled sexual promiscuity became a part of the system.

Anger, rage and fear are three major expressions of the social sickness of emotional dysfunction which affects our countries. Years of abnormal relating as human beings has led to emotional scarring in all of us. We carry around in our broken hearts attitudes of superiority, inferiority, prejudice and fear, anger and hatred. Our history is one of exploitation and dehumanisation of the other. Now that the oppressive structures have been removed, the lid has come off the boiling pot and

we can see the symptoms more clearly. They include road rage, child abuse, promiscuity, and an inability to form stable relationships leading to broken marriages, family suicides, drug abuse and a whole host of other social problems. However, a greater visibility of the symptoms is also the first step to healing the sickness and this is why the mission to heal is so important right now. Our role will not primarily be on the medical level but on the level of emotions, spirit and human reconstruction. This is the healing to which the Gospel refers.⁸⁹

Human healing also requires the construction of a set of coherent reliable moral values. If people cannot trust the social system in which they live, the result is more emotional distress. People who live by a set of coherent values know where they stand and what they can trust in. Daily life is less of a struggle against dangerous unknown forces and more of a life in which others can be relied upon and social support structures can be created. Families should be like that, neighbourhoods should be like that, churches should be like that. We must begin to create such societies. Many of our scholastics have found such a lifestyle in our own religious communities and I would suggest that this is one of the reasons for the growth in vocations. People want to come out of the chaos into a more stable and predictable world. This must be expanded to the society as a whole and this is what is meant by raising the dead, healing the sick and casting out demons (Matt 10:8). Here too is a priority area of mission for us. All Religious should be involved in an authentic healing mission of prayer, counselling, creating community and bringing hope.

Unfortunately, this is an area where I think our response has been poor. We are too tied to a medical model of healing and not sufficiently exploring other alternatives for Christian healing strategies. I have been disappointed by the lack of experimentation amongst those congregations clearly founded with the charism of healing to explore new forms of Christian healing strategies as medical facilities are handed over. This is vital, for example in the fight against HIV AIDS where the healing from stigma, isolation and alienation from God and the community are an essential yet often neglected part of the remedy. The growth of Christian healing cults and sects clearly points to the impotence of traditional Christianity in this regard. Those Religious Institutes with the charism to heal are clearly called to leadership here. A failure to

respond may result in the death of such Institutes as the Spirit seeks elsewhere to blow.

The youth as the major social grouping where Catholic influence is declining

The socio-cultural problems of our society embed themselves with even greater power within our youth and this ministry is becoming an urgent priority. The youth of our countries are faced with tremendous challenges. In South Africa, they live in a country that is being renewed, but they were born and brought up in a society that lived in a state of low intensity war. Youth is faced with lots of possibilities but often lacks the structural support a healthy and holy society can provide.

The Catholic Church used to have a powerful influence amongst youth. By 1953 it controlled 15% of all black schools, by far the most visible Catholic presence in South Africa at the time. In the 1960s and 70s there were a number of effective Catholic youth movements within the country which provided leadership training for young people.⁹⁰

Today the Catholic Church has a very small influence amongst young people. It is the area of ministry in which the church has reduced its involvement more than any other. Yet it is the most important area for the future of the church in this country. What I am saying here is that if the Church is not involved with young people in a meaningful way then the future for us will be quite bleak.

Many young people find the attractions of African Independent Churches and Pentecostals much more appealing than what we Catholics have to offer. Today, our involvement as church with youth is now increasingly only on the parish level. Parish youth groups, however, are unlikely to be very effective. Youth work requires vision, and structure to be effective. It requires movements and lots of resources. I would consider a greater regional and national effort on the development of youth ministries and movements to be one of the most urgent and pressing needs for evangelisation today. More Religious must be released to specialise in this work but they must also be inserted into structures which can train them to do it well. Of these three local signs I have presented I think this one is the most important for us because the need is so great and it was part of our tradition. This is a mission that the Re-

ligious must do. Youth work is intimately tied to our tradition right from the time of the Founder. It was one of his first ministries.

CONFIGURATION OF OBLATE MISSION AND MINISTRIES 1998-CURRENT AS RESPONSE

The immense hope project and the 2006 congress challenged us to respond concretely our missionary vision by means of the configuration of new missionary clusters based on our reflection over the years.

Mission statement

The following mission statement was adopted:
We, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the
Province of Natal,
called by Jesus Christ to bring good news,
commit ourselves in apostolic communities,
guided by the Spirit
to serve the Church in transition
with a renewed response to the poor.

Configuration of ministry clusters 2006

A new configuration of our mission into clusters around specific missionary goals was developed during the *Immense Hope project* and formalised after the 2006 Provincial Congress.⁹¹ The diversity of ministries to serve the poor and abandoned include Missions *ad extra* outside the boundaries of the province, Missions in specific areas of ministry and missions *ad intra* to Oblates and candidates including formation of Oblates and care of retired and sick Oblates.

External Ministries

These currently includes the Zimbabwe Mission for which the Natal province has been responsible since 2001 and the mission in Cape Town which began in 1998, was suspended for a few years in 2004 and re-established with a group of four young Oblate priests in 2012.

The Mission to Zimbabwe began in 1982 as a mission of the Transvaal and Natal Provinces and placed under the control of Natal in 2000.

The main task is to consolidate our presence in the mission, to actively support the missionaries there and to ensure an effective transition as Zimbabwean Oblates are appointed to the Mission. The First Zimbabwean Oblate was ordained in January 2006 and since then a further 11 Zimbabwean priests have been ordained. The first Zimbabwean Mission superior was appointed in 2013. The mission is becoming self-sustaining

The Mission to Cape Town began in 1998. It was suspended for a few year in 2004 but restarted in 2013 with new missionaries all in first ten years of ministry. The two mission stations are two poorer areas of Cape Town with Xhosa speakers in the one and Afrikaans speakers in the other. Both of these are languages not fully familiar to the missionaries who have Zulu and English as their home languages. The missions are situated in poor areas with a relatively high presence of gang culture. One missionary was attacked in an attempted hi-jacking of a mission vehicle in the first week they arrived.

Mission in communities focused on specific ministries

These specific ministry groups can be presented in various ways as they have developed since 2005. Today they are: parish ministry in the archdiocese of Durban; education and academic ministries; Ministries of human promotion: Justice, development and healing; Retreat and pilgrimage ministries; youth ministries and ministries of New Evangelisation.

About 20% of the missionaries have been appointed to 12 of the 70 *parishes of the Archdiocese of Durban*, the successor to the Vicariate of Natal which we founded. This number has declined considerably over the last 10 years.

About 10 Oblates work in *Education and Academic Ministries*. On the tertiary level we work at *St Joseph's Theological Institute* in Cedara.⁹² Part of the development here is working on making St Josephs a *centre for Catholic theological research*. In the last three years we have held conferences on HIV and AIDS; Globalisation; and Catholic education each of which was held in partnership with Catholic organisations active in these fields. The SJTI Journal, *Grace & Truth* has been published for more than thirty years. In the last few years it has become a peer reviewed journal and since 2014 its articles are indexed by *ATLA*

in the USA,⁹³ *Index Religiosus* at Louvain,⁹⁴ and *Bibliographia Missionaria* in Rome.⁹⁵

On the secondary level we own two *schools*: *Sibongumbomvu* at Cedara and *Inchanga Combined School* at Inchanga. We are currently planning to send Oblates for training as teachers in schools that serve the poor including our own because of the increasing need for evangelisation in these contexts.

A number of Oblates are involved in Ministries of *human promotion* such as justice development and healing ministries. Many of these ministries are coordinated by the *Oblate Development Projects* committee which was established in 2007. Currently it coordinates 20 development project in KZN and Zimbabwe. A few Oblates are involved in the healing ministries including hospital chaplains, registered psychologists and others involved in spiritual healing and development initiatives

A number of Oblates are involved in *retreat ministries*. We own a retreat centre at Redacres near Cedara where one Oblate stays.⁹⁶ Previously we founded the *Nshongweni pilgrimage centre* which has now been handed over to the Archdiocese of Durban. Since 2011 we have been responsible for the *Ngome Marian Shrine* in the Diocese of Es- howe.⁹⁷ Three Oblates minister there.

A large number of Oblates are involved in *youth ministry* of various types whether in parishes, schools, vocations recruitment, retreat work or in the shrine. Youth ministry was reconfigured in 2005 with an OMI youth committee responsible to promote the ministry.⁹⁸ However this proved not to be the best strategy and it has now been replaced by more localised structures. Youth is seen as an important category in the Province and there is a great desire amongst many Oblates to respond to this. The initial focus was on retreats, workshops, and leadership. Today it is increasingly clear that we interface with youth in many areas whether in schools, parishes vocations work retreats and at the Shrine. The OMI *Youth for Life* programme developed initially by the Oblates in Zimbabwe is increasingly being implement in more centres. The *Oblate Development Projects* team is currently working on a programme to upgrade the Redacres retreat centre into a centre for youth ministry.

A few Oblates are involved in specific projects of New Evangelisation. The *ACTS programme* for the renewal of families; men and

women was brought to South Africa through contact with Oblates in San Antonio Texas and it has flourished.⁹⁹

Internal Ministries

About 15 Oblates work full time in these ministries which are formation ministries, ministries of care for sick and aged Oblates, the essential ministry of administration and the missionary work of support for brothers in many circumstances which often remains unseen.

There are three *houses of formation*. In Pietermaritzburg, *Cebula house of formation* provides a pre-novitiate programme for all the provinces of South Africa. In Bulawayo Zimbabwe, *Mazenod House* provides a pre-novitiate programme for the Zimbabwe Mission. At Cedara, *St. Joseph's Scholasticate*, which is a distinct entity from St Joseph's Theological Institute mentioned earlier, provides a scholasticate formation programme for Oblates from throughout Africa and indeed for some from outside Africa. It has been the largest Scholasticate in the Congregation for a number of years.¹⁰⁰

The province runs Sabon House, a centre for sick and retired Oblates and is currently investigating enlarging this facility to include frail care.

Four Oblates are full time in Administration. Two, the Provincial and the Provincial treasurer are in the provincial administration. The other two are bishops: One is the Archbishop of Bloemfontein and the other is the vicar general of the Archdiocese of Durban.

Handing over established ministries to bring new life

It is clear that renewal requires the painful task of letting go of the familiar and established in order to follow the Spirit towards the new and not yet dared. This is a law of missionary spirituality. It hit the *Missionnaires de Provence* very early on as the Church was asking them to become Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In order to have life every Oblate unit has to deal with this question. On the secular level this is the question *resource management*.

There is no doubt that the immense hope project provided an opportunity for all units of the congregation to look for the new signs of the Spirit. I wonder how many saw these signs? Sadly I have never seen

much written about that. In the Natal province it meant that we had to give up some existing ministries in order to provide missionaries for new ones. Handing over established parishes where we were serving as diocesan clergy was a possible strategy. There was some resistance by a minority of Oblates to that but the spirit of the process emboldened us to act in faith and courage. During a period of some six years twelve established parishes were handed back to diocesan authorities in the dioceses of Durban & Umzimkulu. In addition we stopped sending missionaries to Lourdes in France where Natal Oblates had worked for many years in collaboration with the Anglo Irish Province. This emboldened us to pursue youth ministries development ministries and missions to other geographical contexts in Eshowe and Cape Town. It was a grace for renewal of all.

On a personal level I can testify to seeing this most clearly towards the end of my term as Provincial when we had made a lot of changes in our missionary activity. At that point a request came from the Bishop of Eshowe for us to accept the Marian Shrine at Ngome. I was against it as we had done enough changes and it was not clear where resources would come from. My council was however in favour. So it was agreed to put it to the forthcoming Provincial assembly. I felt that the assembly might be in favour but that is often easy. The problem was who would volunteer to go. So we asked two questions: Are you in favour of accepting the new mission? And are you prepared to go? This second question was on a separate paper. Those volunteering to go had to put their name on that paper to provide a pool to choose from. About 60 out of 90 were in favour to accept the mission but, surprisingly to me, more than 20 volunteered to go including a few over 60s! That was one of the most powerful signs of the Spirit I saw in those years. And subsequently our mission at the shrine has been one of great blessings to many and it has grown tremendously. The original missionaries still minister there some years later!

It wasn't part of our planning. It just arrived before us one day!

CONCLUSION

In many ways we are closer to the Kairos time of de Mazenod rather than that of 1978. This is because he was also faced with a radical change in the world as he knew it and was increasingly convinced of the

need for new forms of mission and evangelisation. He also gave witness to this when his original conviction expressed in the ‘Missionaries of Provence’ grew into a congregation present in four continents even within his own lifetime with a completely different name and mission! Remember that all this was done whilst he was vicar general and then bishop of a local church with its own urgent need for the very resources of manpower and finance that he diverted elsewhere.

Those institutions successful in discerning the call of the Spirit of God and setting up new approaches to mission and evangelisation were the ones that thrived as branches linked to the vine. The future, however, is not guaranteed. We must discern what the Spirit is asking of us in this new time. For if the time *is* new then the mistake will be to employ our resources in maintaining the tried and trusted and focussing on the needs of local churches. In the end that is the responsibility of local structures and not those Religious Institutes which transcend the structures of a single Particular Church. Whilst we must continue to play a role in service to the local church we must also begin to urgently experiment with new forms of evangelisation and mission as a response to the new signs I have presented here.

Oblates here have made many mistakes. Some have been weak; others have compromised beliefs, values and principles. But most have been men of God, open to the promptings of the Spirit, participating with ‘charity, charity, charity and zeal for souls’ in responding to the terrible challenges of Apartheid South Africa. This has produced many fruits. Our society is being liberated from Apartheid. Our congregation has many more vocations and many more young Oblates than we could ever have foreseen in 1978. The future is brighter.

We are wont to be very critical of ourselves. Let us also see the good that has been done through us. Let us also be inspired by the method of discernment we have seen here. It may help in interpreting the signs in our current context so that we can discern God’s mission for us today.

Let us be filled with hope. The 19th century was to become the greatest century in the history of Christian expansion carried along on the wave of the industrial revolution. In 1800 there were barely 350 Catholic missionaries worldwide.¹⁰¹ But by 1900 there were 87000 as new prophets appeared and men and women burning with the fire of God were raised up. St Eugene and our first Oblates were part of that

new missionary thrust. We are called to take our new Kairos seriously, for perhaps history is to repeat itself in a new missionary surge. The great prophet of our time, St John Paul II, seems to think so. In his writings he often refers to this time, prophetically, as ‘a new springtime for Christianity’.¹⁰² Let us listen to him!

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¹ ‘Kairos’ refers to time in a special and meaningful sense as opposed to the ordinary ongoing time of ‘chronos’. Kairos times are significant. The scriptural paradigm for ‘kairos’ is given in Mk 1:14-15, the first words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel: ‘The time (kairos) is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, change (*metanoia*) and believe in the Good News’. The term kairos took on a special sense in Southern African theological discourse with the publication, in 1985, of the *Kairos Document* which suggested that a ‘Kairos’ - a particular moment of truth - had arrived for South Africa and that this had important consequences for the South African Church. The term is used in a similar sense here.

² In *Dominum et vivificantem*, Vatican, 1986, § 3, St. John Paul II presents Jesus teaching about the Holy Spirit as “counsellor”, “advocate” or “Paraclete”, “the Spirit of truth” and the one who will “continue in the world, through the Church, the work of the *Good news of salvation*”. The Holy Spirit is teacher of “all things” and will remind you of “all that I said to you”. In *Dominum et vivificantem*, 4 the pope writes that the Holy Spirit will “continue to inspire the Gospel of salvation” and “help people to understand the correct meaning of the content of Christ’s message”. In *Dominum et vivificantem*, 5 we read that the Holy Spirit guides the Church “into all the truth” and thus ensures the Church’s continuing access to Jesus Christ “the supreme and most complete revelation of God to humanity”.

³ A Religious Institute in the Catholic Church is “a society in which members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary which are to be renewed, however, when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common.” (CIC 607 §2)

⁴ Clearly Oblates of Mary Immaculate acknowledge this truth when they come together to pray and when they come together in community to seek the Lord’s will for their mission and ministries. Prayer and invocation are surely central but there are also other forms of effective method in discernment. The scriptures abound with many examples. In ‘Acts of the Apostles’ alone we see approaches as varied as casting of lots (*Acts* 1), dreams (*Acts* 10) and councils (*Acts* 15). Spiritual authors provide other approaches that have stood the test of time: St Ignatius of Loyola (*The spiritual exercises*); St John of the Cross (*The dark night of the soul*) and St Teresa of Avila (*The interior castle*) also suggest steps for spiritual discernment by members of religious communities like the Oblates and indeed in all churches.

⁵ Eucharistic Prayer I.

⁶ R. COTÉ, OMI, “Oblate Mission in Southern Africa today”, in *Oblate Formation*, Durban, Unity publications, 1978, 46-58.

⁷ F. JETTÉ, OMI, *The Apostolic Man: A commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, 18-19.

⁸ Such as the Lamennais brothers; see JETTÉ, *Apostolic man*, 19.

⁹ The work of Robert-Félicité de Lamennais is particularly important in this regard since we find that de Mazenod appropriates many of its points in his early writings; see JETTÉ, *Apostolic man*, 19.

¹⁰ Interestingly he also adopted a step that included an examination of tradition in proposing a missionary solution. We find this in a question the founder asks: ‘How indeed did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world?’ And in the response he gives to this question.

¹¹ JETTÉ, *Apostolic man*, 17-18.

¹² I think this step is important and its importance can easily be missed. Modern methodology in pastoral theology uses human data analysis coming from knowledge within the humanities and social sciences to help construct the object of theological reflection. In Vatican II and after, this is, of course, called reading *the signs of the times*. The fact that we find such a step in the methodology of de Mazenod reflects a certain sophistication in his methodology within his own time. Clearly we have to be careful of anachronism in back reading this. But it is essential for his methodology something that his followers may not always have adopted.

¹³ All four dioceses of Lesotho; 23 of the 29 dioceses of South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland. And through the ‘mission “Sui Iuris” of Zambese’ erected in 1879 in territory taken from the Vicariate, all 8 dioceses of Zimbabwe and all 11 dioceses of Zambia. Many of these later jurisdictions were handed over to other Catholic missionary congregations who did the primary evangelisation. All of this was part of the great mainly European missionary endeavour of the 19 and 20th century linked with colonialism and “civilization”. This information can be abstracted from by examining the establishment of the vicariates of Kimberly, the prefecture apostolic of Swaziland and the ‘mission “Sui iuris” of Zambese’ from territory taken from the vicariate of Natal (<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/ddurb.html>) (Access July 2014).

¹⁴ We find a similar process in the document *Missionary Outlook* coming from the 1972 General Chapter. M. Foley draws a parallel with the preface and this document in ‘Introductory presentation to workshop on General Chapter, Africa Madagascar region January 2004’.

¹⁵ *Oblate Orientations. Regional meeting with General Team* (Mazenod, Lesotho, 1976); *Oblate Priorities. Southern African Inter-provincial conference* (Assisi, OFS, 1977) *Oblate Formation. Report on the Oblate Congress of Formation 1978 held in Mazenod Lesotho*. (Durban, Southern African Region OMI).

¹⁶ In my opinion this short document, despite its limitations, could be valuable reading for Oblates everywhere attempting to make a discernment of missionary direction for the future in times of social *kairos*. Would that we can live up to this example today. *Oblate Priorities* was produced by the Oblate Provincials of the time as suggestions for ensuring the realisation of two particular concerns of *Oblate Orientations* viz.: Authentic liberation and the building of effective localised (i.e. Africanised) Christian communities. This document does make use of literature from elsewhere (step 3) and

provides suggestions for effective strategies for realising these two priorities. A year later, a formation congress similar to this one, made recommendations leading to our present system of formation. The proceedings of the conference were published in the document *Oblate Formation*. In a presentation: ‘Oblate Mission in Southern Africa today – 1978’, in *Oblate Formation*, 46-58, Father Richard Coté identified three principal signs of that time that had a bearing on Oblate formation. These were ‘a time of profound social and political upheaval’; ‘the eyes of the world are upon us’ and ‘institutional violence and injustice’. He prophetically stated that ‘before peace and reconciliation come to South Africa, things will get worse – much worse – before they get better’, *Oblate Formation*, 56. We know how right he was and we also know how heroically many Oblates suffered or entered into the suffering of the people they ministered to during this period. Many were jailed; others participated in demonstrations and were tear gassed. Some, like me saw their parish youth jailed, harassed by police and even killed. The context was firmly focused on South Africa. Indeed for Coté the biggest challenge was ‘a call to suffering’, *Oblate Formation*, 56. His analysis led to a number of recommendations, *Oblate Formation*, 73-78, including ensuring that the seminary programme focussed on training people to respond to the urgent social and political needs and people’s experience of suffering. Another emphasised the importance of witness and another a ministry of justice. *Oblate Formation*, 73-78, also examined the SAAAC model which was to become the current PSAACA model of Southern African Oblate formation today. Another recommendation, *Oblate Formation*, 79-87, was the introduction of a pre-novitiate programme at Cleland, the precursor of the OMI pre-novitiate currently running.

¹⁷ *Oblate Formation*, 46-58.

¹⁸ ; <http://omi.org.za/natal/omi-update-v3i5.html>; <http://omi.org.za/natal/omi-update-v3i6.html> (Both accessed: April 2015).

¹⁹ *Ps* 121 (V 120) is a scriptural metaphor of what is required since it asks us to lift up our eyes to the mountains rather than just being preoccupied with what is happening under our feet.

²⁰ It should be noted that much of this text was written in 2005 for the Natal province *Congress the World and the way* referenced earlier. In the intervening 10 years these realities have been increasingly clear to all.

²¹ M. CASTELLS, *The information age: economy, society and culture*. Volume 1: *The rise of the network society*. 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, 1.

²² S. GOULD, *The Panda’s Thumb: More Reflections on Natural History*, NY, Norton, 1980, 226.

²³ R SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, NY, Orbis, 1997, 5.

²⁴ In 1996 Africa had one million cell phone users. By 2002 this had increased to 28 million. Source: South African Institute of Race Relations Report 2003, reported in *Business Report* 28 August 2003. By 2012 “Africa now has more than 650 million mobile phone subscribers. That’s more than either the United States or the European Union. Source: World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/12/10/ict-home-grown-development-solutions-in-africa> (Access: May 2014).

²⁵ The lifestyle of regular global travellers happens within a number of different geographic spaces within regular intervals. The Internet has created a new domain of human interaction called cyberspace. Television has brought the world into people’s

living rooms and satellites allow the possibility of avoiding media controls set up in geographical space by Nation-states, religious groups and other geographical social actors. Video conferencing allows people to talk to one another without leaving home.

²⁶ I use the word symbol because the analysis I am making is cultural. I want to use culture here as a term which is linked to the creation of human identity within a group of people and I want to use philosophy as the search for a coherent system of meaning and praxis within that identity. Identity is the organising principle of the meaning of human activity whilst its construction implies the internalisation of the meaning of social roles and activities. Cultures and social institutions may have their own set of meanings and identities but identity is only constructed by agents out of internalised meanings.

²⁷ These become cultural as people internalise the lifestyle of business travel, commuting and jet setting because the activities carried out in these spaces, be they work spaces, recreational spaces, client access spaces, deal making spaces or others, carry value for the people involved. Such value is interpreted as augmenting the quality of their life.

²⁸ Many new kinds of interface are emerging including motor vehicles tied to global positioning satellites, fridges which order groceries through the internet as their stocks run down, microwave ovens linked to menus and a whole host of other consumer products which are increasingly tied into the network.

²⁹ Human culture, identity, meaning and ethical systems will have to incorporate social networks in cyberspace in the construction of new forms of identity. Examples of cyberspace communities include chat rooms, the hacker fraternities and e-groups such as yahoo groups <http://groups.yahoo.com> (Access: March 2004). In 2015 we speak of social media like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. This form of interface did not exist in 2004.

³⁰ Other controversial areas include gender identity, terrorism, fundamentalism, pornography, and paedophilia. Individuals coalescing around such interests are far freer and far less susceptible to sanction from those opposed to such groups, usually the majority, within a given geographic space.

³¹ It is true that belief systems and values exist in a dialectical relationship with the geographical space where people live. Nomads have different beliefs and values to pastoralists for example. Climate played a role in the development of spiritual powers like rain gods, lightening gods and the rituals for getting rain in drought conditions. But the point here is that a coherent system was developed because people understood their environment and were able to create a human life within it. In the Nation-state, for example, organs of civil society such as labour movements, non-governmental organisations and churches were often vehicles of social transformation for a better society predicated upon people's understanding of their identity and worth as, for example, in the Christian vision of created in God's image.

³² The network controls aspects of human life as necessary as the economy, issues of national identity, licences, passports and other national bureaucratic issues and people increasingly interface with it at the workplace. Consequently the main characteristic of this new social structure is a 'bipolar opposition between the Net and the self' (CASTELLS, *The information age*, vol. I, 3).

³³ These new humans have aspects of the cybernetic about them and so the notion of what it means to be human is challenged. And indeed digital philosophies of the human person are emerging, for example, interpreting humanity in terms of genes and memes. Here, digital humanity is articulated physically in terms of genes and culturally in terms of memes. Such an understanding has profound questions for the nature of human life which impact upon ethical systems based on human dignity. If humans are basically genes and memes each with its own propensity and desire to reproduce, then the nature of what we call the human person is contingent not upon a creator nor indeed a non-spiritual evolution but rather upon the genes and memes themselves which become the real actors. For an insight on human culture understood from the perspective of memes see J. M. BALKIN, *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology*, New Haven, Yale University press, 1998. For the debate about the genetic basis of human nature, see D. MOORE, *The Dependent Gene: The Fallacy of Nature vs. Nurture*, N.Y., Freeman, 2002.

³⁴ CASTELLS, in *The information age*, Vol I, 3, suggests that the chief human consequence of this revolution is on the level of human identity which 'is becoming the main, and sometimes the only, source of meaning in an historical period characterized by widespread restructuring of organizations, delegitimation of institutions, fading away of major social movements and ephemeral cultural expressions'.

³⁵ It is this latter which Manuel Castells, sees as the principal form of identity construction in the networked society. These involve 'the reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles', 11. We could also make an analogy with the massive growth of fenced and barricaded residential security zones emerging in South African cities. See in *The information age: economy, society and culture. Volume II: The power of identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, 17.

³⁶ CASTELLS, *The information age*, Vol. II, 12.

³⁷ In CASTELLS, *The information age*, Vol. II, 17, Tisi sees the growth of Islamic fundamentalism as part of 'the exposure of this part of the world of Islam, which sees itself as a collective entity, to the processes of globalization, to nationalism and the nation state as globalized principles of organization'.

³⁸ American Christian fundamentalism is presented by CASTELLS, *The information age*, Vol. II, 25, as 'a reactive movement, aiming at constructing social and personal identity on the basis of images of the past and projecting them to a utopian future, to overcome unbearable present times'. These 'unbearable' times include the threat of globalization and a loss of control linked to the undermining of the so called 'traditional American family life' by groups like the civil rights movement, feminism and gay rights.

³⁹ R. SCHREITER, in *The New Catholicity*, 79 observes that: 'Our Lady of Fatima was clearly connected to anticommunism. With communism's demise, she is now directed especially against accommodation to Western style consumerism'.

⁴⁰ 'The American Militia is a collection of militia networks, groups, cells, and individuals who are committed to defend the United States of America through education and training'. <http://www.americanmilitia.net> (Access: August 2003). The site has subsequently closed down. For more on this movement see K. STERN, *A Force upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate*, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. See also http://www.factnet.org/cults/militia/Recommended_Books_on_American_Militia.htm?FACTNet (Access: June 2004).

⁴¹ The well-known network of Islam fundamentalist military cells.

⁴² Japanese religious cult involved in release of poisonous gas in a Japanese subway system in 1995. <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/aums.html> (Access: September 2003). Other examples include the Shiningpath, a Peruvian rebel group, the *Boeremag* (meaning *farmer's force* in Afrikaans) a right wing organisation whose goals are the overthrow of democratic majority rule in South Africa and a return to the days of apartheid, and many others.

⁴³ See E. HARTSHORNE: "Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Terrorist Identity: A Qualitative Comparative Case-study on the Strategic Self-Presented Identities of the Global Jihadist Groups." (2015).

⁴⁴ This figure comes from an oral presentation at the World Council of Churches, International consultation on Faith health and healing in Accra, Ghana December 2003. Note that the Catholic Population of Accra was only 4.5% in 2002 whilst the national average was 11%. Source: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/daccr.html#info> and <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/sc1.html> (Access: June 2004). For more on Pentecostalism in Ghana see <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj13/amanor.pdf> (Access: June 2004).

⁴⁵ That is why South Africa is somewhat symbolic in the world today. People often only intuit this, though Mandela is a powerful symbol of it, but the reality is that we have been through a passion, death and resurrection experience as a society. It is for this reason that a document like *Oblate Orientations* is so important and should be required reading for those examining issues of formation and Oblate Missionary spiritual discernment. It is necessary to be aware of this contribution but not to become arrogant about it, which would compromise its evangelical power. Our experience over the past twenty-eight years is helpful in providing an example of how to deal with a challenge like that presented by the network. This is because the growth of the network could increasingly imprison, enslave and even oppress people. Such dehumanisation may sometimes occur in subtler, more alluring and thus more difficult ways. But what is clear is that the experience of human weakness is likely to be exacerbated by the increasing power of the new entity and the elites it benefits. The Christian message rooted in the paschal mystery offers hope for victory in such a context without recourse to withdrawal in cults and purified religions retreating to their own communities or sub-cultures, on the one hand, or perpetrating reactive, destructive violence on the other.

⁴⁶ The situation in Northern Europe probably provides the paradigm of this condition though these attitudes are also emerging in some of our own African societies and this trend is likely to increase. P. Hunermann outlines this reality in European Catholicism in his article "Evangelization of Europe? Observations on a Church in Peril", in *Mission in the third millennium*, edited by R. SCHREITER, NY, Orbis, 2001, 57-80. See especially 65-68. G. LYNCH reveals a similar picture within Evangelicalism in his book *After religion: Generation X and the search for meaning*, London, Darton, Longmann and Todd, 2002, 37. For a similar analysis see also D. TOMLINSON, *The Post Evangelical*, London: Triangle, 1995.

⁴⁷ T. BEAUDOIN, *Virtual Faith*, Chichester, Jossey-Bass, 1998.

⁴⁸ LYNCH in *After religion*, 105, notes that 'Spirituality has been a huge growth industry over the past decade'.

⁴⁹ M. STARKEY, *God, Sex and Generation X*, London, Triangle. 1997, 119.

⁵⁰ An important challenge for effective Christian identity in future will be to promote a greater affirmation of local cultural Christian expression in local churches. This includes popular religious spiritualities, inculturated liturgies and the development of catechetical forms that incorporate cultural elements. This is because the local context will become an important site of identity construction within the networked world. Lamin Sanneh suggests that ‘at the close of the twentieth century, the Catholic mind is being formed by a religiously and culturally pluralist world, by the secular political and economic pressures of the new international order, by the factors that correspond to the search for national and communal identity and the building of a better life for people’. See L. SANNEH, “Popular Catholicism in the Emerging Global Church”, 269-270, in T. BAMAT and J-P. WIEST, *Popular Catholicism in a World Church. Seven Case Studies in Inculturation*, NY, Orbis, 1999, 265-271.

⁵¹ www.ngome.co.za.

⁵² African Century is a term, popularised by the ANC and especially Thabo Mbeki, which has been introduced into the Africa debate. In ‘The Millennium Debate of the joint Houses of Parliament’, Cape Town, 19 November 1999, Mbeki said: ‘As the dispossessed take possession of their lives, their future, and begin to define who they are, where they are going and the milestones along the way, thus we must set ourselves tasks that will make the next century an African century, for in doing so, we shape the road ahead and become the authors of the narrative as it unfolds before our very eyes and in our lives’ <http://www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/1999/news1122> (Access: June 2004).

⁵³ M. MZAMANE, ‘Where there is no vision the people perish: Reflections on the African renaissance’. [http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawke/institute/resources/Where%20there%20is%20no%20vision%20\(long%20version\).doc](http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawke/institute/resources/Where%20there%20is%20no%20vision%20(long%20version).doc) (Access: June 2004). Mzamane’s article chronicles the many phases of this long process over 250 years from the slave rebellions in the new world, through African colonisation, the struggles for independence, the period of African independence, the struggle against apartheid and the current context.

⁵⁴ MZAMANE, ‘Where there is no vision’, outlines the centre of the African renaissance in the development of individual countries: ‘The most meaningful renaissance in Africa will thus be the renaissance of individual African countries. Continentally perceived, the African renaissance will be an aggregation of the success of each and every African country. Such a renaissance will be predicated upon how individual African countries tackle reconciliation – reconciling warring factions within each country’s borders as well as resolving territorial disputes and other conflicts of interest between neighbouring African states – and reconstruction – the recovery of each country’s ailing economy. Any renaissance must take on both challenges and succeed on both scores’.

⁵⁵ This is what Thabo MBEKI calls ‘a matter that is dear to all our hearts - the reconstruction and development of our Continent of Africa’ Statement by Deputy President Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference, Johannesburg, 28 September 1998. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1998/tm0928.htm> (Access: May 2004).

⁵⁶ NEPAD has four primary objectives: a) To eradicate poverty; b) To place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development; c) To halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy; d) To accelerate the

empowerment of women. Source: The NEPAD website: <http://www.nepad.org/en.html> under “About NEPAD” (Access: June 2004).

⁵⁷ NEPAD and the AU are merely the African form of new agglomerations of nation states. A large number of such organisations have emerged with economic, political and cultural goals. Some of the principal ones include: Africa: the African Union (AU); Americas: Organization of American States (OAS); In Latin America MERCOSUR; In the Caribbean, CARICOM; In Europe: European Union (EU); In Asia: Association of South Eastern Nations (ASEAN), the *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation* (APEC) and The Arab League. Source: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/International-organization> (Access: Jun 2004).

⁵⁸ It was within and between two geographical spaces: the colonial power and the colony.

⁵⁹ And 159 other countries. General Motors is bigger than Denmark. For these facts and similar see December 1996/January 1997 issue of *The CCPA monitor* published by the Canadian Centre for Policy alternatives www.policyalternatives.ca (Access: August 2003).

⁶⁰ M. CASTELLS, *The information age: economy, society and culture*. Volume III: *End of millennium*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, 172.

⁶¹ *Populorum Progressio* of Paul VI consistently challenges this view in 1967 See 8, 26, 45, 57, 58.

⁶² <http://www.africaaction.org/action/debtpos.htm> (Access: August 2003). \$300 billion is owed and this crippling burden fundamentally hampers any progress. As such, it is both a cause and a symptom of the structural inequality in the international economic system. See also: <http://www.africaaction.org/action/debt.htm> (Access: August 2003).

⁶³ Reciprocity within the system functions only when both partners are capable of exercising some power over each other. Groups without such power are being increasingly impoverished. The G7 countries are seen as particularly problematic since they meet together regularly as a group and are powerful enough to ensure that world trade works to their benefit. The G7 countries are the 7 most industrialised countries of the world. France, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan and Italy comprised the original G6 group meeting for the first time in 1975. They were joined by Canada in 1976 to make up the G7. The European Union was admitted in 1977 but the title G7 remained. Russia was also admitted to full membership in 1998 and the term G8 was adopted. Nevertheless the G7 continues to meet separately at conferences. Source: http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/what_is_g8.html (Access: June 2004).

⁶⁴ Report published in August 2003. Source: Reuters. See also <http://www.ifpri.org> (Access: May 2004). At the recent meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Cancun, Mexico, trade talks broke down after rich countries refused to cut huge subsidies they give to their farmers. Dave Timms of the British development lobby group, the World Development Movement, told BBC News: “The collapse of the talks was the only option for the developing countries - walking out was better than the deal on the table. It is the EU that must take responsibility for the failure”. Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3108460.stm>.

⁶⁵ The Centre for International Development at Harvard University, in its ‘South Africa Summary’ remarks: ‘At the WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun in November

2003, South Africa led the coalescence of a new trade block of twenty articulate developing countries, along with India, Brazil, and China. The group came together over their insistence that they could not consider further lowering their import tariffs until developed countries, particularly the US and EU, committed to significantly lowering their subsidies of domestic agriculture production and export. The G20's rejection of the investment issues that the developed countries wanted to include in the negotiations and its insistence on prioritizing agriculture brought about the early ending of the Cancun meetings and has shifted the course of the Doha Development Round'. <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/gov/southafricagov.html> (Access June 2004).

⁶⁶ CASTELLS, *Information*. Vol III, 2, emphasises that such communities are found in both rich and poor nations.

⁶⁷ T. MBEKI, 'Statement by Deputy President Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference', Johannesburg, 28 September 1998.

⁶⁸ It will be important for us to participate in organisations like the 'OMI Justice, peace and integrity of creation network'. For more information see <http://www.omijpic.org> (Access: June 2015)

⁶⁹ JETTÉ, *Apostolic Man*, 63.

⁷⁰ G. SIEBERT, 'Religious Life' in *The Catholic Church in Contemporary Southern Africa*, edited by J. BRAIN & P. DENIS, Pietermaritzburg, Cluster, 1999, 78.

⁷¹ 'OMI General Statistics 2014' in *OMI Personnel 2014* gives a total of 402 Oblates in Southern Africa.

⁷² *Ad Gentes*, 6.

⁷³ Pope Francis for example, in a an audience with Male Superiors general in 2013 called for mission across "symbolic frontiers that are not predetermined and are not the same for everyone": A. SPADARO, "Wake up the world" Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious life, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2014, I, 3-17 (4 gennaio 2014). (Translated by Fr Donald Maldari SJ). Viewed March 2015. http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli_download/extra/Wake_up_the_world.pdf.

⁷⁴ We must go beyond geographical notions of mission to discover new unevangelised social spaces. For a missionary congregation like ours, which must situate itself on the boundary between faith and unfaith, the geographical definition is not sufficient. We will lose sight of the clear fields for primary evangelisation, which is so important to our nature and history if we just stay there. We urgently need other concepts of social space in order to deal with the challenges of Oblate Mission in the future.

⁷⁵ Like, for example, third world urbanisation and migration.

⁷⁶ Such as the world of communications and youth.

⁷⁷ The Vatican II mission document, *Ad Gentes* mentions the term only sparingly. There it is usually linked to the healing and transformation of the culture of an evangelised people by the gospel, Cf. *Ad Gentes* 9 and *Ad Gentes*, 21. This idea will eventually emerge as 'Inculturation' during the 1970s and 1980s. *Ad Gentes*, 19 is the clearest indication of this direction when a new particular church emerges from a former mission church as it is increasingly 'rooted in social life and somewhat conformed to the local culture'.

⁷⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18, 19.

⁷⁹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20. The same paragraph also notes that 'the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other

times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures.’

⁸⁰ This is dealt with as a central issue in *Redemptoris Missio*, 52-54.

⁸¹ *Towards a pastoral approach to culture* Vatican 1998, 4.

⁸² Note that culture is not interpreted here in a merely ethnic way. The issue is not just the inculturation of the gospel into local African ethnic cultures. Rather we emphasise that new cultural spaces are emerging, in urban areas, amongst youth, in informal settlements and in many other areas. These are becoming new fields for mission and they provide areas for the challenge that is facing us today. This is because they represent new fields for mission within emerging cultures that are increasingly untouched by the geographically based church structures we have set up and which require creative and new strategies for evangelisation. These strategies and activities have yet to be properly developed and will demand creativity and new passion from us.

⁸³ There is a real need for new ways of preaching to those who are untouched by the gospel. We could take some lessons from the work of Pentecostal groups who reach large groups of people through radio, television, rallies in stadiums and other forms of outreach into the community.

⁸⁴ Facilities included two new churches, pastoral training cultural centres and websites. This information was supplied in conversations with Fr Nadim Abou Zeid, the mission superior, and other Maronite Christians.

⁸⁵ <http://awestruck.tv/ngome>.

⁸⁶ Many of my talks and published articles are available at <http://omi.org.za/scbate> or more recently at <https://sjti.academia.edu/StuartBate>. Follow the links given there. (Access: June 2014).

⁸⁷ G. ELLIS, *South African Developmental Issues*, SAIRR (Western Cape), 2001.

⁸⁸ In May 2002 by Anthony Stoppard, in an article for Inter Press Service. For details see www.corpwatch.org/news/PND.jsp?articleid=2617 (Access: June 2004).

⁸⁹ For an example in the context of healing HIV and AIDS see Stuart C. BATE, “Constructing a Theological Model of Salvation and Life to Inform the Ministry of HIV and AIDS Prevention.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (November 2014), 20-45.

⁹⁰ Christian Life Groups (CLG), Chiro, Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Young Christian Students (YCS) were movements that focussed on youth leadership training. In a speech at the opening ceremony of the YCW World Council, in Brits in 1995, Nelson Mandela said: ‘It is common knowledge that the YCW has made a significant contribution to building the organs of civil society in South Africa... The YCW’s approach has always been to acknowledge and challenge injustice, and then to build the capacity of the oppressed to act in a constructive way that will bring an end to injustice and create a better world for all of us’.

⁹¹ Source <http://www.omi.org.za/natal/missionstatement.html> (Access: July 2015).

⁹² www.sjti.ac.za (Access: July 2015)

⁹³ *ATLA Catholic Periodical and Literature Index* (CPLI) of the American Theological Library Association. <http://www.atla.com> (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁴ *Index Religiosus*: International Bibliography of Theology, Church History and Religious Studies (Louvain – Leuven). http://www.brepols.net/publishers/pdf/Brepolis_IR_EN.PDF (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁵ *Bibliographia Missionaria* (Rome). http://www.urbaniana.edu/biblio/en/biblioteca/bibl_missionaria.htm (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁶ www.redacres.org.za (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁷ www.ngome.co.za (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁸ OMI Update June 2005. <http://omi.org.za/natal/omi-update-v2i3.html> (Access: June 2015).

⁹⁹ For a testimony from Durban see <http://www.actsmissions.org/2013-03-06-20-32-25/history-of-acts>.

¹⁰⁰ See Minutes of the 2010 General Chapter.

¹⁰¹ J. LOPEZ GAY, *Storia delle missioni*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1987, 89.

¹⁰² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2, 86.

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the emergence of new missionary visions and strategies of the Oblates during the last 40 years as this missionary congregation responds to the challenges of the future. It reveals elements of a missionary spirituality of discernment which is found within de Mazenod's original inspiration leading to the OMI charism and the manifestation of this charism in two challenging times in southern Africa: the struggle against apartheid and the challenges of new ministries in a globalising world. It points to the need for coherence within spiritual discernment and missionary spirituality for missionary groups in the Church.

RÉSUMÉ: Ce document traite de l'émergence de nouvelles perspectives et stratégies missionnaires chez les Oblats, pendant ces 40 dernières années, dans leurs efforts de répondre aux défis de l'avenir. Il présente des éléments d'une nouvelle spiritualité missionnaire, centrée sur le discernement qui prend ses racines dans l'inspiration propre au Fondateur, source du charisme OMI. Il en montre la manifestation en deux événements critiques : en Afrique du Sud, la lutte contre l'apartheid, et les nouveaux ministères pour répondre aux défis de la globalisation. L'article souligne le besoin de cohérence, chez les groupes missionnaires dans l'Eglise, entre le discernement et la spiritualité missionnaire.

SUMARIO: Este papel trata sobre la aparición de nuevas perspectivas y estrategias misioneras entre los Oblatos en los últimos 40 años.

años en la respuesta de esta congregación misionera a los desafíos del futuro. Revela elementos de una espiritualidad misionera del discernimiento sacados de la inspiración original de De Mazenod que condujeron al carisma OMI y a la manifestación de este carisma en dos momentos particularmente difíciles en Sudáfrica: la lucha contra el apartheid y el reto de nuevos ministerios frente a la globalización. Señala la necesidad de coherencia dentro del discernimiento espiritual y de una espiritualidad misionera en grupos misioneros de la Iglesia.

APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY ON THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER

ROBERT E. WRIGHT, OMI

The Missionary Oblates have a long history serving along the Rio Grande (the “Big River”) between Texas and Mexico. They began in 1849 in the Lower Rio Grande area, that is, deep South Texas from below Laredo to where the river flows into the Gulf of Mexico (see map). In 1884 they added the West Texas stretch of the river including the towns of Eagle Pass and Del Rio. And in 1922 they assumed responsibility for most of the city of Laredo in between the first two areas. We still serve in all three of those areas, but in a much reduced fashion from our once almost-exclusive clergy presence along the entire stretch of the river.

I was asked to address what insights might be gained from this history for our Oblate apostolic community today, particularly the internal life of the Congregation, its missionary strategies and religious community life. I have chosen to focus upon the period from 1849 to 1903. I believe that that period resembles in many ways our situation today in the United States Province, even though society has changed dramatically since then. During those years we had relatively few foundations, often quite distant from each other, and they were truly mission centers, places from which the Oblates reached out to large surrounding territories. After 1903, our Oblate residences along the Rio Grande mushroomed, as old and new towns grew exponentially. As a newly ordained Oblate in 1974, I sat at lunch every week with over a dozen Oblates who all ministered within a few miles of each other at six different places. That is no longer our reality in most places. Once again we in the United States find ourselves with much smaller numbers of Oblates, often spread out at an appreciable distance from each other.

THE DOUBLE FOUNDATION WITH DISTINCT GOALS

The first Oblate entry into Texas was in late 1849, to Galveston and Brownsville. Galveston was the major seaport at the eastern end of the state, near Louisiana, whereas Brownsville was the commercial center at the opposite end of the Gulf Coast, far to the southwest at the mouth of the Rio Grande. The Texas Rio Grande country had been part of Mexico until 1848, only a year before the first Oblates arrived. Mexico had been forced by a U.S. military invasion to cede the area along with what is now the entire southwestern United States, all the way to California. Thus the population along the Rio Grande was overwhelmingly Mexican, and remained so for the rest of the century, as relatively few “foreigners” immigrated into the area, with those who did remaining mostly in Brownsville.

Since under Mexico the Lower Rio Grande country had been administered by civil and church authorities in centers on the south side of the river, the Texas diocese now had to provide priests and build churches in the new towns being created on the northern or Texas side, with their jurisdictions stretching far into the Texas interior. In Galveston, on the other hand, the bishop wanted priests for the multilingual European immigrants, but he especially wanted a religious community who could found a diocesan seminary. The objectives in both places clearly fell within the charism of the Oblate Founder: reaching out to the abandoned and training new priests.

The Oblates who arrived in 1849 were withdrawn by early 1851, mostly due to poor communications with France. But the pleas of Bishop Odin of the Diocese of Galveston, the only diocese in Texas at that time, led St. Eugene to send even more Oblates back to those two places in 1852. I was not asked to write about the Oblates’ brief Galveston foundation in this presentation, but certain points help to shed important light on our topic. For the Galveston foundation, the bishop argued strongly for attaching a boys’ school to the proposed seminary. He asserted that this would help to support the seminary while at the same time providing the best training for future missionaries, by having the seminarians help provide some daily teaching in the school. Odin argued that in the United States this combination of teaching and pastoral ministry had proven more beneficial for both the community life among the religious and their mission work:

Lacking financial resources, the religious houses solely dedicated to the work of the missions are generally composed of two or three persons who rarely find themselves together for their spiritual exercises, due to the diverse tasks of parish ministry. A school, on the other hand, by the small revenues that it obtains, allows the number of vowed religious to be increased to form a respectable community. The absence of one or two persons called to visit the sick or administer the sacraments is almost imperceptible. The spiritual exercises are always done with order and regularity. With the aid of the resources furnished by the school, one can also occasionally detach a few priests for spiritual retreats, or to visit isolated families that do not have resident priests. Teaching is very respected in our country by all classes of society. It is a way to bring about an intimate rapport with all the Protestants who surround us, and the influence that a priest obtains upon a student often contributes to bringing all that student's relatives to the faith. The Jesuit Fathers, the Vincentians, the Dominicans, the Sulpicians, and almost all our religious communities have understood perfectly well the necessity of uniting teaching to pastoral ministry.¹

Three assertions stand out in this argument. First, it was said that having more than three community members would provide that a sufficient number would always be in the residence for regular community exercises, making the absence of one or the other for pastoral ministry beyond teaching hardly noticeable. This clearly prioritizes community over pastoral ministry, and demands larger numbers in a community. This very approach would subsequently become a serious source of contention in the Lower Rio Grande area. Secondly, it was assumed that the school would bring in more money than pastoral ministry, and indeed would help to support the pastoral ministry. This assumption would be contradicted by the Oblate experience in both Galveston and Brownsville. Thirdly, it was said that schools bolster the reputation of the priests among the Protestants and even gain conversions from among those with children in the schools. This argument would appear again in the strategizing among the Oblates in the Lower Rio Grande area.

In agreeing to these two foundations, was St. Eugene concerned about the impact on Oblate community due to the great distance between the two places – 400 miles by land? If so, those concerns were

outweighed by his missionary zeal. Furthermore, the contract signed by the two bishops only specified three priests in each city. Bishop DeMazenod also planned to send a Brother to each foundation.² The ministries packed into this agreement, in two places very distant from each other, with only three priests in each place, amply demonstrate that apostolic zeal – to the point of stretching resources – outweighed a monastic type of community in the minds and hearts of the two bishops.

The Oblate presence in Galveston was relatively short-lived. From the outset St. Eugene had made it very clear that the Oblate priority was the direction of the seminary, not the running of the boys' school.³ By 1857 it had become abundantly clear that it was too soon to form a real seminary, due to the lack of seminarians at the philosophy and theology levels. That year the Oblate Founder approved withdrawing from Galveston at the request of the Oblate community there, even though Bishop Odin pleaded otherwise.⁴

THE BROWNSVILLE-MEXICO MISSION

At Brownsville, the Oblates were entrusted with the religious service of the entire huge county in which it was located, which at that time covered around 5,000 square miles,⁵ with many villages and ranches along the river and far into the interior. In Brownsville itself, the young Oblates had to care for the two main language groups, Spanish and English, as well as a convent-school for girls directed by Sisters who arrived with them. The Oblates soon ended their initial efforts at a boys' school, ostensibly due to the bad effects of teaching on the health of the priests assigned to this task; they would not try again for another dozen years.⁶ In spite of this heavy ministry demand, whenever in subsequent years the community was enlarged by another priest or two, they almost immediately embarked upon additional ministries outside their own mission territory. In 1853 Fr. Gaye was absent for four months, visiting at the bishop's request the priest-less territory along the river all the way up to Laredo. In 1854 he and another Oblate added a large part of that territory, today's Starr County, to the Oblate mission, establishing themselves in Roma, 100 miles in a straight line from Brownsville but much more by the winding river road.⁷

When the number of Oblate priests along the Rio Grande was reduced to only four early the following year, by the death of one and the

absence of another on a voyage to France, only one Oblate was left in Roma. The General Council in France, rather than sending more missionaries as requested by the local Oblates, ordered a withdrawal from Roma back to Brownsville, for both ministry and community reasons. However, not wanting to leave Roma and its county clergy-less until the bishop could provide his own priests, a single Oblate was permitted to remain there for a year.⁸

By that time the outlying mission stations within the Brownsville district were multiplying, due to a strong increase of immigration from Mexico. When it was decided to leave Galveston in 1857, St. Eugene, aware of the Brownsville needs but especially of calls for help on the Mexican side of the river, assigned all four of the Galveston priests and one Brother, including Fr. Gaudet as the new mission superior, to Brownsville. But no sooner had the last two priests reached Brownsville than two were sent to San Antonio at the urgent request of the bishop, to fill in for the pastor there for eight months while he was in Europe.⁹ That left only four priests for the increasing pastoral needs in the Brownsville district, since Fr. Gaudet, unlike the previous Superior, “occupied himself mostly with administrative and internal Oblate affairs, supervising but not actively engaged in the external ministry.”¹⁰

Again, no sooner had the two priests returned from San Antonio in 1858, than Fr. Gaye and another priest began an Oblate post in Matamoros, immediately across the river from Brownsville in Mexico.¹¹ The Founder, who had been keeping all the Oblates on the border precisely in hope of such an opening in Mexico,¹² happily received the news, but added a caution:

I only ask that you not leave a Father alone in this ministry – they must always be at least two –and that the two of them follow the Rule exactly. Otherwise the one left alone would become insipid and lose the habit of religious life. That is why I would hold them to maintain frequent relations with their community of Brownsville.¹³

To fully appreciate the response of St. Eugene, one should know that when first apprised of the Matamoros possibility a year previously, he and his Council had given permission to start with three priests and a Brother – the same planned membership of both the original Galveston and Brownsville foundations.¹⁴ But he actually accepted that they have

only two men. Certainly the immediate proximity of the Brownsville community was one factor. But others must have been his great desire that the Congregation enter Mexico, and his hope, along with the Rio Grande Oblates, that the bishop of Texas would accept an Oblate foundation in San Antonio.¹⁵ It is thus certainly noteworthy that the Founder was so eager to be in Mexico while also wanting to be able to respond promptly to an invitation to San Antonio that he was willing, at least provisionally, to have only two Oblates in Matamoros.

When the Texas bishop visited Brownsville at the end of September 1858, he found the Oblates “united and full of ardor for the observance of their rules.”¹⁶ A week later, the second Oblate in Matamoros died in an epidemic, and yet Fr. Gaye remained in Mexico alone for a year and a half. He was assisted as often as possible by an Oblate from Brownsville. Repeated pleas for more priests for both understaffed mission centers – Brownsville and Matamoros -- came to the Founder from the Mission Superior, the diocesan dean in Mexico, and the Texas bishop.¹⁷

When Fr. Gaudet received the news that two new priests would arrive by the end of 1859, he proposed that Matamoros be given two more priests, rather than promptly accepting a request from Mexico to give a second priest to Matamoros and send two priests to Ciudad Victoria, 200 miles south of Matamoros. Gaudet advised against the Mexican proposal, asserting that it “would expose our Fathers to losing the religious spirit in placing them thus two by two.” That proposal would also leave Brownsville with one less priest. And yet, apparently at the direction of the General Administration, the Mexican proposal was the one implemented. Gaudet officially voiced support for the foundation at Ciudad Victoria, but privately complained to an Oblate colleague in Ottawa about the effects on both ministry and community: “There are only eight of us [priests] and we occupy three different posts; from this the only result can be solitude and being almost worn out. No wonder that the [Oblate] family celebrations pass unobserved, even that of the Immaculate Conception.” As it turned out, the Oblates at Ciudad Victoria were expelled at the end of that same year by the triumphant Liberal party in the turbulent Mexican politics of that time.¹⁸ Intriguingly, however, even before that expulsion Gaudet himself allowed one of the Brownsville Oblates to administer the temporarily priestless parish of

Reynosa. That parish, on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande upriver from Matamoros across from the Oblate mission territory, was served by an Oblate until mid-March 1861.¹⁹

Stimulated by more requests from the Bishop of Monterrey, Mexico, whose huge diocese covered all of northeastern Mexico below the Rio Grande, St. Eugene had sent three more priests who arrived in April 1861, only a month before the Founder's death. With ten priests thus at hand, Gaudet planned to send two "for at least two months" to a place in Mexico about halfway to Ciudad Victoria.²⁰ But by then both the United States and Mexico were engaged in political turmoil and indeed civil wars, which made communications very difficult and new foundations extremely risky. And in late summer and early Fall 1862 two priests and a Brother died during another epidemic.²¹ An opportunity that Gaudet really coveted came from the new archbishop of New Orleans, the former bishop of Texas, who was desirous of having an Oblate foundation in his diocese. Gaudet saw this as a great opportunity to provide a very needed strong support for the Oblate presence in the U.S. Southwest. But with the interval between the death of the Oblate Founder and the election of Fr. Fabre as the new Superior General in 1861, along with the continued interrupted communications with France, Gaudet never received a response from the General Administration to the initial offer from New Orleans.²²

After the deaths in 1862 there were three priests in Matamoros and five at the Brownsville center engaged in pastoral ministry.²³ That would seem to have been close to an adequate number for each center in view of the great ministry challenges. But the Oblates continued to hope to move into the Mexican interior, and were definitely interested when they were offered Agualeguas, a small town with a Marian shrine and some surrounding mission stations about 40 miles below the Rio Grande at Roma. But when they asked Paris for more help in order to take on this new post, the General Council decided to wait until the civil strife had ended in both countries.²⁴ One of the most recently arrived Oblates, Fr. Clos, wrote from Brownsville that the Rio Grande Oblates needed to expand beyond the "well-worn rut" of that district, and he asked for a Visitor from the General Administration.²⁵ At the end of 1864, with Maximilian installed as the head of Mexico by French troops triumphant over the Liberal armies, Gaudet went ahead and sent

Fr. Gaye by himself to Agualeguas, where he took over the administration while the old Mexican pastor remained for a while. The Rio Grande Oblates were anxious to respond positively to the bishop of Monterrey, who was also offering them all five parishes on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande and even the direction of his major seminary in Monterrey itself. Gaye remained alone the first year and a half, but this initiative and its prospects spurred Fr. Fabre to promise to send more priests for the end of 1865. At the same time he counseled all the heads of Oblate missions around the world: “don’t overextend your commitments; we are lacking subjects everywhere.”²⁶

Sure enough, three more priests arrived from France on December 20, 1865. But Fr. Clos, having been transferred to Matamoros, complained about how Fr. Gaudet, as Vicar of the Rio Grande Mission, assigned the Oblates and directed community life, even while Clos praised his superior as “an excellent religious.” Repeating his request for a Visitor, Clos charged that Gaudet was always overstaffing Brownsville at the expense of Matamoros and other possible missions, due to the latter’s desire to always have a well-attended solemn Divine Office in the Brownsville house: “The Reverend Father Vicar always follows his system of making a cloistered house in his residence.” While one newcomer was sent to Matamoros to take the place of the priest destined to help Fr. Gaye in Agualeguas, the other two were added to the Brownsville house, and Clos himself, although still assigned to Matamoros, was required to visit the upriver ranches of Brownsville during Lent. The superior of the Matamoros residence refrained from sending the ministry surplus from there to Brownsville, asserting that such revenues sent to the Vicar were always spent on unnecessary material improvements in Brownsville rather than for more necessary things elsewhere.²⁷ But Gaudet actually had his sights set beyond both Brownsville and Matamoros, raising once again the possibility of an Oblate ministry near New Orleans, to fulfill the need for “a central establishment with ease of communication with Europe and capable of rendering service to the other establishments of the Vicariate.” It would require, he declared, Oblates more capable of such a foundation than those along the Rio Grande. But this Louisiana possibility was dropped by both Gaudet and Paris when changed conditions presented another option that required no new subjects.²⁸

Ironically, only one-half year after the arrival of the priests sent in view of expanded work in Mexico, the forces of the Liberal party, resurgent in that nation upon the withdrawal of the French troops, closed the door to Mexico on the Oblates. The missionaries, viewed as sympathizers of the allied Mexican conservative and French parties, were expelled from Matamoros in June 1866. Fr. Gaye and his companion were able to remain in the Agualeguas district, thanks to its out-of-the-way location and relative unimportance politically.²⁹ But the rest of the Oblates were now all crowded into the Brownsville residence – nine priests in pastoral ministry, three Brothers, and the superior.

Father Parisot had started a boys' school the previous year with two lay teachers – a project that Gaudet extolled as “for years the object of all my dreams.”³⁰ But even Gaudet acknowledged that Brownsville had more priests than were needed. He wanted to be rid of Mexico once and for all, and judged that none of his subjects were capable of leading a new foundation beyond the Rio Grande region. So he recommended to the Superior General that three priests and a Brother reassume the mission district of Roma, upriver from Brownsville and even closer to Agualeguas: they were already known there, it would keep them in sight of Mexico, and it would bring into one contiguous Mission territory the Brownsville and Agualeguas districts. Thus it would allow for mutual pastoral assistance and community visits. Gaudet's proposed new foundation was readily accepted by Paris for the reasons given. But he did not send Oblates to the Roma district immediately. Rather he kept them all in Brownsville for eight months, with the objectives of renewing and intensifying their community exercises, including weekly theological conferences, and providing help in the schools for boys and girls.³¹

The other Oblates were open to the Roma proposal, but the preference of most was to be allowed to return to Matamoros once the situation there changed. They complained about Gaudet's priorities and about all being penned up in Brownsville. His subjects wrote that he had never set foot outside of Brownsville and thus was incapable of directing the ministry to the ranches. They said that he did not confide in any of them, and in fact derided their competency in insulting terms. Thus he only fanned the discontent among them as they complained

about their inactivity. Several wrote to Paris, earnestly pleading that a new Vicar be named or a Visitor be sent.³²

When Gaudet finally sent men to Roma in March 1867, that district was enlarged by the Texas bishop to include the next county up-river immediately below Laredo. The General Administration in Paris had apparently overruled Gaudet by ordering that only two priests be sent, prompting Gaudet to brazenly reply that “the way that you scatter subjects is feasible up to a certain point at least for the beginning, but if these subjects should remain thus dismembered from a community for a long time, I would consider them lost from the start.” Besides, he repeated, the ministry itself in the new mission required more than two priests. On that point he was definitely correct. Almost immediately the Oblates in Roma, astounded by the great distances, wrote directly to France for more help.³³ At the same time, however, Gaudet sent a priest to administer by himself the once-again priest-less parish of Reynosa, until the Mexican bishop could send another priest there. Fr. Vignolle served in Reynosa for six months.³⁴

In their joint report to their delegate at the General Chapter in 1867, the Oblates of the Rio Grande wrote that the continual lack of sufficient men had prevented them from accepting foundations in more prominent places in Mexico and Louisiana. They felt caught “in a narrow circle not amenable to development, in a sort of isolation in relation to the Congregation,” apparently abandoned to themselves, with their leaders in Paris only awaiting for some occurrence to finally dissolve their Mission. Their current insufficient numbers, they declared, prevented them from adequately visiting the 200 scattered ranches.³⁵

In response, two new priests were sent from France and assigned to Roma in 1868. And a Visitor finally arrived. Fr. Jolivet praised the men’s good spirit, zeal, and general observance of the Rule. But he reconfirmed Gaudet as both Vicar of the entire Rio Grande Mission and, by exception, local superior in Brownsville, and even made Gaudet the Vicariate’s bursar “provisionally.” In a compensatory gesture toward the complaining Oblates, he enlarged the Vicar’s council and recommended that it meet monthly. Gaudet must have been pleased that the Visitor scolded the Fathers for responding to ministry calls during their spiritual exercises and for not praying Prime and Terce in community. Jolivet also insisted that they not take any initiative without the

superior's permission, and warned them not to let a spirit of criticism and murmuring reappear among them.³⁶ Two years after this doubtfully helpful visit, both Vicar and subject were complaining that they had received no help, in fact no communication, from the Superior General since the visit, and that they were really in need of good reinforcements.³⁷

Upon visiting Roma in 1869, Gaudet recognized that the Oblates there and in Agualeguas followed their community life "as much as this exceptional position allows." When one of the priests at Roma was transferred to the Brownsville district a few months later due to the recall of another Oblate to France, the Oblate assistant at Agualeguas came to Roma annually to help out, sometimes for months at a time.³⁸ At the insistence of the bishop named to the new Vicariate Apostolic of Brownsville in 1874, Rio Grande City was made a separate Oblate mission center in 1880 to take care of the eastern portion of the Roma district. Thereafter both Roma and Rio Grande City had two priests. In Roma the same two priests and one Brother formed a very stable and cohesive community until the first decade of the 1900s. Known in their later lives as "The Happy Trio of Roma," they were praised by their successive Oblate superiors for their apostolic dedication and the regularity of their community life.³⁹

The Rio Grande Oblates were not wrong in their fears about the thinking of the General Administration. By this time, the General Council had come to agree with the Rio Grande Oblates that their mission, as admirable as it was, would not prosper without adding a more solid position outside the Rio Grande territory. But, unbeknownst to the Oblates in Texas, the General Chapter of 1873, facing a shortage of missionaries everywhere, had decided to accept no new mission districts until the current ones were adequately staffed. Given that mindset, when the General Council finally in 1874 sent the Rio Grande mission a new superior, Fr. Vandenberghe, they were very open to any possibility of honorably handing over the work to others. Unfortunately, the new Superior turned out to be too much like the previous one. The men felt that he too saw little value in all that they had done, clearly preferred the Anglo Americans over the Mexicans, did little ministry due to lack of language fluency, and failed to take them into his counsel. Fr. Olivier, who had been first consultor for Gaudet and continued as such

under Vandenberghe until 1876, commented in 1877 that these titles had only been “a simple formality for a very long time”; in other words, he had rarely been confided in by the two Vicars. In 1881 Clos wrote that Vandenberghe almost never consulted his appointed counselors.⁴⁰

The Oblates tasked with visiting the far flung ranches and directing the Roma and Agualeguas centers also protested that the Vicars’ strong support of Parisot’s school efforts in Brownsville was “useless and unjust, using the money of the Mexicans for the benefit of the Anglo congregation.” The advocates of the school argued, with merit, that it was important to improve the ministry among the English-speaking or “Americans” in Brownsville, since they were more influential in the direction of society, and that not providing a school would not only abet the total lack of Catholic representation on the town council, but also have the Catholic families turn to Protestant schools. Here one notes strong similarities with Bishop Odin’s arguments a quarter-century earlier in regard to the Oblate ministry in Galveston.⁴¹

In 1877 the second Assistant General to visit the Rio Grande Mission arrived to try to arrange its closure. He told the assembled Oblates that he was contacting the Jesuits about taking over the Rio Grande Mission, an announcement that provoked such heated opposition that the Visitor made four Oblates take supper on their knees. And he ordered that the Oblates remove themselves from the administration of the boys’ college. The school closing was carried out that year. But undesirable conditions set by the bishop made the Jesuits reconsider, and the bishop had Rome ask the Oblates to remain along the Rio Grande until suitable replacements could be found. Thereafter Fr. Fabre kept pushing Vandenberghe to find another Congregation.⁴²

Discouraged and yet resolute, the Rio Grande Oblates carried on as best they could. They continued to build new chapels for the increasing population and, besides their regular ministry, to accept as they had before the preaching of extended missions by a team of two or three priests in various towns of South Texas outside their own vast mission territory. They also urged the General Administration to accept posts in San Antonio and Eagle Pass being offered by the new bishop of San Antonio, a friend and former colleague of theirs who had ministered in Laredo along the Rio Grande. Those pleas continued to fall on deaf ears.⁴³

The next visit of an Assistant General, Fr. Martinet, in 1883, finally ended this state of suspended death, and provided a new important opening in Oblate history. As noted above, the bishop of San Antonio, a friend of the Oblates, had been trying to get them to take over the Eagle Pass district, another vast area above Laredo that extended for a hundred miles along the river and a hundred miles into the interior towards San Antonio. It was a territory similar in challenges to the Lower Rio Grande region, populated mostly by very poor Mexicans, but with fewer towns and ranches at even greater distances from each other.⁴⁴ It did have the advantage of being connected to San Antonio by railroad, unlike the Lower Rio Grande country. Fr. Martinet saw firsthand, as the local Oblates had been arguing, that the Oblate mission in Texas would not prosper as long as it remained confined solely to the work along the Rio Grande, as meritorious as that ministry was. So he drove a hard bargain with the bishop. In return for the Oblates accepting the vast and poor western area of his diocese, the bishop had to give the Oblates his best parish in San Antonio, the English-language St. Mary's.

Furthermore, Martinet said that the United States had reached the point of needing its own Oblate province, and successfully recommended the formation of that province by combining the struggling but admirable Texas foundations with the prosperous ones in the Northeast, principally in the cities of Lowell and Buffalo. Talk about a challenge to Oblate community! The two areas of the new province were 1600 miles apart, and very different in social characteristics. For the twenty years that Texas remained part of this First American Province, the only real bridge between the two was St. Mary's in San Antonio, staffed mostly from the Northeast as a mostly Irish-American parish.⁴⁵

But that is another story. Along the Rio Grande, Martinet decided to close the outpost of Agualeguas, thus removing the Oblates from official ministry in Mexico for the rest of the century.⁴⁶ The Oblates would now be in the urban San Antonio parish and four very spread-out mission centers on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, each with a large interior territory to cover. But, other than the key central post of San Antonio, the new arrangement was at first more of a burden than a benefit to the Rio Grande missions.⁴⁷ They now had a mission territory that had doubled in size, but the personnel situation only worsened.

Whereas three veteran Oblates from the Lower Rio Grande districts were sent for the Eagle Pass foundation, only two new Oblates were sent to the Lower Rio Grande that decade, and one was promptly removed as impossible to live with soon after his arrival. Another Oblate was lost before 1890 due to ill health.⁴⁸ And yet, at the urgent pleading of their friend the bishop of San Antonio, the Oblates along the Rio Grande somehow managed to send one or two priests for periodic tours of one to three months between 1885 and 1890 into temporarily priestless Far West Texas. That was the vast, almost completely Mexican area stretching all the way from the Pecos River to Presidio in the Big Bend country of the Rio Grande.⁴⁹ Pleas for help to Oblate authorities provided no relief.

The Rio Grande Oblates also complained that they were losing funds, rather than receiving them, in the new provincial arrangement.⁵⁰ To make matters worse, personnel-wise if not in mission strategy, in a return visit in 1892 Fr. Martinet authorized Fr. Parisot to reopen the boys' school in Brownsville. Some teaching Brothers were sent, but the direction of the school became one more task for the overburdened Oblate priests already there.⁵¹ What suffered were the visits to the outlying villages and ranches. In 1899 Del Rio in the Eagle Pass district and La Lomita in the Lower Rio Grande country were made into separate mission centers.⁵² Even minimally staffing the six centers along the Rio Grande with at least two Oblates at each place took a toll especially on Brownsville. By early 1901 there were only four priests for all the ministries in that still vast district, and there were only two Brothers for all the work usually expected of them.⁵³ The Provincial up East was so concerned about the situation that he bluntly refused the request of the Superior General to send to a different destination one of two newly arrived Oblates from France: "If I do not considerably strengthen the Brownsville house, community, parish and ranches are going to ruin." The college situation, he noted, was also extreme.⁵⁴ One reason for the worsening clergy shortage was that the two generations of Oblates who had arrived along the Rio Grande before 1880, most of whom had demonstrated remarkable longevity, were finally dying or retiring from ministry. Between 1890 and 1903 nine of these pioneers died.

STRONG RESOURCING AT LAST

The 1901 visit of another Assistant General, Fr. Tatin, finally addressed this situation as boldly as Fr. Martinet had in 1883, and another major chapter opened in Oblate history in Texas and beyond. Within the next three years a major seminary was started in San Antonio, new priests and seminarians were sent from Canada and Europe, a new entry was made deep into Mexico, and a new province was founded headquartered in San Antonio.⁵⁵ Thanks to these combined initiatives, the missions of that new province would rapidly spread both geographically and in terms of varied ministries throughout the southwestern United States and beyond.

CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

What conclusions might be drawn from these fifty years of Oblate apostolic community along the Texas Rio Grande? The priorities of both missionary outreach and Oblate community life entered into every personnel decision. But, with the exception of Gaudet in regard to Brownsville itself, missionary outreach clearly prevailed over an emphasis on always keeping numerous Oblates in residence for community exercises. Although the “ideal” seems to have been a minimum of three priests and a Brother, in practice there were often only two Oblate priests, with a Brother if possible. This was true in spite of the usually great distances between one center and the other. Even Fr. Gaudet several times in special circumstances had a single Oblate in one place for periods of up to a year and a half. It is truly impressive how the Rio Grande Oblates time and again responded to the needs of priest-less or very underserved districts in spite of their barely sufficient numbers in their existing posts. Even though they were often asking for more help, they continued to choose to “go small” in order to expand their ministry among the poor and abandoned, rather than making sure that every place was fully staffed. And even where one of only two Oblates was often absent visiting outlying villages and ranches, they still generally had a good religious community life.

Some questions. Does this have anything to say to the U.S. Oblates about our “mission centers,” originally designed as six or seven-person residences? Does it make a difference that our priority mission centers are no longer in smaller cities with extensive rural territories, but

rather within much larger urban centers? If it is true that in today's U.S. society many young people are searching for a community that they have seldom experienced, is this personal search for community, sometimes seen as meaning a larger residential community particularly among many younger Oblates, a more important factor than previously in Oblate life? Should it be?

A second point that emerges from this history was the realization by these Oblates that they needed a stronger position in a major regional center that would give the necessary support and development to their mission among the poor and abandoned. San Antonio eventually gave them that. In my view, the same lesson can be learned from Zambia, where the Oblates soon recognized the necessity of having a post in Lusaka to support their admirable ministry in the poorest and most isolated region of that country.

Thirdly, it is saddening but also instructive to see how Oblate community life in Brownsville and indeed the entire Rio Grande Mission was actually damaged by some superiors. For twenty-six years the Rio Grande Oblates had a local Vicar who did not share the mission priorities of most of them, did not share actively in the ministry, and did not confide in them. When the General Administration sent them Visitors in 1868 and 1877, it seemed to be only to urge them to be good religious, indeed meticulous religious, while leaving them basically in the same state as before. This is not to say that there were not any challenging personalities or situations to deal with among the local Oblates. But when almost all the subjects are repeatedly pleading for changes and bolder moves, a more adequate response is called for.

Finally, the value of perseverance shines throughout this history, as the Rio Grande Oblates and indeed their eventual Visitors continually pointed out. In the face of so many challenges, outside of and within the Congregation, almost all the men persevered in their apostolic zeal and community life. Eventually major interventions did finally brighten and strengthen their apostolic community in Texas and beyond. We today are their very grateful heirs and *responsables*.

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¹ Bishop Odin to Bishop de Mazenod, 18 March 1850, General Administration Correspondence (henceforth GAC), transcripts in Southwestern Oblate Historical Archives (henceforth SWOHA), Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio. Most of the letters cited in this essay were written in French; the translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

² “Copie des arrangements entre Mgr. de Mazenod et Mgr. Odin,” 14 November 1851, GAC; translated in Bernard DOYON, OMI, *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-1883*, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1956, 32, but with no mention of the Brothers.

³ Mazenod to Verdet, 2 September 1852, 10 January 1853, in Eugene de Mazenod, *Lettres aux correspondants d'Amérique, 1851-1860, Écrits Oblats*, 2, p. 44-45, 51.

⁴ In Baudre to Mazenod, 14 January 1855 (“Oblates Records, Galveston 1850-1857” file, History Box, SWOHA), Fr. Baudre complained of Bishop Odin’s constant meddling and criticism since the beginning of the college, and that the “seminarians” were youth from the 8th grade on – at an age and preparatory level of those later called “junior” or “high-school” aspirants to the priesthood. For the Oblates in Galveston during this period, see Doyon, 35-57.

⁵ Z.T. FULMORE, *History and Geography of Texas as Told in County Names*, Austin, Steck, 1915, 288, adding together the sizes of the counties later formed out of the original Cameron County. This can also be calculated by combining the current sizes for Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy, Kenedy, and Brooks (one-half) counties in *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles>), by the Texas State Historical Association. Doyon, 60 and 66, erred in stating that the original mission territory went all the way up to Roma, which was in a different county.

⁶ “Missions du Texas,” in “Notice historique et statistique sur la Congregation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Compte-rendu de l’année 1854-1855,” 36, History Box, SWOHA.

⁷ Odin to Verdet, 29 September 1852, History Box, SWOHA; Doyon, 69; Roma sacramental records, 1853-1854.

⁸ Doyon, 69-70, wrote as if Roma had two Oblate priests the whole time. The Roma sacramental registers, along with those in Brownsville, demonstrate otherwise.

⁹ Doyon, 74-76; Mazenod to Gaudet, 23 June 1857, *Écrits Oblats*, 2, p. 160-161; P.F. PARISOT, O.M.I., *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary*, San Antonio, St. Mary’s Church, 1899, 37-38. Doyon noted only three priests who came from Galveston; he did not mention Fr. De Lustrac, who had been transferred to Galveston from the Lower Rio Grande mission the previous year, nor Bro. Copeland. Yet he concluded that there were eight priests in Brownsville – one too many – just before the two were sent to San Antonio.

¹⁰ Robert E. WRIGHT, OMI, “Brownsville, Texas,” in *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, Vol. II: *The Oblates Outside France at the Time of the Founder*, Rome, Association for Oblate Studies and Research, 2010, 87, based upon Gaudet’s own description of his managerial role in Gaudet to Mazenod, 25 April 1859, “Missions O.M.I.” I (1862), 492; Parisot to Fabre, 21 July 1866, GAC; and Doyon, 181-185.

¹¹ Doyon, 87-88.

¹² Aubert to Gaudet, 20 April 1858, GAC.

¹³ Mazenod to Gaudet, 28 August 1858, *Écrits Oblats*, 2, p. 200.

¹⁴ *Registres des Conseils Généraux*, vol. 1, 420 (6 October 1857), General House Archives, Rome.

¹⁵ Mazenod to Gaudet, 28 August 1858, and Mazenod to Rio Grande Oblates, 16 September 1858, *Écrits Oblats*, 2, p. 201, 203.

¹⁶ Odin to Mazenod [early 1859], doc. 33, GAC.

¹⁷ Parisot to Mazenod, 9 October 1858, and Gaudet to Mazenod, 24 December 1858, 25 April 1859, 1 June 1859, “Missions O.M.I.” 1 (1862), 475, 479, 482-483, 492-494; Odin to Mazenod [early 1859], GAC; Musquiz to Mazenod, 14 March 1859, GAC.

¹⁸ Mazenod to Musquiz, 10 October 1859, *Écrits Oblats*, 2, p. 229-230; Gaudet to Mazenod 13 November 1859, Sivy to Mazenod 30 December 1859, [ca. May] 1860, and Sivy to [Fabre] 20 April 1861, “Missions O.M.I.” 1 (1862), 502-505, 517-519, 528-530, 533; Gaudet to Guigues, 19 December 1860, Ottawa Correspondence, History Box, SWOHA. Doyon, 95-96, misinterpreted various aspects of the decision about Ciudad Victoria, including the people involved in it, and gave the distance from Brownsville to Ciudad Victoria as 300 miles.

¹⁹ Gaudet to Fabre, 12 March 1861, “Missions O.M.I.” 1 (1862), 523; “Bautismos 1850 a 1868,” entries from 17 November 1860 to 21 March 1861, Reynosa Archives, Barker Texas History Collection, University of Texas at Austin; PARISOT, *Reminiscences*, 43-50.

²⁰ Mazenod to Bishop of Monterrey, 1 June 1860, “Missions O.M.I.” 244-245 (the editor mistook this letter as addressed to the bishop of Monterey, California); Gaudet to Rousselon, 2 April 1861, Catholic Archives of America files (New Orleans Papers at University of Notre Dame Archives) [henceforth CAA], History Box, SWOHA; Gaudet to Fabre, 26 April 1861, “Missions O.M.I.” 1 (1862), 534; DOYON, 77, 99.

²¹ DOYON, 78, 99-100, 162.

²² Gaudet to Fabre, 15 March 1862, 30 April 1863, “Missions O.M.I.” 1 (1862), 539, and vol. 3 (1864), 50-51.

²³ Dubuis to Odin, 29 April 1863, CAA files, SWOHA.

²⁴ Gaudet to Fabre, 30 April 1863, “Missions O.M.I.” 3 (1864), 49-50; *Missions O.M.I.*, vol. 3 (1864), 73-75.

²⁵ Clos to Fabre, 8 June 1864, GAC.

²⁶ Gaye, “Reponse au questionnaire,” 10 December 1877, GAC [arrival of himself and later Rieux in Agualeguas]; Parisot to Fabre, 27 April 1865, GAC [bishop’s requests]; Fabre to Gaudet, 1 March 1865, GAC; Doyon, 101-102, 116-117. The date that Gaye began in Agualeguas was December 23, not November as in Doyon: see *Libro # 3 de Bautismos, 1863-1870*, Agualeguas. A year later the bishop of Monterrey, after his diocese no longer included the Lower Rio Grande country due to the creation of a new diocese, would offer the six northernmost parishes of his diocese above Laredo, all priestless, to the Oblates: Gaudet to Fabre, 14 March 1866, GAC.

²⁷ Gaudet to Fabre 30 December 1865, Clos to Fabre 22 April 1865, Clos to [Rey?] 30 January 1866; Gaudet to Fabre 28 February 1866, GAC; Doyon 81, 111.

²⁸ Gaudet to Fabre, 20 April 1866, 16 July 1866, GAC; DOYON, 119 n. 1.

²⁹ Doyon, 114-117; Jaffrès to Fabre, 29 June 1866, GAC.

³⁰ Doyon, 79; Gaudet to Rey, 17 February 1866, GAC.

³¹ Gaudet to Fabre, 16 July 1866, GAC; DOYON, 119 n. 1.

³² Parisot to Fabre, 21 July 1866; Clos to Fabre, 31 December 1866; Maurel to Fabre, 1 January 1867; Clos to [Vandenbergh], 30 January 1867 – all in GAC. See Doyon's summary and the new superior's assessment of his predecessor in Doyon, 183-185, 196.

³³ Gaudet to Fabre, 16 October 1866, 5 January 1867, GAC; Clos to Rey, 16-22 April 1867, GAC.

³⁴ "Bautismos 1850-1868," Reynosa Archives, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

³⁵ "Compte-rendu des missions du Texas y du Mexique," 31 May 1867, GAC.

³⁶ Vandenbergh, *Ephemerides*, 43, 43v, SWOHA (two new priests); Fr. Jolivet, "Acte de visite de la Maison de Brownsville," 3 May 1868, and "Acte de visite du Vicariat de Texas," 20 May 1868, Brownsville Register of Visitations, SWOHA; Doyon, 187-188.

³⁷ Clos to Fabre, 25 February 1870, GAC; Gaudet to Fabre, 17 September 1870, GAC.

³⁸ Gaudet visitation, 25 June 1869, Roma Register of Visitations, SWOHA; Vicariate minutes, 11 September 1869; Rieux, "Reponses au questionnaire" [1877], GAC.

³⁹ DOYON, 138, 211 n. 37, 232.

⁴⁰ The long "crisis" of the leadership in regard to the future of the Texas mission is well described in Doyon, 179-198, 210-223. For the lack of real consultation, see Olivier, "Reponses au questionnaire," 18 January 1877, GAC, and Clos to Sardou, 6 February 1881, Doyon research notes, SWOHA. For the appointment of Malmartel as first consultor in 1876, see the register *Minutes of the Vicariate's Meetings*, 27 June 1876, SWOHA.

⁴¹ DOYON, 203-204, 206-209; *Minutes of the Vicariate's Meetings*, 15 April 1876 (quotation).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 212-222.

⁴³ DOYON, 90-94 (Mexico); *Minutes of the Vicariate's Meetings*, 10 December 1875, 22 March 1876; "Missions O.M.I., 14 (1876), 47-50; 20 (1882), 5-9; Vandenbergh, *Ephemerides*, 70 verso.

⁴⁴ Martinet, "Acte de Visite, Residence d'Eagle Pass," 22 April 1892, GAC; Tatin, "Acte de Visite, Del Rio," 29 March 1901, and "Acte de Visite, Eagle Pass," 2 April 1901, GAC.

⁴⁵ DOYON, 226-233. Doyon's otherwise excellent summary does not include how Martinet had to negotiate to obtain St. Mary's in San Antonio, since the bishop had offered the Mexican parish, San Fernando. See Martinet to Fabre, 6 January 1883, GAC no. 226, and Bishop Neraz to McGrath, 1 March 1884, Oblate files, San Antonio Archdiocesan Archives. For the Irish-American Oblate clergy at St. Mary's, see its sacramental registers.

⁴⁶ Martinet to Malmartel, 8 June 1883, copy inserted between pp. 14-15 of Roma Visitations ledger. Doyon, 232, mistakenly included Agualeguas among the houses of the new province; but also see Doyon, 117.

⁴⁷ Doyon's book, which closes with the Martinet visitation of 1883, sounds too much of a resurrection theme at that point: "Texas would share in the life of a new province, in its blood stream of men, money, and works which would circulate as far as

the Rio Grande...” (233). That did not turn out to be the case, with the solitary but important exception of San Antonio. The Rio Grande missions, now even more extensive, carried on under an increasingly heavy burden with very little outside help.

⁴⁸ *Our Lady of Refuge Parish, Eagle Pass* (centennial booklet 1983), 9, 15 (Olivier, Rieux, Malmartel); *Minutes of the House Council, Brownsville, 1888-1930*, November 1888, July 1890, August 1890; Parisot to Martinet, 27 March 1889, 3 September 1890, GAC.

⁴⁹ Robert E. WRIGHT, *Transient Clergy in the Trans-Pecos Area, 1848-1892*, “Journal of Big Bend Studies” 18 (2006), 28-43.

⁵⁰ Clos to [Martinet], 17 October 1887; Gaudet to Martinet, 24 December 1894; Michel certification, 2 April 1901; Clos to Tatin, 4 March 1902 – all in GAC.

⁵¹ Martinet Act of Visitation, 25 May 1892, Brownsville Visitation Register, 64-65, 71-74, SWOHA.

⁵² Pescheur to Scholastics at Liège, December 1899-January 1900, “Missions O.M.I.” 38 (1900), 186, 189; Lefèbvre act of visitation, 23-26 January, 1900, Del Rio Visitation ledger, SWOHA.

⁵³ Tatin visitation, 28 April 1901, Brownsville Visitation Register, 100. The four priests most probably did not include the retired Vignolle (101).

⁵⁴ Lefèbvre to Augier, 13 September 1901, GAC no. 291a; Valence to Lefèbvre, 9 July 1901, GAC no. 301.

⁵⁵ Tatin visitation in Texas, March-April 1901, GAC nos. 283-300; Donat LEVASSEUR, OMI, *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée: Essai de synthèse*, vol. 2, Montréal, Maison Provinciale, 1986, 177-178, 191.

ABSTRACT: A review of the history of Oblate apostolic community along the Texas-Mexico border between 1849 and 1903 demonstrates that, while the ideal seems to have been to have at least three priests and a Brother in each mission center; in actual practice both the Oblate founder, St. Eugene, and the Oblates in the Rio Grande missions typically chose to “go smaller” when it was needed in order to respond to the poor and abandoned outside their originally assigned territories. Yet visiting superiors generally confirmed that these Oblates maintained a regular supportive religious community life under missionary – rather than monastic – conditions. The Oblates also came to realize that it was important to have an Oblate foundation in one of the stronger civil centers of the region in order to support their missions in more marginal or out-of-the-way areas. Unfortunately, for over two decades both the local mission Vicars and the General Administration seemed to have failed to respond adequately to the needs of the men and the mission, and yet the missionaries persevered.

RÉSUMÉ: Un survol de l'histoire de la communauté apostolique, entre 1849 et 1903, le long de la frontière entre le Texas et le Mexique, qui démontre que même si l'idéal ait été d'avoir au moins trois Pères et un Frère dans chaque mission, dans la pratique, tant le Fondateur que les Oblats du Rio Grande, ont choisi de 'réduire la voilure' quand cela s'imposait, afin de répondre aux pauvres et aux abandonnés, hors de leurs territoires d'origine. Cependant, les Visiteurs oblats ont insisté pour que ces Oblats maintiennent une vie de communauté régulière qui les soutienne, avec un style missionnaire plutôt que monastique. Les Oblats eux-mêmes en sont venus à réaliser qu'il était important d'avoir une fondation oblate, dans l'un des centres civils importants, afin de soutenir leurs missions en des régions plus marginales, ou en dehors des grandes routes. Malheureusement, pendant plus de deux décades, tant les Vicaires de la mission locale que l'Administration générale, ne semblent pas avoir répondu correctement aux besoins des hommes dans la mission, et pourtant les missionnaires ont persévéré.

SUMARIO: Una revisión de la historia de la comunidad apostólica Oblata a lo largo de la frontera de Tejas-Méjico entre los años 1849 y 1903 demuestra que, aunque el ideal parece ser contar con tres sacerdotes y un hermano en cada centro de misión, en la práctica, tanto el Fundador oblato, S. Eugenio como los Oblatos de las misiones de Rio Grande, normalmente optaron por "tirar a lo bajo" cuando era necesario para responder a los pobres y más abandonados fuera de los territorios a ellos asignados al principio. No obstante los superiores que les visitaron por lo general confirmaron esta práctica y mantuvieron como apoyo regular un estilo de vida comunitaria en condiciones misioneras – más que monásticas. Los Oblatos también se dieron cuenta de que era importante contar con una fundación oblate en alguno de los núcleos urbanos más grandes de la región para apoyar sus misiones de las áreas marginales más remotas. Por desgracia, durante más de dos décadas parece que tanto los Vicarios locales de las misiones como la Administración General no supieron responder adecuadamente a las necesidades de las misiones y de los misioneros. Y sin embargo, éstos perseveraron.

Local Section North American Congress

June 30 – July 3, 2015

Our North American Congress had 40 participants from the Oblate provinces of Lacombe, Notre Dame du Cap and the United States, made up of Oblates, laity and men from the three stages of formation. The invitations to the participants were done in collaboration with, and at the suggestion of the participating provincial superiors. As the focus was on the charism in context, we focused on people who were expressing the charism in response to different challenges. While acknowledging with admiration all the traditional ministries that we have engaged in since the time of St Eugene, our choice of speakers was made so as to throw light on different expressions of the charism as they are lived today. Our hope was that the insights gained on the charism in this way would enrich every Oblate ministry in North America.

The congress, hosted at Oblate School of Theology, started the day before the opening of the international section in Rome, and unfolded in two phases. In the morning the participants were joined by the leaders of the lay associate groups of Texas, some Oblates, honorary Oblates and members of the OST faculty in exploring three questions:

1. How could the wider Mazenodian family of Canada and the United States grow in and deepen their connection to the Oblate charism
2. What should be the directions to pursue in making Oblate studies an academic activity?

3. *How might the two Oblate institutes of higher learning in the region (University of St. Paul and Oblate School of Theology) assist in this effort?*

The presentations and discussion were enriching and are already producing fruit.

In the afternoon we were joined by many other members of the Mazenodian Family of the area for a “Charism Fiesta.” Oblates, lay associates, and friends celebrated our Mazenodian charism by sharing, stories and experiences of how the charism has touched their lives and made a difference to them and to others they have shared it with. This led to an unforgettable prayer service of celebration and thanksgiving for our charism, and this marvelous day concluded with a simple festive supper.

Empowered by this beginning, the congress participants gathered at 6:30 the next morning to join the international congress by internet. Each afternoon thereafter we had our own North American branch of the congress – joined by other internet auditors. The majority of the written texts that we received are being published below.

We were spell-bound as we listened to the presentations of the many faces of our charism today. Regional Councilor, Warren Brown, set the framework with: “The Oblate Charism in the Context of a Rapidly Changing North America.” From then we were transported to Mexico-USA border ministry, immigration, outreach to the periphery, tertiary education in Ottawa and San Antonio, the Aboriginal People of Canada, Hispanic ministry, Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation, fund-raising, the Brothers as evangelizers, arts, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, the corporate world of business, vocation direction, formation houses, inter-ethnic/urban parish ministry, mission centers, among many other facets touched on in the discussion groups after the presentations. One evening the leadership of the Provinces of USA, ND du Cap, and Lacombe described how they saw the charism in the context of their units.

All the participants agreed that the golden thread that ran through each presentation was our love for and dedication to the most abandoned – and our search for creative ways to “lead all to act like human

beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints.”

We were filled with a sense of awe at these expressions of our charism. The challenge and excitement of being a part of Eugene’s continuing missionary adventure was tangible. May you also experience something of this as you read the presentations which follow.

Frank Santucci, OMI, and Fernando Velazquez, OMI

THE OBLATE CHARISM IN THE CONTEXT OF A RAPIDLY CHANGING NORTH AMERICA

WARREN A. BROWN, OMI

The context is the demographic change, the decreasing number of personnel, and their vision in leading Oblates and lay associates to respond and express the charism in this context. (F. Santucci)

In a daring move for such a young and small religious congregation, Bishop Eugene de Mazenod sent the first Oblate missionaries to North America in 1841 in response to a plea for missionaries by Bishop Bourget of Montreal. This decision was the first of several subsequent responses to send the missionaries outside of France and even Europe: a sign of the missionary nature of the Oblate charism. These first Oblates in Canada came to answer the needs of a growing region of Catholic immigrants, but also a region where native peoples lived without the benefit of a Gospel witnessing presence. From those early days, the Oblate mission has grown and expanded throughout Canada and the US, so much so that by the 1960s, the greatest concentration of Oblates in the Congregation was located in Canada and the United States. Oblate missionaries heard the call of the Church to respond to needs in the mission from the furthest points in the north and the south, and from the east to the west. It is not unusual in our Canada-US region that the Oblates had established the local Church; they established many local churches, and they helped many others to flourish. But, what is the context of our Oblate charism today for a geographical region that has grown considerably in terms of population and at the same time has grown increasingly more affluent and technologically advanced yet where the Oblate population continues in diminishment? Aware of the challenges that the current situation poses, I would like to suggest some possible opportunities for the Oblate charism and our missionary way of life in today's context and offer some personal observations in light

of my experience and contacts as General Councilor for the Region of Canada-US.

Oblates in Canada-US Region	Fr.	Bro.	Sc.	Tot.
1987 Total for Canada and US Regions	1562	314	49	1925
2000 Total for Canada and US regions	1191	211	41	1443
2010 Total of Canada-US Region	753	125	12	892
2015 Total of Canada-US Region	649	103	10	713

Paraphrasing the words spoken by the Superior General Louis Lougen to another Oblate region regarding his reflection on the Oblate charism today, one might say that the fundamental questions that should not depart from the heart of every Oblate at this moment are: “What is the reality of North America today?” “What is the Lord calling us to do as OMI in North America?” “Where is God calling us to be?” “What is the Church calling us to do today?” The Superior General enjoins Oblates to keep the hope alive because he notices a very strong movement of the Holy Spirit in many ways. He calls on Oblates of the Canada-US Region to espouse the life of simplicity; to make themselves be accessible at all times; to be present in the lives of their people; to be truly Oblates! He enjoins us to involve, in this process, all the Oblates and our collaborators; this can only be possible if there is accountability and transparency in the process through communication.

In recent years the respective Oblate provinces in the region have gone through processes of discernment and restructuring so as to renew the Oblate mission and community. Three new provinces in the region were launched on the following dates: US Province in 1999, OMI Lacombe in 2003 and Notre-Dame du Cap in 2005. Though Assumption province did not join in the merger with the other Canadian provinces, that province’s leadership was involved throughout the Canadian restructuring discussions. The underlying purpose for this restructuring was to better adapt the Oblates and their charism to the mission today in North America. Understandably, these processes of restructuring did not reach their final completion on the dates when the new provinces were launched, but rather it has taken time to adjust to a new working style,

familiarize members and leadership on the former provinces' personnel and ministries, and develop new mission strategies. Only recently have the newly formed provinces begun to see their new identities emerge with the ongoing diminishment of resources in personnel and temporal goods. Overall the mission commitment remains strong and living the charism in a new context is taking shape: new mission strategies are emerging within the Provinces through processes of discernment (e.g., assemblies, congresses, consultations, mission statements, priorities) involving the entire membership; the missions *ad extra* in Baja California, Kenya and Zambia continue to develop robustly through the mentoring of the "mother" Provinces; mission in and through apostolic community is becoming an essential part of living the charism in the present context. While the way is not clear and questions abound, the commitment to mission to the poor, the continual search on how best to respond to current missionary needs and the creative attempts to respond to the signs of the times all indicate the vitality of the Oblate charism.

Several realities impact the Oblate charism in North America; those I will discuss here below are some of the more apparent ones. North America, in Canada and the United States, is a pluralistic society in which a great diversity of peoples, cultures and languages has come together. This has always been the case, but today even more so. The population in both countries continues to grow: the US population in 2000: 282.5 million, in 2015: 320 million; and the population of Canada: in 2000: 30.77 million, in 2015: 35.7 million. I believe the Oblate charism of mission and community is suited and is needed in such pluralism, since the poor and marginalized by the society and the Church, those who live on society's peripheries, are more numerous than ever. Among these pluralistic groups, let me mention two of them in particular as they relate to our Oblate charism: immigrants and the secular society.

One of the realities today is the large number of immigrants coming to North America, from Latin America and also from Asia and Africa. The early Oblate missionaries in the region worked with various immigrant groups who came from Europe, Mexico and Canada including the Polish immigrants of recent memory. Canadian statistics for 2013 show an immigrant population of 6.8 million or around 20 percent of the

Canadian population. Statistics on US immigration in the same time period show there were around 41.3 million immigrants living in the US, or 13 percent of the population. Today most of the Oblate parish ministry in North America is found in ethnic neighborhoods, downtown areas and native reserves. In several of these ministry centers the immigrant community is significant and Oblates have sought to welcome them. These immigrant groups are the poor and abandoned in our society today, as they have always been, without resources and rights. We will need to continue to search out these immigrant groups and try to reach out to them, as is being done, for example, at our shrines of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville and Notre-Dame du Cap in Trois-Rivières, or through the Oblate apostolic communities in Buffalo, Toronto and Vancouver, to name a few. Lay ministry studies in Oblate parishes, and at Saint Paul University and Oblate School of Theology, have sought to train lay Catholics for ministry, so they can serve especially among the immigrant communities, even most recently in the area of prison ministry. Saint Paul University in Ottawa has a long history of programs in missiology and family counselling and more recently in conflict resolution studies which are helpful for a better understanding of these developing trends in the Church and society.

The secularity and consumerism of North American life pose challenges to the Gospel message in general and can offer us new challenges for our Oblate charism. One US Oblate now a missionary overseas told me that he thinks the greatest missionary challenge for Oblates today in the US is more with the secularized and individualistic white Anglo majority than with the Hispanic or minority groups who are mainly Catholic and practice their faith and popular devotions. In Canada, too, this secularization is reflected in the decreasing number of people among the traditional Catholic groups who identify themselves as Catholic and who participate in Church activities; working with these secularized groups provides a missionary challenge. In the US there may be growing church attendance numbers because of the growing Hispanic population, yet the polarization of thought in the US has created a number of Catholics whose primary allegiance is to certain political causes rather than to the richness and challenge of the Gospel teachings of Jesus. It is difficult for many to challenge the status quo in an affluent society. Pope Francis' message of inclusivity and concern for all those people

on the margins and peripheries as expressed in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* finds a strong backing in our Oblate charism as we strive to bring the Gospel to the poor and those who are excluded. Finally, placing St. Eugene's emphasis upon prayer and renewal for those engaged in the mission of the Gospel in the context of the secularism, busyness, intrusions and noise of today's world, Oblate shrines, retreat houses and houses of prayer in the region help people who are seeking an oasis for prayer, renewal and contemplation.

The expansion of programs in recent years at Saint Paul University and its outreach to Canadian university students has seen positive results in trying to find a connection between the values of the Oblate charism and Catholic theological and pastoral studies which address the needs of the contemporary society; these efforts are to be commended highly. The school's recently announced School of Social Innovation offers a response in the spirit of the Oblate charism to poverty in today's society. At Oblate School of Theology, developments in the spirituality program, promotion of the ACTS Missions program and the school's recent entry into African-American theological training tries to answer a desire of those who feel the challenges of secularism. There is still much to be done, but at Saint Paul University and Oblate School of Theology the Oblates involved in higher education in the region have sought to reach out to the needs of contemporary Catholics in creative missionary ways and serve as resources to all the Oblates in the region.

The scarcity of Oblate vocations is surely a major factor which limits the possibilities for the Oblates to do mission in the region. Some of our important missions have suffered because of this, notably at the northern and southern peripheries where before we had many more Oblates working in the North with the Inuit people and in the south along the border with Mexico. Vocation directors have worked assiduously over the years with some result, but it is a challenge today to find young, and not so young, men who are interested in committing to a religious missionary vocation which would take them away from their local surroundings. Ministry with youth is a traditional Oblate ministry and has been a good way to connect with the young people: perhaps they might realize interest in a religious vocation in a mission experience. Many Oblates in the region are working with youth in congresses, preparing

for World Youth Days and the Oblate Youth Encounters prior to the same; weekly meetings for formation in the Oblate charism; missionary trips both within the Region as well as outside; solidarity projects and assistance to the poor in many forms; in schools with students and teachers. These ways of being with young people have borne the fruit of sharing in our Oblate mission and hopefully will continue to do so in the future years.

Living the Oblate charism in the present context of our Region necessarily involves the collaboration of Oblate lay associates. This expression of the charism of St. Eugene has grown and developed over time throughout the Region in an amazing variety of ways depending upon the particular province. Many laypersons have embraced the Oblate charism and the missionary zeal of Saint Eugene with enthusiasm and dedication. These men and women have found ways to participate actively in service to the poor and abandoned in a diversity of circumstances across the region, sometimes with the Oblates or other times they do so on their own initiatives. They have committed themselves to a life of prayer and to some form of living the community spirit within their own reality.

One important aspect of our Oblate charism is the focus on community life. This was always an essential component of St. Eugene's vision for his missionary society: Oblates should live and work together in a common mission. By contrast, our civil society in Canada and the US is one that becomes increasingly more scattered and individualistic and we see the breakdown of family and community structures, all often in the name of freedom and individual rights. Unfortunately the Oblates also, in the name of the mission, had begun to live apart and alone in large numbers, though they were officially and sometimes tenuously connected in "district communities". The renewed synergy in the Oblate North American provinces towards mission centers, in which Oblates live together as they work for a common mission of evangelization in a particular locale, is a sign that this aspect of the Oblate charism is re-awakening. Rather than a disparate group of strong one-man shows, the apostolic community is one which exudes a certain joy and community spirit. It was interesting to read the remarks given by one of our newest *ordinandi* in the region in an article written on the occasion of his ordination; he said that what most attracted him to the priesthood and spe-

cifically to the Oblates was his experience of the Oblate community he met in his local parish in Mississauga because they were down-to-earth and close to the people, visiting families and engaging the youth to be active. This is exactly what Pope Francis has been quoted as saying; the people look to those ministers who have the smell of the sheep and who can relate to people on the street corners. As the 1992 Oblate General Chapter quoted from St. John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* (42): "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in doctrine, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission..."

As has been mentioned, those living in democracies such as Canada and the United States are well aware of the Magna Carta and their subsequent countries' Bill of Rights. The ministry of the Oblates on behalf of justice and to give a voice to the poor and abandoned and help them seek their basic human rights has had a long history. Because of the Oblates' charism of being close to the people they serve, Oblate missionaries have helped the disenfranchised from the beginning of their arrival in North America for the rights of native peoples, immigrants, and the poor and abandoned by society. Perhaps it was fitting that an Oblate from our Region, the late Francis Cardinal George, gave impetus for the present Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation ministry of the Oblate Congregation which is now very active in both Canada and the US. Oblates in Canada have been active especially in recent years in the Truth and Reconciliation process and reconciliation with the 1st Nations peoples over the schools in reserves. The Oblate charism alive in the respective Oblates throughout North America who have been involved in community organizing has helped to better the life of the disenfranchised. The presence of the Oblates as members of VIVAT International, an NGO at the United Nations in New York, places the Oblate charism for justice, peace and integrity of creation within the world conversation as well. For many years Oblates in North America have been active in the corporate responsibility movement and the work of justice in relation with the international corporations, especially those based in North America whose policies have affected adversely the poor indigenous communities in Latin America in the area of mining and the extraction industries and also those who have built and run the maquiladora factories along the US-Mexico border.

Finally, the context of the Oblate charism today is seen in the Region's commitment to the mission *ad extra* which has always been an important element in our Oblate charism from the time of St. Eugene. The sending of Oblates to Canada and later the United States from France and Europe was a sign of St. Eugene's growing awareness of a responsibility to respond to the needs of the Church in places where the Oblates could be of help in evangelization. In their history the Oblates of Canada and the US inherited this charism of daring missionaries *ad gentes* and were responsible for establishing missions and/or building Oblate presence in many foreign countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Mexico, Guatemala, Philippines, Laos, Haiti, Peru, Lesotho, South Africa, China, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Greenland, Denmark, Tahiti, Bangladesh, Turkmenistan, Indonesia and today still in Zambia, Kenya and Baja California. There are 97 Oblates originating from Canada and the US who presently are serving in a foreign mission in these Oblate units or in others. This missionary spirit has also spread to our Oblate lay associates and to MAMI who have been full-fledged partners with the Oblate missions around the world. Today the need for missionaries *ad gentes* still exists. We have a renewed vision for missionary activity today in light of Vatican II and post-conciliar and post-colonial world, and in our Oblate charism and mission today in North America there still exists a need for those who could be credible witnesses of Jesus' love and mercy in many places around the world.

In recent years, the missionary *ad extra* charism of the Oblates in North America is experienced and embraced with the arrival of Oblate foreign missionaries to North America coming from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America to share their contribution in the missionary outreach of the Oblates here. Many of these Oblate missionaries are helping in the traditional missionary fields of the region which continue to grow and need more missionaries, especially in the far North regions of Nunavut and Quebec in Canada and the southern extreme along the US-Mexico border. Others have become instrumental for our Oblate mission here in North America to become more responsive especially to immigrant communities in our midst. Our two institutes of higher studies at Saint Paul University and Oblate School of Theology have developed orientation programs to help welcome these foreign missionaries, whether Oblates or other religious or diocesan priests, and better equip

them to be effective ministers of the Gospel in this region. This hospitality and welcoming spirit is a part of the Oblate charism that goes back to the time of the Founder, St. Eugene. Oblate leadership of the region and the members are learning how to unite this new missionary presence within the local Oblate communities to foment a rich spiritual and cultural experience of Oblate life and mission at the service of the new poor and the most abandoned.

The Oblate charism in North America since 1841 has been characterized by adaptability, flexibility, creativity and innovation ever since the first Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate began missioning in these lands. From the Far North of Canada to the Rio Grande intrepid missionaries adapted the charism to the context in which they were located and served society on the frontiers helping to establish outposts, villages and cities with all the necessary infrastructure. Today we attempt to do our part, in unison with our lay collaborators and with the resources that Oblates in the region have developed over the years. With the ever vital and present spirit of St. Eugene leading us in a daring missionary endeavor, we can continue to see the Oblate charism continue to grow and to adapt to the needs of the Church in our time.

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THE OBLATE CHARISM: A WORK IN PROGRESS

RONALD N. CARIGNAN, OMI

I have been asked to share with you on a missionary outreach to the corporate world that I have been involved in over the past years. In 2005 I left Zambia and came to San Antonio for knee replacement surgery. After recovering from the surgery I was asked by Fr. Ron Rolheiser to help out with an International Priest Internship underway at Oblate School of Theology. The IPI, as the internship became known, is a program for young priests coming to minister in the United States from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is intended to help them navigate the challenges of acculturation as they transition from ministering in their home countries to serving faith communities in the United States.

With time, I also found myself pursuing a side-line missionary outreach with service oriented corporations in San Antonio. This outreach took the shape of a value-based process aimed primarily at leadership development for chief executive officers and senior management personnel. What started out as a favor to a long-time colleague eventually became a challenging involvement in a rather unlikely expression of the Oblate missionary charism.

The title of my paper, *The Oblate Charism: a Work in Progress*, simply wants to highlight the fact that our missionary charism is a dynamic reality that evolves throughout its historical journey and is called to adapt to new places and circumstances.

MY STORY: HOW THIS MISSIONARY OUTREACH CAME ABOUT

My new sideline missionary outreach resulted from a long-standing association with *Values Technology*, a consulting firm based in Santa Cruz, California. Values Technology offers a technology that helps identify and measure values within a comprehensive model of individual and organizational development. Together they constitute a

helpful information-retrieval system for various aspects of personal and leadership growth.

In 1978, at the end of my second term as Provincial of the Western Province, Fr. Francis George, then Vicar General of the Congregation, asked me to develop a program for newly appointed provincials. A team was put together that included two other Oblates, Fr. Jim Sullivan from Brazil and Fr. Leo Paul Nobert from Canada, then Treasurer General of the Congregation.

Francis George introduced me to Dr. Brian Hall, an Anglican priest who was in Rome developing a value based discernment and development process with Benjamin Tonna a priest sociologist from Malta who was at the time the Director of Sedos, a documentation service located in Rome and dedicated to Church's global mission. As part of our preparation, we spent time with Brian Hall and Benjamin Tonna. We adapted and translated some of the value materials and integrated them in our program design. In December 1978, we facilitated the first Oblate Leadership Enrichment Program for Provincials (OLEP). It was soon dubbed the Oblate Charm School and continues in some form to this day. I did continue my association with Brian Hall and Benjamin Tonna over the ensuing years carrying out value work with corporations and religious groups throughout the world.

When the San Antonio Credit Union approached Brian Hall for help in facilitating a CEO leadership succession process, he asked me to represent VT since I was living in San Antonio. We met in Morell Hall at OST for a full day every month over a period of a year and a half. We also held two off site retreats at a nearby ranch. At the center of the discernment sessions were Jeff Faber, CEO of SACU, and Steven Hennigan, the top contender to replace Jeff Faber as CEO. At the time, Steve was the CEO of CUFBL, a subsidiary of SACU providing for factory built housing and the accompanying loan servicing. Other employees and consultants participated in the sessions from time to time and Brian Hall who was then bed-ridden was skyped in for the sessions.

Since then I have been involved with a number of corporations in helping them pursue one, two, or all three of the following processes.

1. Develop a value language for the members of the corporation;
2. Do a values assessment of the leadership and /or the corporation as a whole;

3. Help the corporation discern a value-based development trajectory. At times this mainly involved administering the VT Values Survey and briefing the participants on the results. At other times, as in the case of SACU, this involved accompanying them in a long term planning and development process.

OUTCOMES: SOME EFFECTS OF THIS MISSIONARY OUTREACH

My most sustained involvement in reaching out to the corporate world was with the San Antonio Credit Union. I worked as a team with Brian Hall and other Values Technology consultants including Elva Castaneda De Hall, the CEO of Values Technology; Rod Hall, a Lutheran pastor from California; Tony and Linda Dunkel, from Interactive Associates and the Bali Institute for Global Understanding in Indonesia. These are some of the outcomes we worked on with the SACU CEO Steve Hennigan and the senior managers.

The naming and assessment of values at SACU

The naming and assessment of values are important challenges for individuals and groups seeking integrated development. The difficulty lies in that many of our values are tacit. We are not always aware of all the values at work within us or the groups with which we live and work. Values Technology makes available three instruments that are helpful when working with values.

1. A List of 125 values with their standard definitions,
2. An interpretive continuum visualized as a Values Map,
3. A computerized Values Survey that helps surface the values of an individual or of a group.

In 2013, VT was contracted to do a values assessment and a strategic analysis for SACU. The *VT Values Survey* was given to the CEO and his Leadership Team, to some one hundred senior managers and to the SACU Volunteers. The SACU Volunteers include the Board of Directors, the Supervisory Committee and a group of Associate Volunteers. Individual value profiles as well as group profiles were produced and all were briefed with the help of a number of computer generated reports. Values Assessment and Strategic Analysis Documents were

prepared by Elva Hall and processed with the participants during a week-long session at the OST Whitley Center.

The learning of a value language at SACU

Knowledge creation is the ordering of chaos. We humans order things by categorizing and naming them. Good communication requires the ability to name things in a shared and constant way. Adopting a value language can greatly improve communication among the members of a group. This task can be facilitated by using the list of 125 values with their standard definitions developed by Brian Hall and his associates over many years of research and validation. These 125 values exist not only in our lives as individuals but also in the various institutions within which we live. They form clusters of meaning that shape our world view. They have equivalent expressions in most languages. VT holds four basic assumptions concerning the nature of values:

1. Values are ideals that shape and give significance to our lives. These are manifested in the priorities we choose, the decisions we make and the actions we take;
2. Values are gifts of the Spirit at the service of life;
3. Values are the way energy is focused by individuals and groups;
4. Values are mediators between the inner world of thoughts and images and the outer world of behaviors and relationships.

Once a group becomes versed in the use of a value language, communication is enhanced and value alignment can be more readily discerned. Reports utilizing a common value language are better understood. In working with SACU, key social values related to economic life and financial services were explored, values such as human dignity, service/vocation, generosity/ compassion, search/meaning/hope, contemplation, justice/social order, accountability/ethics, human rights and global justice.

The re-appropriation of the social purpose of a federal credit union

As we worked through the Value Assessment, the true purpose of a Federal Credit Union was rediscovered and better understood. It was discovered that the charter for federal credit unions was established by

the seventy-third Congress of the United States on January 3, 1934 and signed by Franklin Roosevelt as part of the New Deal legislation. The Act read in part: “To make more available to people of small means credit for provident purposes through a national system of cooperative credit.” In 1998, the Congress amended the Federal Credit Union Act in the following way: “The American credit union movement began by a cooperative effort to serve the productive and provident credit needs of individuals of modest means.” This amendment extended the pool of prospective members for credit unions.

Working with the SACU Board of Directors, the CEO established an ad hoc committee to flesh out the meaning of ‘modest means’ in today’s economy. There is no doubt that ‘individuals of modest means’ refers to those in society who are at the bottom rungs on the ladder of financial capacity. The SACU Leadership Team and the Board of Directors are challenged to be congruent with the chartered purpose when developing financial programs, policies and processes. They need to identify these ‘individuals of modest means’ and reach out to them with information and services that can help them handle their financial needs.

Recently the CEO and an ad hoc committee have been reaching out to struggling businesses in order to dialogue with them and help them enhance their financial know how and performance. A case in point is a recent personal visit by the CEO and other SACU personnel to Dos Carolinas, a guayaberas factory staffed by ‘individuals of modest means.’ Employees do not have bank accounts. Most are in trouble with credit cards. Many are in over their head with credit payments for homes and cars they purchased without proper advice. Steve Hennigan, the CEO, welcomed Dos Carolinas as a corporate member of SACU and all the employees are able to access the advice and services they need.

Working on value alignment

Early on, work was done with the CEO Leadership Team and the Board of Directors in reviewing and updating the SACU triple-bottom-line. A corporation’s triple-bottom-line refers to its priority value filters in the process of making important decisions. SACU’s triple-bottom-line emerged as sustainability in financial matters, human dignity in

dealing with employees and members, and service to society as its main orientation. These three values actually influence attitudes, policies and procedures throughout the organization. A high level of human sensitivity is observable. Employees are encouraged to be well informed on the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community. They are given a certain amount of working time to participate in the activities of groups seeking to address these needs. The employees continually reach 100 % participation in the UNICEF annual drive for volunteers and funds.

Reading of the signs of the times at SACU

In corporate planning this is often referred to as scanning the environment or clarifying the corporate context. For the SACU leadership, a discerned reading of the signs of the times is to be done in reference to the Credit Union's stated purpose and triple-bottom-line. One of the most obvious signs of the times for SACU as a financial service institution is that of the *growing economic inequality* resulting in increasing affluence at the very top of the population and in ongoing stagnation or worse for the rest of society. The forces at play in this increased inequality over the past three or four decades are not easy to detect. To understand them better we need to continue to explore social factors such as globalization, technological advances, de-unionization, superstar compensation, and returns on higher education.

Most serious observers do not doubt that the past 40 years have seen an unprecedented growth of economic inequality in America. Our parishioners and family members are very aware of this phenomenon, but they do not always understand the extent and the consequences of the shift underway. Pope Francis has talked and written extensively on the subject much to the chagrin of the political right. He sees how this growing gap between rich and poor affects many other measures of wellbeing. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he states clearly that "...we also have to say 'thou shall not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills."

Several significant social consequences flow from this excessive economic inequality and can be seen as emerging signs of the times. One is that economic inequality is being accompanied by *a growing segregation of Americans along class lines*. More and more families

live either in uniformly affluent neighborhoods or in uniformly poor neighborhoods. This trend has been translated into de facto *class-based school segregation*. Robert D Putnam in his book *Our Kids* explains how education segregation has consequences far beyond the classroom. “Ultimately, growing class segregation across neighborhood and schools means that rich Americans and poor Americans are living, learning, and raising children in increasingly separate and unequal worlds.”

The above points to another emerging sign of the times, *the growing opportunity gap between poor kids and well-off kids*. New fault lines are being experienced in many cities in *the growth of child poverty* within down scale neighborhoods as compared to gated communities. Almost a quarter of children in the United States live in families with incomes below the poverty line; some 45% live in low-income families. Most of these children have parents who work, but *low wages and unstable employment* leave their families struggling to make ends meet. Poverty impedes children’s ability to learn and contributes to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children’s well-being. No one searches for unhappiness, but many find it.

Another significant sign of the times related to economic and social stratification is *the growth in political polarization*. Over the past three decades people in the U.S. have clustered in communities of sameness among people with similar ways of life, beliefs, and in the end politics. There seems to be *a tendency to become more extreme at both ends of the polarization*. This is resulting in an inability among political parties to find even an inch of common ground. *Some of this polarization is happening in our faith communities as well*. The back and forth regarding issues to be taken up at the next synod on family life bears this out. Although debate is valuable, extreme positioning is not. This polarization spills over into the moral implications of a number of sensitive issues related to the common good, issues such as care for the planet, abortion, immigration, the use of military power, Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, subsidized housing, and education in poorer neighborhoods.

The reading of the signs of the times can have a positive effect on the SACU leadership. It can stimulate a healthy dialogue between the Leadership Team and the Board of Directors. All in all it can bring

about a greater awareness and a better understanding of the social context within which SACU functions as a financial institution. Initiatives to identify people of modest means and to reach out to them in intentional ways will become an important concern. Projects to establish credit union facilities in areas where people of modest means live and raise their children must be given a high priority!

THE OBLATE CHARISM: REFLECTIONS GROWING OUT OF MY EXPERIENCE

Reflection on our Oblate way of life has always been important to me. During my years of formation most of this reflection was somewhat intellectual and fed by the study of historical documents and the perspective of the Oblate formators with whom I crossed paths. Later, when I moved through a variety of assignments, reflection on the meaning and purpose of Oblate life and mission was mostly occasioned by my lived experience and interaction with Oblates who shared similar involvements. *Thus, my present understanding of the Oblate charism is one that has evolved over the years.* It reflects my missionary experience as well as my participation in wider Oblate discernment events over the years.

In preparing for this Congress on the Oblate charism, I spent time reviewing the impact of my various assignments on my understanding of our Oblate identity and mission. I also reviewed how my grasp of a continually changing Church and Oblate Congregation was conditioned by the leadership roles I exercised in my missionary journey. I am including some results of this review, highlighting in bold print what I see as shifts in awareness occasioned by my different experiences.

My early Oblate assignments

For the first ten years of my Oblate life, 1960 to 1970, I was involved in the ministry of education in three of our secondary schools in California. I lived and worked as part of a community of young and energetic Oblates from the five United States Provinces as well as from Ireland, Spain and Canada. We all had different theological formations that ran the spectrum from quite conservative to quite liberal. We followed closely the goings on at Vatican Council II and discussed extensively the deliberations and early implementations of the Council.

I became increasingly aware of the call to the renewal of religious life and along with my young Oblate colleagues sought to apply some of the emerging ideas to our Western Province. This was not always well received by the older members of the Province. Deep differences surfaced that would eventually cause some polarization in our renewal efforts.

My participation in the de Mazenod experience

In 1970 I attended the de Mazenod Retreat in Rome. For me, this was an important experience of the lived reality in the Congregation. Fr. Roger Gauthier, a wonderful and capable Oblate from Canada, directed the retreat and some twenty five Oblates from various parts of the world participated. It was a real eye-opener! I had encounters with Latin American Oblates in the throes of liberation theology, as well as Oblate worker-priests from France who were well versed and influenced by a Marxist way of doing historical analysis. A number of the participants were struggling with their Oblate vocation, several of whom eventually left.

I became increasingly aware of the paradigm shift occurring in our Congregation in the midst of what appeared to be an irreconcilable diversity. Things would never be the same. A new missionary vision that would offer ways of engaging the modern world was struggling to be born. The real world was struggling to gain traction over an ideal or abstract world.

My years as Director of Clergy and Lay Education for the Diocese of Oakland, CA

When I returned from the de Mazenod Retreat, I was asked by the Bishop of Oakland, CA, to set up an Office for Clergy and Lay Education in the Diocesan Chancery. These were great years, truly missionary years during which I worked with various pastoral agents, religious community leaders, theologians, social justice activists, liturgical reformers, and educators from various institutional levels. I consulted with the *Center for Planned Change* for help with complex group dynamics and the change process. I worked with parish leaders and helped develop parish councils and school boards. With Christian Brothers

from St. Mary's College, we organized lecture series with some of the most prominent theologians of the day. Working with major superiors of women and men congregations, I experienced the confusion that was surrounding the renewal of religious life. I also grew in my understanding of the dynamic nature of charisms responding to history and culture. With several major superiors, I discussed and applied the research of Raymond Hostie on the life cycle of a religious congregation.

I became increasingly aware of the historical forces that were continually shaping the Church and our Religious Congregations. I grew in my conviction that the documents of Vatican II offered the foundation of a renewed theology of church. We had to get over our reactionary fear of modernity and let in the light of some of its great thinkers. We had to deal with the tension between hope and nostalgia.

My years as Provincial of the Western Province

In 1972 I was named Provincial of the Western U.S. Province, a wonderful yet challenging experience of bringing leadership to a generous group of Oblates passing through a time of difficult transition. With the members of the Provincial Council, I attended a series of training sessions at the Center for Planned Change, a Jesuit run leadership consulting service. We were unaware of the tsunami-like change experience we were entering. Truly something familiar and comfortable was ending and something unfamiliar and uncomfortable was trying to begin. We survived as a Province for the time being and entered a renewal trajectory that would give us some good years. 1972 also marked my involvement in a series of General Chapter events in the Congregation.

The Western Province experienced the resignation of Richard Hanley as Superior General in a rather painful way since he was Provincial of the Province when he was elected General. It was an especially difficult moment for me since I was asked by the General Administration to accompany him in his discernment.

I became increasingly aware of the long term challenges involved in navigating the major transition we were experiencing in the Oblate Congregation and in the Church itself. There was a need for more adequate interpretive models to help us understand what we were experiencing. New resources and greater leadership capacity were needed.

My experience in renewal work and my years as President of CMSM

After my terms as Provincial, I spent a number of years preaching retreats and facilitating renewal sessions for Oblates and other religious communities. I teamed up with Oblates such as James Sullivan, Fred Sackett, John King, and Bill Hallahan. For a number of years I helped plan and facilitated the Annual National Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. In 1983 I was elected President of the Conference and served for three years in Washington, DC. I worked closely with the Leadership Conference of Religious Women as well as with the Latin American and Canadian Conferences of Major Superiors. I helped plan and facilitated joint sessions.

I realized the depth of the issues related to the cultural shifts occurring in the Church at the national and global levels. I became increasingly aware of the growing tensions between different ways of reading the present moment in the Church and in Religious Life, tensions that generated a difficult polarization. I came in touch with liberation theology and dispelled the one size fits all approach to theology. In 1973 the Vatican launched its first visitation of both men and women religious in the U.S. This opened up many interesting and revealing experiences with Cardinal Hamer and his staff at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life. The distance in world view was not easy to transcend.

My years as General Councillor for the U.S. Region

I was on the *Preparatory Commission* for the General Chapter of 1986. Ernest Ruche and Gerard Laprise rounded out the team with Fr. Fernand Jetté, Superior General as ex officio chair of the Commission. The Chapter produced the document *Missionaries in Today's World*. At the Chapter I was elected General Councillor for the U.S. Region. Thus began 12 years of service to the Congregation with Marcello Zago as Superior General. This rather long and extensive experience of the Congregation included participation in the General Chapters of 1992 and 1998. I also carried out several visitations to Provinces and Delegations in all six Regions of the Congregation. This afforded me the opportunity to be in touch with the lived reality of our Oblate mission-

ary presence in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, Canada and the United States.

I became increasingly aware of the consequences of the demographic shift occurring in the Congregation. Older Oblate units were diminishing and newer units were expanding. I recognized that the need for capable leadership and good planning was not always being met. It was clear to me that the restructuring of Provinces and Delegations was inevitable as well as a greater centralization of finances.

My years as Superior of the Delegation of Zambia

After my twelve years as a member of the General Administration, I went to Zambia to explore the possibility of developing a system of ongoing formation in the Delegation. A few months after my arrival, I was asked by the Provincial David Kalert to serve as Superior of the Delegation. I did so from 1999 to 2005. Being involved in the foundation phase of this Oblate Delegation was a challenging and exciting time. I tried to accomplish four things.

1. Facilitate a systematic reflection on the Oblate charism and its inculturation in Zambia.
2. Promote a serious reading of the signs of the times and explore feasible and viable responses as a Delegation.
3. Develop a community-based collaborative structure along with a coherent body of policies and procedures.
4. Provide a leadership experience for as many Zambian Oblates as possible and work with the U.S. Province to bring about a good leadership succession to a Zambian Oblate at the end of my mandate.

My years in Zambia were a blessing. Along with Oblates like Bishop Paul Duffy, Ron Walker, Pat Gitzen, and Jean Rene Talabo as well as with a continually growing group of awesome young Zambian Oblates, we journeyed through the foundation phase and entered the expansion phase in the life cycle of the Delegation.

I grew in awareness of the critical need for resource development within and among the emerging units of the Congregation. Such a development calls for well focused strategies of affirmative action animated from the General, Regional and Sponsoring unit levels. I realized that our regional structures needed to be improved and better animated.

More extensive and intensive leadership training would be needed in our emerging units. The development of a feasible and viable system of ongoing formation should be encouraged and enabled.

My years with the International Priests Programs at OST

After my years in Zambia, I was asked by Fr. Ron Rolheiser to help in the development of programs for international priests at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio. I worked on and directed the IPI (International Priests Internship) for eight years. Fr. Vince Louwagie took over the IPI program and I spent the next years collaborating in a research project with CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) which resulted in the book *Bridging the Gap* about the opportunities and challenges of international priests ministering in the United States Church. I also worked with Fr. John Staak in some preliminary work in view of an Oblate Missionary Institute.

I became more aware of the great diversity in the Church and the awesome challenges of multi-culturality. Priests are not interchangeable parts. We can be a little cavalier in lauding the richness of multi-culturality without investing resources in enabling a multi-cultural capacity. I do not pick up much willingness on the part of a number of bishops to even recognize the issues involved. Newly arrived Oblate priests from India and Zambia have been participating in the Internship. By and large they stand out among the participants. It is important at this time for the Province to develop a strategy of integration for these young priests coming to be missionaries with us. Their early placement and the presence of mentors are most important.

My Experience in the Outreach to the Corporate World

Over the past eight years or so, I worked with leaders from a number of corporations including financial, energy production and health care institutions. As indicated earlier on in this paper, I worked more intensely with the San Antonio Credit Union and its CEO Stephen Hennigan. I experienced the travail of transition underway in SACU as well as throughout the world of business and public service. All seem to be caught up in serious change processes.

I grew in awareness of how non ecclesial institutions can reach out to the poor and to those at the margins of economic life. Business leaders are well positioned to be salt of the earth and light of the world where life happens day in, day out. They can be catalysts for the living of Gospel values. I understand better how to talk about the vocation of service in the workplace. Meaning and purpose can be explored. Human dignity, accountability/ethics, contemplation, human right, and global justice can be the subject of individual coaching and team sharing. I also experienced in a real situation how working with values can help facilitate organizational change.

CONCLUSION

Comments on Our Oblate Charism

In the working paper produced by the organizers, the first objective of the Oblate Charism Congress was presented as “to listen to the opportunities and the challenges to the Oblate charism from its being lived in different contexts, with a view to developing strategies for a new impetus for the entire Congregation, 200 years after its birth.” I believe this statement expresses well the two major expectations I bring to this experience – to listen to the lived experience of our Oblate charism and to look at new strategies for an effective way of living it into the future. In the same section of the working paper we find the statement “It is to be supposed that the nature of the Oblate charism is now clear.” This is a valid working assumption since we do not want to continually reinvent the wheel. However, I do believe that our charism is a historical reality and evolves over the years. I also believe that the present moment in the life of the Congregation calls for new ways of looking at our charism.

It has been helpful for me, over the years, to see our Oblate charism as a life principle coming from the Spirit and incarnated in a missionary presence. This missionary presence is to be given direction and energized by a constellation of specific values identified by our Founder and the members of our early Founding Communities. These values are not only a message from the past but a resource for the present as well. Over the past two hundred years, these values have been continually

discerned and interpreted by a series of General Chapters representing living Oblate communities throughout the Oblate world.

In the light of the above, I would like to share the following observations.

Observation One: I would suggest that we highlight the reality of a missionary presence as the integrating factor in our understanding and living out of our graced gift to the Church and the world. Our lived experience as Oblates occurs at the individual level as well as at the level of various groupings such as team, community, delegation, province, or region. All are vehicles of the Oblate missionary presence. Even when ministering alone, the activities of an Oblate can be an expression of our corporate missionary presence. Planning strategies for our missionary future can take on a clear specificity when aligned with a given missionary presence. Thus, we can avoid continually coming up with the vague language of conversion as the way forward. Ongoing conversion is indeed needed. However, more importantly, we must also elaborate ways of improving our missionary orientation and action.

Observation Two: I would encourage the use of a value language when reflecting on the elements we have discerned as being part of our charism. I find such an approach quite promising in promoting a shared understanding of our charism. As a prerequisite it would be useful to have a shared understanding of the nature of values as presented on page 3 of this paper. The elements that were discerned at the Congress of 1976 as constitutive of our charism take on a new light when seen as values. They are the realities that give direction and energize our missionary presence. Values such as the centrality of Jesus Christ, apostolic community, and religious life offer important areas of discernment when reviewing the vitality of our missionary presence. When these values are absent, our missionary presence loses a sense of direction as well as important sources of energy.

It may be helpful to note that the realities of *missionary* and *presence* are themselves values and need to be understood as such. The thrust of these two realities has evolved over the years and call for adaptation and inculturation. While they carry a shared understanding among Oblates, they often reflect a significant uniqueness when conditioned by the specific context of time and place. Today, as we seek to name our present moment and discern a life-giving trajectory, theologi-

cal reflection on the values of missionary and presence could be quite useful. Reading the signs of the time and the trends in the Congregation as proposed in the Congress *Working Paper* are right on target.

The elements discerned at 1976 Charism Congress and later integrated in first part of our 1980 Constitutions and Rules, are to be privileged. The values they represent include the centrality of Jesus Christ, love for the Church, apostolic community, integral evangelization, preference for the poor, religious life, closeness to Mary Immaculate, and response to most urgent needs. I believe we can always continue to round out the constellation of values that energize our charism. We could include the value of *daring*. I believe this value has taken a back seat in our contemporary missionary presence. I believe we could also include reading the signs of the times since it is part of our lived experience these days. Perhaps the election of Pope Francis is one of the major signs of the times in the Church. He seems to be keen on animating the missionary dimension of the Church, continually calling for boldness and creativity as he does so. He really lays this out in number 3 of *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.”

Observation Three: Understanding the dynamics involved in the development of values can help in planning strategies for a focused missionary presence and coherent formation programs. Two basic conditions need to be met, enabling supportive environments and facilitating access to the resources needed to activate the capacities underlying the values involved. In an individual or a group’s value profile there are three clusters of values, a cluster of focus values dealing with the present, a cluster of foundation values emerging from the past, and a cluster of vision values pulling into the future. It is helpful to be aware of the values involved, to understand how they situate themselves in a developmental continuum, and to discern the attitudes and skills that support these values.

Observation Four: Without laboring the obvious, the quality of leadership at the various levels of the Congregation is critical to the success of the planning and execution of our many missionary projects.

Well informed collaborative leaders are needed to animate emerging ‘new source units’ in the Congregation so they can attain a viable sustainability. In view of this, the effectiveness of our leadership has to be continually evaluated and ways of intentionally improving it explored. This is not an easy task. Leadership development and leadership succession are very complex and sensitive areas. In seeking to understand these two elements, we can begin by thoroughly debriefing Oblate leaders when they finish their mandate. This can be part of the research function of the General Administration. Resources for this function have yet to be developed and made available.

Observation Five: A helpful continuum I use in charting the value development of an individual or a group is that of *a path moving from awareness through understanding to capacitation*. Groups seem to have a tendency to want to stay in activities related to awareness and understanding. Moving from awareness and understanding to capacitation involves a leap from the notional to the strategic. This involves activities related to a shift in attitudes, to the pursuit of appropriate skills, and to the development of feasible and viable strategies.

Our charism and the way forward

We are preparing for the General Chapter of 2016. In its deepest meaning a General Chapter is a time of encounter between our Oblate charism and the Church and world of today. Part of the chapter event must be a serious reading of the signs of the times. Equally important is an honest reading of the health of our missionary presence and the values that give it direction and energy.

Among the signs of the times in the world that impact on the poor we readily see a growing economic inequality with its resulting social stratification and opportunity gaps in education and employment. How informed are we about these phenomena and their moral imperatives? Another sign of the times has to do with the growing anxiety around climate change and fossil fuel consumptions. Ecology and environmental ethics are concerns for the scientific community that Francis addressed in his letter on the environment. How informed are we about these concerns? Do we see the impact they have on poorer nations?

Among the signs of the times in the Church is the election Pope Francis. He is calling for an “evangelizing missionary Church.” This

certainly speaks to our vocation. Are we hearing his call to pay attention to the real world and develop an inclusive and merciful Church.

Among the signs of the times in the Congregation is the effect of the demographic shift underway in all our Oblate Units throughout the world. This situation points to the need for a resourceful Oblate Missionary Institute in the Congregation. Such an Institute is presently being considered at OST. It would be of immeasurable help to have a resource that would help Oblates throughout the world initiate and monitor research, facilitate planning, manage project, promote dialogue, enable leadership development and encourage multi cultural collaboration.

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SUR LE CHARISME OBLAT DANS LA PROVINCE NOTRE-DAME DU CAP

LUC TARDIF, OMI

LE CONTEXTE

La sécularisation accélérée

Nous sommes dans une société où les religions doivent être confinées au privé. Catholiques, nous sommes discrets, minoritaires et regardés avec une certaine méfiance : mémoire encore blessée et amplifiée ou déformée dans les processus de transmission générationnelle. Personne n'est neutre dans notre société.

Le vieillissement des communautés chrétiennes et des Oblats

Nous vivons la disparition progressive de nombreux signes d'engagements. On peut parler de crise du membership et du leadership tant dans les communautés chrétiennes que dans les communautés oblates ;

Il y a ici aussi de nouvelles communautés religieuses ici aussi : Marie-Jeunesse.

La collaboration très étroite entre les communautés religieuses

et avec les Églises étrangères aussi collaboration entre les Églises locales du Québec et les Églises d'Afrique et d'autres continents pour assurer le ministère pastoral et presbytéral.

Nous sommes en train de devenir comme la société une Église plus multiculturelle tout comme notre province oblate d'ailleurs.

C'est aussi le cas au sanctuaire Notre-Dame-du-Cap : ce sont les minorités culturelles qui ressuscitent actuellement le sanctuaire.

Les gens cherchent encore du sens et des rituels pour accompagner les moments significatifs de leur existence :

naissance, décès, maladie, vieillissement, solitudes.

Sommes-nous équipés pour les accompagner, pour tenir un discours qui recoupe leur langage et leurs soucis? Un confrère se fait dire qu'il n'est pas nécessaire qu'il prêche durant les funérailles. Les témoignages suffiront.

De nouvelles pauvretés, de nouveaux besoins de salut :

les personnes âgées, Mourir dans la dignité.

Il y a encore des chrétiens très engagés dans les questions de justice et paix et intégrité de la création : ils sont moins nombreux mais ils sont actifs.

Les communautés autochtones. Les premières nations.

Des défis de transmission dans toutes les institutions, mouvements, organisations

La militance est ponctuelle. Rupture entre les générations, crise de la transmission.

Les facultés de théologie en péril tout comme l'enseignement religieux

et pourtant l'approfondissement et la maturation de la pensée chrétienne demeurent un défi plus que jamais pertinent et urgent en quelque sorte. Pauvreté au niveau du sens, de la proposition de l'Évangile : le discours catholique est considéré comme vieillot et impertinent. Bonne nouvelle et signe des temps : la théologie à Saint-Paul: théologie pratique et dialogue avec les sciences humaines.

La formation risque de devenir un parent pauvre.

LE CHARISME OBLAT

Le charisme Oblat est comme une culture.

Une culture, c'est une manière d'être en relation, de penser et de voir et enfin des manières de faire.

Un style relationnel, des «clés de sens» ou une vision de foi qui a ses propres sensibilités ; et des manières de faire, des pratiques.

Comme une culture, le charisme d'une famille religieuse est une réalité dynamique qui subit des transformations et provoque aussi des changements dans les milieux où il se réalise.

La qualité de l'interaction du charisme oblat avec les autres membres de l'Église, avec le peuple de Dieu, avec les différentes cultures l'enrichit et le transforme.

Relations : y a-t-il une manière «oblate» d'être en relation ?

Proximité. Fraternité, communauté, accueil, hospitalité. Unité.

Internationalité : aller à l'étranger : inviter des OMI à se joindre à nous. Des hommes apostoliques au coeur universel.

Relations entre nous. Relations avec le Christ Sauveur.

L'identité oblate est devenue plurielle.

Le sens : y a-t-il une manière «oblate» de voir le monde, de chercher à le comprendre ?

Dieu est à l'oeuvre dans le monde actuel, ce que traditionnellement nous appelions parfois la Providence. Acquis du Concile : une théologie des signes des temps ;

Discerner l'Esprit à l'oeuvre dans le monde actuel ;

Besoins de salut ; signes et artisans du Royaume, un monde différent ;

Le mystère pascal ;

Penser en Église ;

Le sens n'est plus seulement dans la tradition reçue mais dans la vision partagée et recherchée.

Le sens se construit avec l'élargissement d'une histoire à écrire qui devient de plus en plus inclusive comme humanité aux différentes cultures et religions.

Le dialogue avec les autres confessions chrétiennes et les autres religions risquent d'enrichir et d'approfondir le sens de ce que nous vivons.

Des pratiques : collaboration et coresponsabilité

Dans la présence et l'évangélisation des pauvres.

Ne pas renoncer à une vision d'Église, celle de Vatican II : le peuple de Dieu.

Des pratiques de discernement communautaire : choisir le temps à l'espace comme nous y invite la pape François dans son exhortation *La joie de l'Évangile*.

Le contexte actuel et depuis Vatican II a enrichi le charisme Oblat :

La mission est l'affaire de tous, de tout le peuple de Dieu :

Nos pratiques de collaboration s'élargissent et intègrent tous les baptisés et les artisans de bonne volonté qui travaillent à l'avènement d'un monde meilleur.

Émergence des associé-es et des groupes et communautés qui se réclament du charisme oblat.

PRÉSENT ET AVENIR DU CHARISME OBLAT DANS NOTRE PROVINCE

Nous sommes dans une dynamique de transformation. Le charisme oblat change le contexte et le contexte change le charisme. On peut décrire ce processus en termes de corrélation mutuelle, critique et créatrice.

La tâche est l'inculturation du charisme oblat dans notre contexte culturel et ecclésial d'une part, mais également en tenant compte aussi de notre propre réalité.

Le défi demeure de faire des choix : ne pas subir le contexte mais participer à la création d'un contexte nouveau. Comme province, à partir du charisme oblat et du contexte actuel, tant le nôtre que celui de la société et de l'Église, nous avons identifié des directions missionnaires qui deviennent des critères et des points de repères pour nos choix et décisions : (1) Évangélisation; (2) mission jeunesse et vocation; (3) formation de disciples et de leaders; (4) la promotion du communautaire.

L'heure des choix :

Laisser aller et privilégier.

Laisser aller ce qui ne correspond plus à notre charisme, qui ne répond plus à des besoins de salut. Par exemple, nous avons quitté de nombreuses paroisses.

Laisser aller ce qui dépasse nos capacités, nos ressources : nous sommes maintenant très peu engagés dans l'éducation populaire et soutenons de manière très modeste le Centre Saint-Pierre Apôtre.

Nous avons quitté et laissé aller des maisons de retraites et des centres des ressourcements.

Nos priorités :

les Innus sur la Côte Nord et les Cris à la Baie James ; le charisme oblat à son meilleur parmi les exclus, marginalisés, à la périphérie.

Priorité : la coresponsabilité baptismale ; la présence aux jeunes générations.

Dépasser la religion des funérailles et des baptêmes pour être présent, proche, marcher avec, accompagner, soutenir, proposer.

Le sanctuaire à Notre-Dame-du-Cap : les pauvres aux multiples visages ;

Le sanctuaire est un lieu par excellence pour réfléchir et chercher à répondre aux nouveaux besoins, aux nouveaux pèlerins, aux nouvelles cultures.

Les activités traditionnelles ne répondent plus aux sensibilités contemporaines : que ferons-nous ? Chercher les clientèles qui sont encore attirées par le style traditionnel et démissionner par rapport à notre contexte culturel : une possibilité.

Les étudiants à Ottawa ; les jeunes

La paroisse : collaboration avec St.Joseph mettre tout en oeuvre pour garder contact et proximité avec les jeunes.

DEUX OBSERVATIONS

Notre présence et engagement actif dans certaines institutions

Exigent néanmoins de l'audace, de la créativité au coeur des continuités : que ce soit en paroisse, au sanctuaire ou à l'université, compte tenu des changements sociaux et culturels mais aussi ecclésiaux,

Il faut refonder en quelque sorte les oeuvres de l'intérieur.

Le défi : nous avons parfois peu de personnel et/ou de ressources qui pourraient ou peuvent imaginer les choses autrement.

Notre capital de créativité est plutôt limité : par exemple dans le cas de certaines revues qu'on publiait, nous n'avons pas été capables de les transformer suffisamment pour qu'elles survivent et maintiennent un lectorat significatif.

Le défi demeure : apprendre à bien quitter

et à préparer tant nos départs que l'après départ :

Dans la transmission, on a parfois la tentation de tout céder et de quitter : ou nous sommes totalement responsables ou nous quittons complètement :

Dans nos paroisses, au centre Saint-Pierre, à l'université, dans les missions autochtones.

Nous avons peu d'expériences d'accompagnement avant de quitter et après avoir quitté : des mesures de transition et de soutien sont pourtant nécessaires.

Comment transformer notre présence et notre contribution sans nous déresponsabiliser ?

Comment laisser un héritage qui soit plus qu'une pièce de musée ou des noms sur des locaux ou des bâtiments : laisser un esprit, une sagesse, bref un charisme.

LA QUALITÉ DE LA COMMUNION ET DE LA COLLABORATION

Nous avons la responsabilité de maintenir vivante et dynamique cette communion et cette collaboration entre nous et avec nos partenaires, avec le peuple de Dieu, avec nos employés. Subsiste le danger de se replier sur nous-mêmes et d'être plus préoccupés de notre santé, sécurité et survie alors que nous sommes solidaires avec toute l'Église et la société et la la Congrégation.

Maintenir vivante la communion, c'est consentir à prendre le risque de l'élargir et à vivre ce risque avec confiance en sachant que les choses se font et se feront autrement : faire appel à des ressources extérieures, entre autres, des Oblats de d'autres unités mais aussi des laïques qui assument des responsabilités que nous avons toujours exercées dans le passé. La prise en charge de nos anciens ; les archives, l'administration, etc.

Nous choisissons donc de vivre avec passion la communion actuelle et de promouvoir le communautaire sous toutes ses formes comme l'une de nos directions missionnaires.

Vivre la communion et en faire la promotion avec reconnaissance, lucidité, et sagesse sans renoncer à l'espérance, une espérance qu'il importe de nommer, de laisser émerger. Car nous croyons qu'il importe de partager notre foi et notre espérance également.

Le charisme oblat dans notre province conteste et remet en question la manière dont nous traitons les personnes âgées et les malades. Il s'inscrit cependant aussi dans un mouvement de société où on les rassemble et souvent, ce faisant, on les isole. Nous portons les mêmes questions que la société : acharnement thérapeutique ou cessation de traitements extraordinaires.

SE BATTRE POUR PROTÉGER ET APPROFONDIR LE SENS DE LA VIE, DE
L'ÉVANGILE ET LA PERTINENCE DE LA BONNE NOUVELLE.

Le chercher et le partager : le sens ne va pas de soi :

Deux directions missionnaires sont concernés :

L'évangélisation et la formation de disciples et de leaders chrétiens.

Il y a une tentation permanente et un danger de verser dans la nostalgie, le cynisme, la démission, la dépression. Du coup, nous sommes à risque de perdre de vue la beauté du présent et la grandeur de l'espérance.

Faire une lecture spirituelle, théologique de notre vécu actuel comme de celui du monde. Le défi demeure de faire une lecture spirituelle dépouillée de nos critères traditionnels, de nos images d'Église, et même du modèle du chrétien idéal.

Il y a un désir réel et presque généralisé d'être en dialogue et en conversation avec les convictions, questions et expériences des gens d'ici.

Que ce soit par la prédication, l'enseignement ou les publications, nombreux sont les confrères qui cherchent à vivre l'évangile et l'évangélisation de manière créatrice et diversifiée. Certains d'entre nous ont réussi de manière admirable en répondant à de réels besoins : Monbour-

quette qui a «adressé» avec compétence et profondeur des questions et problématiques très existentielles. Même chose à Saint-Paul par exemple.

Nous avons une longue tradition de formation et de ressourcement, d'éducation populaire et ministérielle. Nous continuons d'y participer et avons à coeur de former des disciples et des ministres pour le monde contemporain, capables de suivre le Christ et de discerner l'Esprit à l'oeuvre dans notre monde actuel.

Une mémoire reconnaissante oui, mais pas emprisonnante :

Nous souvenir avec reconnaissance ; un passé glorieux, long et très diversifié.

Des personnes, des oeuvres, des institutions, des milieux et des cultures.

La mémoire permet d'être fidèle à nos sources et de favoriser leur mise en valeur.

Tout mettre en oeuvre pour protéger la qualité de la mémoire et l'intégrité de l'histoire : archives, publications et notices nécrologiques ; honorer la contribution de nos prédécesseurs. Investir donc dans l'aménagement d'espaces qui rendent notre mémoire et notre histoire accessibles : inviter et soutenir des chercheurs capables de raconter notre histoire.

Assumer donc la responsabilité du devoir de mémoire fait partie de notre charisme et de notre mission. Le film : Les missionnaires : visionnement possible ?

Le défi à ce niveau : transmission de la mémoire aux plus jeunes. Mais pas au point de conjurer ou étouffer leur imagination et créativité. Ce devoir de mémoire est d'autant plus nécessaire que nous vivons dans une culture où elle est à la fois très courte et parfois fort biaisée. Nous parlons ici d'une mémoire blessée par rapport au leadership de l'Église au Xxe siècle.

Avoir le courage de semer, envisager l'avenir et de planter :

De ne pas se contenter des gestes du court-terme ou à effet immédiat.

Nous contestons le contexte actuel qui sacralise le moment présent et refuse de considérer l'avenir à moyen ou long terme. Il y a un avenir.

La conscience vocationnelle : la capacité de saisir et comprendre sa vie comme un tout, comme une histoire : que voulons-nous faire de toute notre vie ?

Qu'est-ce qui fera que nous aurons été fiers de l'avoir vécu et donné ?

Nous mettons des énergies et des ressources au service de la mission jeunesse et la mission vocation dans nos différents milieux.

C'est une direction missionnaire qui nous tient à coeur, spécialement dans les régions d'Ottawa et du sanctuaire Notre-Dame du Cap.

Des pratiques

Les pratiques dans le charisme oblat réfèrent sans doute plus que jamais à la collaboration, au caractère communautaire de la mission, à l'exercice du leadership partagé. Or, dans le contexte actuel, nous sommes appelés à développer une nouvelle compétence, celle de l'accompagnement.

De fait, je crois que le mot clé ici est l'accompagnement : «Connecting with and caring for, sharing...»

Développer et approfondir, diversifier nos compétences pour accompagner, pour marcher avec les personnes, accompagner les jeunes confrères qui se joignent à nous.

Accompagner les personnes et les communautés qui vivent des passages importants.

Apprendre à accompagner aussi nos communautés et nos confrères âgés.

Accompagner : et toute la gamme de verbes et d'actions que cela suppose comme l'écoute, la présence, le discernement de la parole, reconnaître l'autre dans sa singularité, etc.

Le défi demeure que nos pratiques soient enracinées à la fois dans la réalité et dynamisées par une vision.

Ne pas renoncer ni à la réalité ni à la vision : entre cynisme et spiritualisation outrancière. Missionnaires jusqu'au bout à condition de persévérer comme disciples, la capacité de sortir de soi et d'apprendre, de chercher à écouter et obéir à l'Esprit.

L'animation passe par les rassemblements, les échanges, le dialogue, la présence, les visites, les sorties, l'hospitalité.

Des pratiques de foi, inspirées par la confiance que les petits gestes peuvent faire une grande différence.

Des pratiques communautaires de partages.

Des pratiques de rassemblement pour promouvoir le communautaire, la fraternité, les échanges, la coresponsabilité.

Cette promotion du communautaire comme direction missionnaire vaut aussi pour les jeunes Oblats qui peuvent être portés à agir seul, à valoriser leurs propres engagements et projets. La conversion au communautaire demeure un défi aussi pour nous responsabilité par rapport à l'avenir du charisme oblat et de notre mission dans le contexte actuel.

Nous sommes conscients qu'en prenant de l'âge et en faisant face au vieillissement, les communautés sont plus nombreuses. Il y a des regroupements plus importants et les services deviennent plus sophistiqués. De moins de moins de confrères sont capables de prendre des responsabilités, que ce soit sur le plan communautaire ou missionnaire. Le leadership devient un enjeu important ; la seule issue est de le partager mais souvent les gens ont peu de réflexe ou d'intérêt dans cette perspective. Nous vivons encore dans la mentalité du supérieur qui voit à tout et pourvoit à tout.

Contestation du contexte

Ce n'est pas l'efficacité, la rentabilité, la production, le succès ou les résultats à tout prix qui nous obsèdent et motivent toutes nos décisions. La gratuité dans nos pratiques, la capacité de semer et de respecter le rythme du temps.

À l'heure du communautarisme et des ghettos culturels, des communautés interculturelles sont prophétiques chez nous comme ailleurs. L'appel à la solidarité dans la Congrégation n'est pas liée avant tout à la survie de nos institutions mais à la qualité de notre présence missionnaire comme témoignage qu'il est possible de vivre ensemble dans la diversité culturelle.

CONCLUSION

Le charisme oblat dans la société québécoise et l'Église d'ici a de l'avenir. Nous nous inscrivons dans des directions missionnaires qui répondent à des besoins de salut actuel et très concrets.

Ils sont liés à une quête de sens qui dépasse l'immédiat et le quotidien et permet de vivre dans l'espérance. Que ce soient les milieux autochtones ou les personnes âgées, il y a une faim et une soif de bonne nouvelle qui alimente le sens de la dignité personnelle, qui confirme la légitimité de leur existence, qui soutient leur participation à l'avènement d'un monde meilleur, qui confirme les désirs d'une qualité de vie intégrant les relations avec toutes les générations.

Ces besoins de salut s'inscrivent aussi dans l'importante d'approfondir sa foi pour qu'elle puisse dialoguer de manière cohérente, sérieuse et crédible avec le monde actuel, que ce soit d'autres religions et d'autres manières de penser. Ils s'inscrivent dans le désir de participer et d'exercer des responsabilités dans les milieux de vie, qu'ils soient civils, citoyens ou religieux.

Enfin, ces directions missionnaires font appel au meilleur de notre tradition apostolique, celle de la charité et de l'unité, et donc la promotion de la fraternité, du communautaire et de la convivialité dans une société et une parfois des communautés chrétiennes où règnent l'individualisme et le «chacun pour soi». Le communautaire permet de sortir de l'isolement, du sentiment d'impuissance et de l'indifférence par rapport aux différentes formes de pauvreté actuelle.

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A CHANGE OF HEART: DISCERNING NEW DIRECTIONS IN OMI LACOMBE CANADA

KENNETH THORSON, OMI

... our whole life style as missionaries had to change so that we could live together more harmoniously, be more consistent in prayer and reflection, and then cross the borders to witness to Jesus Christ to the poorest and most abandoned in more creative ways. (Fr Steckling's Opening Address to the 35th General Chapter, September 2010)

The call to conversion is nothing new. As Oblates and Associates we are always called to conversion in our ministry and community life. But just a year after the last Chapter, at OMI Lacombe's Vancouver Convocation in 2011, our present Superior General, Fr Louis Lougen, would speak to a certain urgency in this call, and to the possibilities it holds: "The call to conversion is the dynamic process by which we strive to participate in God's mission... and makes it possible for OMI Lacombe Canada to discern new directions in ministry, participating as a community of consecrated men and Associates in God's mission."

DEMOGRAPHICS

This call to discern new directions comes as OMI Lacombe Canada grows older and diminishes in number. This diminishment has occupied us for decades but it grows more striking each year. A quick look at the numbers in recent Canadian history shows that consecrated life is lived by those who are advancing in age and declining in number. In 2012 there were between 18,000 and 20,000 male and female religious in Canada. This number will decline by about 1000 per year for the next five to seven years. The Oblate numbers reflect this trend:

- In 2004 there were 365 Oblates in OMI Lacombe Canada. Today, 198

- In all of Canada in 2004 there were about 750 Oblates. Today there are about 440.
- In the Province of OMI Lacombe Canada today there are only 4 Oblates under the age of 55, born in Canada.

While the rate of diminishment will slow in the coming years, it is clear that religious (Oblates included) life as it has been known in North America for the last two hundred years will essentially have ceased to exist. Consequently, the Oblates will be smaller, poorer, and have less influence than at any time since our arrival in Canada in 1841.

SOME OF THE ISSUES WE FACE

And the wider social and ecclesial context is not without its questions and challenges:

The New Face of the Canadian Church – The growth in our Catholic churches is largely the result of new immigrants, and Oblates in OMI Lacombe, with the exception of First Nations and Metis communities, minister largely in white Anglophone parishes.

Shifting First Nations Demographics – While more and more Aboriginal people migrate to urban centers, the bulk of Oblate Aboriginal ministry is located in northern and rural settings.

General Mistrust of Institutions – Like us, most religious communities operating in Canada today trace their origins to the religious and social disruption of 18th and 19th century Europe. The environment of the Religious of these times was one where schools, hospitals and prisons (to name only a few) were seen as the answer to the ills of society. Being children of their time, Religious responded to the needs they encountered through the creation of institutions. What happens (and here think Residential Schools and the more sexual abuse crisis) however, when institutions are proved to be harmful to the very people they claim to protect? When Pope John XXIII called for the Council, diminishment was already beginning for Religious Life as institution, even though the full effects of this diminishment would not hit Canada for another decade or so.

Lack of a Vocational Culture – While it is true that few young men are considering the possibility of Oblate life, it is also true that too few Oblates offer the invitation. Thirty years have passed since we closed

our last Oblate-run high school; the time when new members filtered into our ranks through our schools, when little vocational effort was required by most Oblates, is long gone. We want new membership, and yet most of us have not taken up the task of explicitly inviting young men to consider Oblate life.

Social Media and Communications – As we grapple with the rapid change re social media, and the questions this raises for us in the moral and ethical realms, we are often a generation behind the latest trends in information sharing and networking.

It is not surprising then, that some Oblates believe our best before date has past, and that there are fewer years ahead of us than behind. While our present diminishment all too apparent, it does not follow, that the work of the Oblates OMI Lacombe has come to an end. For the moment, the call is to perseverance, trusting first that there is a future beyond our ‘glorious’ past; a past that will not, and likely should not, come again (it is worth noting here a too often forgotten fact: that the high numbers of religious priests, sisters and brothers of the 1950s and 60s were actually an anomaly in the history of the religious life). For now we need to shift our focus from nostalgia for the past and anxiety about the future, to living a simpler, more prayerful, more communal present. Perhaps this will give us space to imagine anew our role for today, and to take small steady steps toward its implementation.

OUR ROLE TODAY

The role of the Oblates of Lacombe will be necessarily modest... marked by humility and in new ways by dependence (i.e. We recently made the decision to discontinue private health care for our elders. Over the last eight months many of our senior Oblates have moved to public care facilities. This is a first for us. While the transition for many of the men has been positive, the need for and the implementation of the decision highlight a new moment). Throughout the ROLM process, one of my constant refrains was - and is - *we are much smaller than we think*.

That said, we still have a role: and this role and its *significance* will emerge out of a faithful presence to:

The Poor – We are called to minister where others will not go, to listen to and learn from the poor and marginalised, allowing our lives to

be shaped by these relationships. Lacombe has chosen give particular attention to young adult, First Nations, and inner-city ministry:

- Young Adult Ministry – When young people come to know us, they like us... they want to be with us... charism appeals to their hearts. For the first time in many years we will direct personnel and resources to ministry with and to young adults.

- First Nations Ministry – While renewing and strengthening our commitment in the far north, we will devote significant energy to urban First Nations Ministry. The province will initiate an ongoing reflection and dialogue between Oblates in the ministry across the Province, dioceses and working in First Nations Ministry today.

Each Other – Approximately one quarter of the Oblates in OMI Lacombe Canada still live alone. That said *community under one roof* has, somewhat surprisingly, emerged in our process as a value, and the principal structure of apostolic community as we go forward. Still, we all know that living in common is not the same thing as living in community, and will require ongoing animation to ensure our homes are warm, prayerful, faith-sharing communities, aware and attendant to the nitty-gritty of daily life that can wear down the ideals that motivate us. Our motivation for this work is the good it does us as individuals. Equally important is the witness value of communities of Oblates who eat, pray, and live together on a daily basis. This summer, in response to the ROLM process, about ten OMI Lacombe Oblates presently living on their own, will move into communities.

Oblate Associates – OMI Lacombe celebrates the recent commitment of about 50 Provincial Associates. The enriching presence of Associates in the ROLM process itself affirms the place of Associates in OMI Lacombe, and efforts towards new membership are now being actively encouraged.

HUBS OF OBLATE LIFE

We have named five parishes as Mission Centres (focusing on urban First Nations ministry Young Adult and Vocations ministry; and Inner City ministry). While they do not have greater value than any other ministry in the Province, we see Mission Centres as “*hubs*” of ministry and community life, and where our vocational efforts will be focused. We envision these communities as centres of best practice and

learning where people (laity, scholastics, inquirers, diocesan priests and religious) join in the life and ministry of the mission centre. In this the Oblates can make a significant contribution to local churches and neighbourhoods and beyond.

The decision to locate all the mission centres in parishes was a conscious one based, in part, on Pope Francis' challenge to see the parish for its full missionary, evangelizing potential:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.... The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word... for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28)

SIGNS OF HOPE

Diminishment then is not the final word. Along with the reality of our aging and dwindling population there are, however humble, signs of energy and hope and new life.

There are some young men inquiring about Oblate life.

Women and men across the Province are committing themselves as Oblate Associates;

The Mission in Kenya grows.

Oblates from other Provinces continue to say yes to the mission of OMI Lacombe Canada.

There is potential for life-giving collaboration among the provinces of the region. One example is Paroisse Sacré-Coeur and St Joseph Parish in Ottawa and the possibilities around young adult / campus ministry.

For historic reasons, especially in Canada, we have operated out of a conviction that a future without the large numbers of the past should be taken as an indication that our work is done and we could fold up the

tent. In her book ‘New Wineskins, Re-imagining Religious Life Today’, Sandra Schneiders writes,

it is highly unlikely that very large numbers of people are actually, or ever were, called to Religious Life. Many contemplative communities that have been in existence for hundreds of years have never had more than a couple of dozen members. If ministerial [apostolic] communities could re-examine the relationship between their identity as Religious communities on the one hand and their ministries and finances on the other, they might discover that the felt need for numbers is, at best, exaggerated. As long as there are some people entering who are truly called to Religious Life, who interiorize the charism of the community, and who persevere, the future of the congregation as a locus of Religious Life is quite secure. Religious Life itself has no need of large numbers.

Therein lies our challenge and our hope.

The *Renewing Our Life and Mission* process in OMI Lacombe Canada is just the beginning of our response to Fr Louis’ call to conversion. Our full response, and the way forward, will emerge through our life and ministry *together*, and as we continue to share our lives with those to and with whom we minister.

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MISSIONARY ECUMENISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS A VITAL PART OF THE OBLATE CHARISM

HARRY E. WINTER, OMI

St. Eugene de Mazenod probably never heard the term “Lay Apostolate.” But as Frank Santucci has shown, he lived and developed the reality.¹ He probably never heard the term “Ecumenism,” or “Inter-religious Dialogue.” But in these matters too, he was way ahead of his time.

When St. Eugene was 59 years old, in 1842, he, as the Bishop of Marseilles, accompanied by Father Tempier and several other French bishops went to Tunisia for the transfer of the relics of St. Augustine. The group wanted to observe Muslim worship, and were delighted when their host pointed out, right next door, a mosque “strongly revered by these poor, blind Muslims as the tomb of one of their saints... I praise them for the respect for this place for their prayers.” For several long paragraphs, St. Eugene alternates between regret that the Muslims do not know Christ, with great praise for their “profound religious convictions: silence, prostrations, humble invocations.” Twice he wished that “unworthy Christians who do not know how to pray and who daily profane our holy temples by their irreverence,” would imitate the Muslims.²

If he had such an open attitude to Muslims in 1842, it is not surprising that, in 1857, when he visited England, Scotland and Ireland, he sought out a Protestant denomination which was famous for its fervent public prayer. He carefully watched their Vesper service, talked with the sacristan, and angrily wrote those in charge of prayer at the Marseille cathedral: “It is shameful to hurry the recitation of the official prayers of the Church, as is done in our chapters. One must watch these poor heretics at prayer to see with what solemnity and with what tone

of supplication God's creatures should address Him when they invoke His aid."³

Instinctively following the example of our Founder, Oblates have worked with Eastern Orthodox and Protestants for the sake of Mission. As Ron Rolheiser frequently states, we are one of the best kept secrets in the missionary world. I would add that we are one of the best kept secrets in the ecumenical world, and that of inter-faith dialogue as well. The sad fact is that most Oblates have little knowledge of what other Oblates are doing in the areas of ecumenism and dialogue. As our number of vowed religious decreases, and Oblate Associates increase, we seem to be more aware of the growth of the numbers of poor. Our Oblate charism has always centered on the needs of the poor. To more effectively serve the poor, we must be aware of the dynamism of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue.

This silence is tragic for all of Christianity, since true ecumenism is linked to Mission and Evangelization. St. John wrote that Jesus did not simply pray that all Christians would be one, but that all would be one so that the world might believe (Jo. 17:21). The failure of Oblates to make known how their work in Christian Unity and Inter-faith Dialogue is part of Mission hurts not only our ability to serve the poor, but it hurts the entire Church.

First we will sketch how Oblates have followed St. Eugene's example regarding Ecumenism and Dialogue. Then we will propose a solution to our current inability to better link Mission, Unity and Dialogue.

OBLATES CREATIVELY WORK FOR CHURCH UNITY AND INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Challenge with Eastern Christians

Two examples come to mind for Canada, and the USA: Albert Lacombe's concern for Eastern Christians, and the Hudson Bay Company's dealing with Anglicans and Oblates. Lacombe joined the Oblates after being a diocesan priest in Quebec and Minnesota, and returned to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area several times. While serving in western Canada, he noticed the large number of Eastern Christians, particularly Ukrainians, who missed the ministry of their own rite. Probably nev-

er having heard the statement “The Church breathes with two lungs,” he nevertheless sensed the importance of Eastern rite priests for the Ukrainians, and he spent much time in Europe recruiting Eastern rite priests for western Canada.⁴

In the spring of 1972 and 1974, I taught a course in the Washington, DC, Theological Consortium, on Eastern Christianity, “The Orthodox Experience.” One Oblate who signed up huffed: “I don’t see why they don’t all become Latin rite. It would make the church less complicated.” In a way I sympathized with the complicated process which protects Eastern Rite Catholics from being overwhelmed by us Latins. During my first pastorate, in Holy Family Church, Pearisburg, Virginia, a Ruthenian rite family lived in the parish. To preside at the marriage of the daughter to a Latin Rite Catholic, I had to obtain two permissions from the Ruthenian jurisdiction to which they belonged: one, to preside in the place of a Ruthenian priest, and second for the marriage to a Latin rite man. Then a son in the family decided to marry a non-Christian, and the permissions were even more complicated.

But in the same small parish, a woman of Russian extraction approached me. Andrea Federoff had been raised a Missionary Baptist in the WV coal fields, but in doing her doctorate at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she discovered her Russian heritage. She was received into the Catholic Church by Charles Beausoleil, OMI, the pastor of Holy Family Church, on Jan. 14, 1971. and became the coordinator for Fr. George Maloney, SJ, the founder of the John XXIII Center for Eastern Christian Studies, at Fordham University. She asked me if Fr. Maloney could celebrate the Divine Liturgy of the Russian Rite at Holy Family. With the help of the Ruthenian rite family, 50 people, both Orthodox and those in union with Rome, came on very short notice for the Sept. 29, 1979 Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, according to the Russian Catholic rite. I was encouraged to concelebrate, and it was a very moving experience to see the emotion of all involved, in the beauty of that Divine Liturgy.⁵

Our only Melkite Oblate, Dan Nassaney, has personally experienced the hurt which some Oblates inflict on Eastern Rite Christians. During our Belleville Convocation of April, 2013, he helped very much in the interest group which I conducted on Missionary Ecumenism. He directly asked Ron Rolheiser, who was also helping, whether there are

liturgical books and vestments at Oblate School of Theology, so that Divine Liturgy can be celebrated there. Dan submits items regularly for the Eastern Christianity page of the Mission-Unity-Dialogue website, and I expect to hear a lot from him as the historic Pan-Orthodox Synod of 2016 approaches, the first for the Orthodox since the Ecumenical Second Council of Nicea (787 AD).⁶ He just attended the Orientale Lumen Conference, held this year June 15-18, Washington, DC.

Tony Rigoli was approached, when he was pastor of Holy Angels Church, Buffalo, NY, by an Hispanic Catholic, Robert Moreno, who was convinced God was calling him to be a married priest. Tony explained that the only way he could do this would be to join an Eastern rite, and marry before ordination. Robert went to the Ukraine, leaned Ukrainian, married, and was ordained in the Ukrainian rite. He then returned to western NY and was never allowed to preside at a Latin rite Mass. He could concelebrate, though.

With the June 14, 2014 decision by Pope Francis to lift the ban on married Eastern rite priests functioning outside their traditional territories, Robert may be able to help in the growing number of Latin rite parishes which are desperately short of priests.⁷

The historic trip of Patriarch Kirill I from Moscow to Warsaw for the almost unbelievable Statement of Reconciliation of Aug. 15, 2012, between the Russian and Polish People, the May 25, 2014 meeting in Jerusalem of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, the Nov. 29-30, 2014 meeting of the two in Istanbul--all these are striking reminders for Oblates in North America that we must work better with Eastern Christians.⁸

No Sharing with Anglicans

Oblates wasted precious personnel by competing with Anglicans in northern Canada. It was probably too early for us to admit that we could have concentrated on one village, and let the Anglicans take the neighboring village, rather than have Oblates in both villages. Did the Hudson Bay Company attempt to persuade us to cooperate with the Anglicans, since it would have made the company's task easier in delivering goods?⁹

As we face fewer and fewer vowed members, we need to look at working other Christian Churches in the areas we serve or are asked to serve. (See below, E, our 1972 “Missionary Outlook” pledge).

Tragedy in Oregon, Some Positive Beginnings in the East and in Texas

When Native Americans massacred a group of Presbyterian missionaries in Oregon, on Nov. 29, 1847, two neighboring Oblates, Eugene Casimir Chirouse and Charles M. Pandosy attempted to help the survivors. Ron Young’s doctoral thesis explores the sad result: the diocesan priest who helped the most, J.B.A. Brouillet, was sued by one of the distraught survivors. The tragic episode illustrates the two attitudes which predominated until the early 20th century: mistrust and persecution on the one hand between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, with some personal friendship as antagonists endured the same hardship and disaster.¹⁰

The latter attitude is documented by Joseph Wild, OMI, in his history of Oblates in the eastern part of the USA. A careful reading of Bernard Doyon, OMI, and his history of the Oblates in Texas would probably reveal the same two attitudes.¹¹

20th Century Improvement

As early as 1910, our first missiologist, Robert Streit, OMI, included Protestant ecumenical work in his research. Our superior generals encouraged Streit and a long line of great Oblate missiologists to develop the priceless tool of *Bibliographia Missionaria*. When I was studying at the Ivy League University of Pennsylvania, I was surprised to see the *Bibliographia Missionaria* on the shelves of the library of this rather secular university. However, many non-religious colleges and universities developed Departments of Religious Studies, beginning in the 1950’s, at the request of their students. Hopefully, Oblates are as aware of the Ecumenical, Inter-faith and Justice and Peace dimensions of this tool, as are the students and universities which value this resource.¹²

Oblates such as Valerian Gaudet have followed St. Eugene in instinctively looking at other groups which were attracting believers. With the emergence of Moral Rearmament in England after World War II, Gaudet checked it out so much that he was called to the formidable

“Holy Office “ (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. Both Gaudet and the superior general at the time, Leo Deschatelets, were worried and concerned that this call meant a condemnation of Gaudet, or some form of punishment. When Gaudet returned to the General House after the appointment, he told a relieved Deschatelets that all Ottaviani asked him was why Moral Rearmament was attracting people and what could Catholics learn!¹³

The “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” from Jan. 18-25, became a part of Oblate prayer life as the opening of Vatican II approached, on Sept. 11, 1962. But nothing prepared us for the shock of heretics becoming separated brethren and then brothers and sisters, as Eastern Orthodox and Protestants of all kinds were invited to be “observers” at the Council.

When I was told in 1964, as I approached ordination, that I would be teaching theology at our scholasticate in Washington, DC, I was given a choice in subject matter. I suggested Christian Unity and Missiology, since my studies at the Gregorian University has introduced me to this emerging field of theology. My superiors in the former Eastern Province readily agreed, and I was given courses in Church History and Ecclesiology, in addition to a course then required: Missionary Ecumenism. It is significant that the best text, after the Constitution on the Church and the Decrees on Ecumenism and Eastern Churches and Missionary Activity, was by Robert McAfee Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution*.

It truly was revolutionary, as Brown presented the Justice and Peace component, and the Missiology component, of Ecumenism. I like to think that Seamus Finn, in taking this course in the early 1970’s, was influenced in his work in Justice and Peace. But by the 1990’s, I was using another text, Gideon Goosen’s *Bringing Churches Together*, and in the 2000’s, Jeff Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*. Note how the titles have changed and the revolution has lessened.¹⁴

Charismatic Explosion, 1967

The Holy Spirit inserted a startling development into Ecumenism on Feb. 17-18, 1967, at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, as the Catholic Charismatic Movement exploded there, and at about the same time, all over the world. For Oblates working with Hispanics, this truly

changed everything. Thomas Rausch, SJ, puts it this way: “Research indicates that there are actually more Latino Catholic Charismatics than Protestant Pentecostals in Latin America and in the U.S.”¹⁵

In the former Eastern American Province, Fran Bagan, Ed Hauf, Dick Kulwiec and Dick McAlear became prime movers in the Catholic Charismatic Movement. And most importantly for Ecumenism, Evangelical Protestants realized their similarity and convergence.

In late summer, 1967, I began doctoral studies in religion at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In order for Oblate College to keep the accreditation it has just received from both the secular Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, and the religious Association of Theological Schools, the college was advised it needed some teachers whose degrees had not come from either Catholic University of America, or from the Gregorian and Angelicum Universities in Rome, Italy. I decided to major in the Presbyterian Church, since it is so important to American history and religion. My minor was in Buddhism. Both areas required one to be able to construct a grid of understanding, to appreciate religious phenomenon. And I would concentrate on public worship as an essential requirement of any religion.

When I returned to Oblate College, Washington, DC, for the autumn term in 1970, after completing all the subject matter, the course required for Oblates in Missionary Ecumenism included a strong section on World Religions. Students were also instructed in building a grid of understanding for any religious development.

Peak, 28th General Chapter, 1972, and Missionary Outlook

Missionary Ecumenism reached a peak, at least for Oblates, at our 1972 General Chapter. It sadly diminished after that. The delegates of the five provinces of the then USA Region presented a paper as the chapter began: “The XXVIII General Chapter and Missionary Concern for Christian Unity.”:

The highest priority should be given by the Secretariate of the Mission, to the integrating of our missionary and ecumenical work. The Secretariate should blend more thoroughly into our missionary aim, the contribution of our Oblate ecumenists, searching also for non-Oblate specialists where necessary. To adequately discover the way

the above developments in shared ministry and buildings, and Orthodox, Anglicans, and Pentecostals, and ecumenical instruction need to be structured into our congregation, the Secretariate should aid in the convening on both regional and international levels, of our ecumenists, missiologists and experienced missionary pastoral members.¹⁶ (See below, IIA for the fulfillment of this, at least in the USA).

In 1972, the general administration consisted of 12 members, headed by the superior general, Leo Deschatelets. Willam Cagney from Australia was “Secretary for Mission,” since the 1966 chapter. He had a full time assistant, Valerian Gaudet, who was an invited delegate with full voice but no vote and described as “Secretary of the General Conference for Mission.”¹⁷ With the development of regions during the chapter, the general administration remained at 12 members, and there was simply a portfolio for Mission assigned to one of the general counselors residing in Rome. Thus Mission, Unity and Dialogue was vastly reduced in manpower.

The USA regional paper found almost no mention of Missionary Ecumenism in the preparation documents for the chapter. But delegates at the chapter discovered that the ecumenical work of its members was vast. It simply was not being communicated, and thus not coordinated. During the chapter, Max Thurian, co-founder of the Taizé Community, was available for delegates to meet with him, on May 19, 1972. Andre Seumois, who had been so influential at Vatican II, helped in many ways, although he was not a chapter delegate. Note the title of his epochal book *Oecumenisme Missionnaire*. Although *Missionary Ecumenism* was never translated into English, it provided for many people a true view of the link between Ecumenism and Mission.¹⁸

The crowning achievement of the chapter as regards Missionary Ecumenism are the words of its statement “Missionary Outlook:”

We will habitually examine what other Christians are doing in our area before initiating new projects or programs; we will do everything with them which faith does not oblige us to do separately. To accomplish this more effectively we will make ourselves aware of the characteristics of these Churches, their particular problems and ways of thinking. In this way we will attempt to heal old divisions and present a unified witness to the non-Christian world (16e).¹⁹

Although “Missionary Outlook” promised much, the lack of any structure for Missionary Ecumenism and Dialogue has, in my view, greatly reduced its effect.²⁰

A MIXED BAG, 1974 REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MISSION
AND UNITY TO RPM AND 2010 BOOK

First and Last Regional Conference on Mission and Unity

By 1974, the USA Region was able to have its first and last Conference on Mission and Unity. “On October 14-18, 34 Oblates in the field, the 5 American Provincials, the American Regional Councilor and the Assistant General for Mission, gathered in Natick, Mass., for the first American Regional Conference on Mission and Unity.” Roberto Pena, John Joyce and I each presented a conference after which discussion in small groups promoted the conviction that we were ministering to each other. Following the meeting, the 5 provincials, Jack King and Bill Cagney left for Rome and the 29th General Chapter, to address the resignation of Richard Hanley.²¹

On July 5, 1977, Missionary Ecumenism received another setback with the sudden death of Charles Morrissey, at the Ecumenical Institute, Chicago, IL.²²

Texas Conference of Churches; Bishop Michael Pfeifer, 1976-2013

Former Oblate Manny Ballard had learned of my concern about Missionary Ecumenism when he was a delegate from the former Southern Province at the 1972 general chapter. In 1976, he asked if I would be interested in the position of Catholic staff member on the Texas Conference of Churches. At that time, the TCC was the largest ecumenical group in the world to have Catholic participation.^{23,24}

My three years as Associate Director were certainly memorable and challenging. I continued to attend the annual meetings of the National Workshop on Christian Unity, and the American Society of Missiology. To these was joined the annual meeting of the National Association of Ecumenical Staff. The staff at Oblate College of the Southwest (now Oblate School of Theology) encouraged me to teach an evening course on Missionary Ecumenism during the autumn semester of 1977.

I quickly discovered the wide gap, and yet overlapping needs, between Tex-Mex Catholicism and Anglo-Tex Protestantism. To my delight, I was able to present, with a Southern Baptist leader, a seminar “Evangelizing the Unchurched: Texas, as a Model?,” at the 15th National Workshop on Christian Unity, Tulsa, OK, April 10-13, 1978.²³

Oblate Bishop Michael Pfeiffer exercised creative leadership not only in the Texas Conference of Churches, but in every possible area of ecumenism and dialogue in the San Angelo, TX Diocese. His pastoral letters attracted national attention.²⁵

Appalachia, and Mission/Unity Newsletter

However, I also discovered less happy realities: personalities can destroy or vastly lessen great ideals. So during the summer of 1979, I asked for a new assignment back in the Eastern Province and was sent to become pastor of a small membership but large geographical parish in western Virginia, Holy Family Catholic Church, Pearisburg, VA. There I discovered the Missionary Ecumenism reality of Appalachia with all its poverty. Organized religion was less than 50%; Catholics, about 5% of the population.

In 1980, under the leadership of George Croft, provincial of the former Eastern American Province, I began the newsletter *Mission/Unity*. The province sent it to each member, and several other of the US provinces sent it. I had a list of about 75 interested subscribers from other countries. In justifying another newsletter, I wrote in the first issue (Jan., 1980) “One of the great disasters of Christian Unity (ecumenism) has been the lack of contact with evangelization... We welcome contributions from the growing number of Oblates who are serving as officers of ministerial associations, councils of churches and other ministerial groups.”²⁶

As I re-read the 31 issues published between Jan., 1980 and April, 1995, I see that 9 Oblates from the former Eastern Province wrote articles (Seamus Finn, twice); Francis George, James FitzPatrick (Austrian evangelizer at that time), and superior general Marcello Zago also wrote.²⁷ Another goal was to join academic ecumenism with pastoral ecumenism: how best to prepare for inter-church marriages, welcoming other Christians into the Church, presiding at funerals with many non-

Catholic Christians present, etc. All this was to promote better mission to the poor and marginalized.

Oblates in 1981 SEDOS Seminar

From March 8-19, 1981, three Oblates were among the 44 participants who presented papers at the SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study) Research Seminar at Villa Cavaletti, the Jesuit think tank built over Cicero's Villa, outside Rome, Italy. (Two more Oblates, Francis George and Leo-Paul Nobert attended, without presenting papers). Tissa Balasuriya's paper dealt with the Mission of the Local Church in Secular Society; Alexander Montanyane's with the Missionary Dimensions of the Local Church, and mine with Christian Mission and Ecumenical Relations. Even more importantly, it gave me a chance to meet participants such as Wahlbert Buhlmann and interview him on the ecumenical dimension of his controversial book *The Coming of the Third Church*.²⁸

Evangelicals and Catholics Together for Mission, Cardinal Francis George

American Presbyterians had been trying to evangelize in Mexico, and some undoubtedly were perceived as proselytizers, using coercion and trickery. Several were murdered in 1993. A group asked Catholics to intercede. Instead, the initial group, which included Jesuit Avery Dulles and Oblate Francis George, produced a remarkable statement in 1994: "Catholics and Evangelicals Together for Mission."²⁹ Many of the Protestant Evangelical signers referred to the Catholic Charismatic Movement as vastly improving their view of Catholics.

Triumph and Tragedy of the Oblate Center for Mission Studies, 1994-99

When more rooms became available at Oblate College, Washington, DC, Provincial William Sheehan asked me to research ways for them to be used. I proposed that the former Eastern Province establish a Mission Center, to do for the USA what the Institute of Mission Studies was doing for Canada at St. Paul's University, Ottawa, Canada. Sheehan quickly accepted, and with the general administration meeting at

Oblate College in November, 1994, we had much advice and support from Superior General Marcello Zago and his administration. Soon Jim Sullivan came from Brazil and Henry Lemoncelli from the Oblate College staff, and we began.

Henri Goudreault, Director of the Institute of Mission Studies, immediately sent a doctoral thesis on ecumenism to increase our library holdings.³⁰ The Oblate Center for Mission Studies acquired all the issues of the Institute's journal "Kerygma" (1967-94) and "Mission" (1994-99). We soon became the only library in Washington, DC to have the entire set of *Bibliographia Missionaria*.

Sullivan specialized in organizing 11 workshops and retreat days, with those by David Power and Louis Lougen the most popular Oblates, and Loughlan Sofield, Monika Hellwig and Dean Hoge as the most popular non-Oblates. Lemoncelli helped with the workshops and specialized in Hispanic Ministry. I found editing a booklet on Oblate Missiologists to be very helpful. Zago sent us his foundational article on the link between Mission and Ecumenism. Avery Dulles' classic pamphlet "Why Catholics Don't Evangelize and Why They Must" became a staple as we worked with laity.³¹ Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio became very interested in working with OCMS and the Washington Theological Union.

Jose Ante came from the Philippines during the autumn semester of 1997, to lecture on Islamic Studies. Ron Young came the spring semester of 1998, to provide us with his expertise. Sheehan asked us to work closely with Seamus Finn and JPIC, with then Oblate Paul Costello's Center for Narrative Studies, and with George McLean and his Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. In fact, the best opening publicity we had, on March 20, 1995, was even before we officially began. Through McLean's friendship with Wacław Hryniewicz, about 45 Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholics and Latin Catholics filled our conference room to hear Hryniewicz on "Contemporary Issues in the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church." Gode Iwele was studying at Catholic University, so he contributed an African perspective.

The newsletter "Mission/Unity" now became the official newsletter of OCMS, and 6 issues were published from Jan. 1996 to Sept., 1998. Just when it looked like OCMS would make a great contribution

to both the Oblates and the Church, the reorganization of the 5 provinces into one, killed it. Begun with great publicity and interest, it died without any closure or grieving.³²

Five Ways Fellowship Begins, 1998-2009, and RPM Mention

With Tony Rigoli as my associate when I was appointed pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church, Buffalo, NY, I had a great example of an Oblate author, and Oblate energy. So I was able to write up the small book *Dividing or Strengthening? Five Ways of Christianity*.³³ Even more importantly, Provincial Louis Lougen asked me to present to the provincial council on Sept. 18, 2007, my thesis that there are five ways (catholic, charismatic/evangelical, Vatican II, fundamentalist and liberal) in every Oblate community, in every parish, and in every Christian denomination. From surveying the council, he invited me to make this presentation to the then six areas of the USA Oblates. After examining the results of the survey done in each presentation (about 190 total), it was discovered that about 76 tend to be liberal. Many of those have worked with undocumented persons. They have experienced the rigidity of laws and legal systems.³⁴

Also during this time, the Mission/Unity newsletter first became *Mission-Unity-Dialogue*, and then morphed into a website of the same name, supported by the USA Province. Updates every two to three weeks are offered “For Oblates of Mary Immaculate and All People of Faith.”³⁵

As the USA Province began to look very seriously at diminishing numbers and increasing needs, it began the program “Renewing the Province Mission” (RPM). Constant nagging and whining (at least it seemed to me) produced this paragraph, following the very last item, #23, Mission Forum on Youth Ministry:

We will continue to explore ways to support the ministries of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (Fr. George McLean) and the Mission-Unity-Dialogue ministry (Fr. Harry Winter). Seamus Finn has been working with George McLean in order to clarify financial and organization aspects of his ministry. A new brochure is being developed for the Mission-Unity-Dialogue ministry of Harry Winter with the help of the JPIC office.³⁶

Jim Flavin Hispanic Book of 2005 and Cardinal Quevedo

Jim Flavin was stationed at St. Stephen's Church, Miramar, Florida, twice, from 1968-72, and from 1991-1999. To learn more about Hispanic culture, he took a seven week immersion course in the Dominican Republic. In 2005, he published a masterful book on Hispanic ministry, including insights and data from both Catholic and Evangelical Protestant sources. His analysis of the Protestant origins of Sunday School, CCD, and Catholic publishing in the USA, are priceless. I hope every novice reads this book in the novitiate.

How many Oblates are aware of his work? His book, *St. Stephen's Gate*, seems a prime example to me that each of us works in our own corner and most of the time are unaware of the accomplishments and tools that other Oblates have. We waste a lot of time and energy reinventing the wheel.³⁷³⁶

Hispanic Catholicism was adapted by the Philippines. The 46-minute video of Cardinal Orlando Quevedo being interviewed by David Uribe during the national Flores de Mayo gathering of May 23/24, 2015 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows has much in common with Flavin's book. Both are demonstrations that the Hispanic culture and Anglo culture can work together, as long as we respect the differences.³⁸

Oblate Mission Committee Book, 2010

In 2010, Bill O'Donnell presented me with a book *Trailblazing Evangelization in the 21st Century: Challenges to Oblate Mission Today*, edited by Oswald Firth, who was the assistant general with the Mission Portfolio. Two publishers were listed: the Centre for Society and Religion, in Sri Lanka, and the Mission Committee of the OMI General Administration. Very surprised that we have a Mission Committee on the international level, I attempted to find out who is serving on it.

It seems to have disappeared, but we do have Mission Committees in the Regions of Latin America, Asia and Europe.³⁹ Among the 9 articles in the book are two by David Power and one by Seamus Finn, from the USA, and one by Marcel Dumais, from Canada. Dumais' article, "Our Oblate Mission Today," is the only one which is concrete about Ecumenism, when he presents the importance of evangelical and

Pentecostal Christians. He observes they lack the social dimension of the Gospel, and is less hopeful than Francis George on working with them.⁴⁰

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND A PROPOSAL

Louis Lougen's "Catholic Digest" Article, and His Appointment

Our superior general, Louis Lougen, put it this way in the widely circulated magazine "Catholic Digest", in 2011: "Our Oblate spirituality also brings us into dialogue with people of other religious traditions. Grounded in our Catholic faith we seek to understand how others believe in God. Oblate spirituality enables us to respect other religions and work with them so that our world will reflect the heart of God."⁴¹

With his appointment in early 2015 as a member of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Lougen now continues the strong place our Superior Generals have had in promoting Mission, Unity and Dialogue.

Appointment as Coordinator of Mission-Unity-Dialogue

In the Letter of Obedience of June 13, 2014, appointing me as Director of the 104 Residence in St. Paul, MN, was a second, totally unexpected appointment: "Coordinator of Mission-Unity-Dialogue for the U.S. Province, effective July 15, 2014 until July 15, 2017." Personally, this was great support. But as RPM implies above, no one is quite sure what "coordinating" means.

Plea for a Structure/Network to Parallel and Intersect with JPIC, on the International, and Provincial Levels

Regarding a structure for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue for our entire congregation, perhaps following Pope Frances pushing the polyhedron might work: a troika of three Oblates residing in different regions and only visiting Rome annually. One would be a specialist in Mission, one in Ecumenism, and one in Dialogue.⁴²

The flyer which is coming as an attachment has two sides. It is patterned after the Justice-Peace and Integrity of Creation flyer, and pre-

sumes a footprint in Washington, DC, and also in San Antonio, TX. The person serving in DC might be a semi-retired missionary such as Peter Curran. It is imperative to have someone at least part time in DC because of the many number of missionary groups headquartered there.

A footprint is necessary at Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, because of our professors of missiology and ecumenism there, and the doctorate offered in Spirituality. Both people would of course be under the direction of the provincial councilor assigned the Mission portfolio.

CONCLUSION

Oblates of Mary in North America have followed St. Eugene's example of bold and constant interest in new religious movements. Both within the Christian Community, and with people of other faiths, Oblates have been in the forefront.

However, as we look at the structure for JPIC, both on the international and national levels, is it not evident that there is not a corresponding structure or network for Mission, Unity and Dialogue? With so many developments regarding Evangelization, Spiritual Ecumenism, Doctrinal Ecumenism, and Dialogue, how can men in the field contribute what they are experiencing, and also learn from others?

Fr. Allan Figueroa Deck's words of 2009 are even truer today: "pastoral leaders in the church have simply refused to come to terms with the charismatic renewal."⁴³ I believe Francis George did come to terms with it, and promoted, as much as he could, our convergence with evangelicals and fundamentalists.

May every Oblate delight in what we have accomplished, and at the same time be very concerned that our lack of structure for MUD hurts us, and hurts the entire Church. We have two very concrete times and places to promote this: the Renewing the Province Mission program, and the 2016 General Chapter.

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¹ F. SANTUCCI, OMI, [www.eugenedemazenod.net/The Service of Lay Mission Collaborators](http://www.eugenedemazenod.net/The%20Service%20of%20Lay%20Mission%20Collaborators), July 3, 2012. See also St. Eugene's relationship with the picturesque leader of the fishmongers, Elizabeth Picot, nicknamed Babeau: J. LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod*, translated by Francis D. Flanagan, OMI, 3, NY, Fordham University Press, 1968, p. 103-104, 205.

² St. Eugene de Mazenod, *Voyage en Afrique*, "Missions OMI" 12 (1874), p. 443-44. Translation mine; the entire journal, pp. 417-57. Lefflon mentions the trip, 4, p. 220. See Yvon BEAUDOIN, OMI, *Mgr de Mazenod et les musulmans*, "Vie Oblate Life" 57 (1998), p. 467-499 for a much more extensive treatment. Note that all four Oblate reviews ("Missions OMI", "Etudes Oblates", "Vie Oblate Life" and "Oblatio") are available on the public section of the international website www.omiworld.org, the first three on the "Archives" page. "Oblatio" has its own page.

³ LEFLON, 4, p. 288-89. The entire section, regarding the Oxford Movement and St. Eugene's meetings with the three future English cardinals, Henry Edward Manning, John Henry Newman and Nicholas Wiseman, is very moving: 278-90. For St. Eugene's attitude when Oblates joined local clergy in Canada in burning Protestant Bibles, see LEFLON, 3, p. 139-40. For his teaching that the Church is much bigger than the institutional Church, see his "Pastoral Letter of Lent, 1860," part of which is used as the Second Reading in the Office of Readings on his feast day, May 21.

⁴ The Easterners are variously described as Ukrainians, Ruthenians, and Galatians, for example in the entry for him in the online *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. The recruiting visits to Europe were in 1900 and 1904. St. Paul University's relationship with the Sheptytsky Institute continues Oblate work with Ukrainian Catholics.

⁵ George CROFT, OMI, *Pearisburg*, "Oblate Fathers Newsletter, Eastern American Province" 6 (Oct. 1979, #2), p. 5.

⁶ www.harrywinter.org/EasternChristianity; Abouna DIMITRY, *Orthodox Churches in Sympathy*, "Sophia", 45 (2014, 1), p. 17.

⁷ Laura LERACI, *Vatican Lifts Ban on Married Priests*, "Sophia" 45 (2014, 1), p. 4, 7.

⁸ Wacław HRYNIEWICZ, OMI, who served for many years on the Catholic-Orthodox International Dialogue, has commented on the Polish Russian Statement: [www.harrywinter.org/Eastern Christianity](http://www.harrywinter.org/Eastern%20Christianity).

⁹ See for example Raymond HUEL, *The Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Hudson's Bay Company: a Mutuality of interests in the Interior of the Canadian North-West*, "Vie Oblate Life" 57 (1998), p. 439-66, especially pp. 441, 443, 446-47, 449-53, 457, 459, 462-65. It would be interesting to know what Anglican sources reveal.

¹⁰ Ronald Wayne YOUNG, OMI, *The Mission of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Oregon Territory (1847-1860)*, Rome, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 2000. Clifford DRURY, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman*, Seattle, WA, Northwest Interpretive Association, 1986, 2005 is available on the internet.

¹¹ I say a careful reading because Joseph WILD, *Men of Hope*, Boston, MA: Society of Oblate Fathers, 1967, has a very faulty index when it comes to the relationship with Protestants, listing only pp. 8 and 154. There is precious documentation on pp. 9-12, 83, and 123. Bernard DOYON, OMI, *Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-83*, Milwaukee, Catholic Life Publications, Bruce Press, 1956; see his article in Harry

WINTER, OMI, ed., *Oblate Missiologists*, Washington, DC: Oblate Center for Mission Studies, 1997, p. 47-55; internet www.harrywinter.org/OblateMissiologists.

¹² Andre SEUMOIS, OMI, cites Streit's *Die Missionsgeschichtliche Literatur der Protestanten, Theologie und Glaube*, 1910, p. 299-314 as just one example: *Oecumenisme Missionnaire*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1970, 88-89. For Streit and his successors, see Harry WINTER, OMI, *Oblate Missiologists*, Washington, DC: Oblate Center for Missions Studies, 1997, p. 36-43; internet copy, 2011: www.harrywinter.org/OblateMissiologists. For Bibliographia Missionaria as the indication of the strength of ecumenism, JPIC, etc, see Harry WINTER, OMI, *Bibliographia Missionaria: Thermometer of Missiology*, "Missiology" 27 (1999, 1), p. 35-39; www.harrywinter.org/OblateMissiologists.

¹³ Valerian GAUDET, OMI, *Memoirs* (1997). There is a French version: *Mes Memoirs*.

¹⁴ Robert McAfee Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967, 1969. I examined Brown's work in revolutionizing Presbyterian worship, in my doctoral thesis: *Catholic, Evangelical and Reformed: The Lord's Supper in the (United) Presbyterian Church, 1945-70*, and enjoyed several very long visits with him. A true gentleman and scholar. Gideon GOOSEN, *Bringing Churches Together*, Newton, Australia, E.J. Dwyer, 1993. Jeffrey GROS, FSC, Eamon McMANUS and Ann RIGGS, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1998. Gros and I worked together for many years, he on the doctrinal side of ecumenism and I on the missionary side. His untimely death from cancer on Aug. 12, 2013, deprived ecumenism of a great and holy person.

¹⁵ Thomas RAUSCH, SJ, *To Embrace the Other*, "America" (April 16, 2007), p. 14. It is still very moving to read the account of the Duquesne experience by one of the participants, Patti GALLAGHER MANSFIELD, *As by a New Pentecost*, Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1992.

¹⁶ USA Delegates, "The XXVIII General Chapter and Missionary Concern for Christian Unity," p. 18. See Harry WINTER, OMI, *The 1972 General Chapter's Work in Missionary Concern for Christian Unity*, "Etudes Oblates" 31 (1972), p. 259-82.

¹⁷ Commission Precapitulaire, *Chapitre-1972-Chapter; Liste des Capitulants*, p. 4, 46.

¹⁸ Andre SEUMOIS, OMI, *Oecumenisme Missionnaire*, Urbaniana Nova Series 4 (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1970). For more on Seumoio, see Harry WINTER, OMI, *Oblates at Vatican II: An Initial Survey*, "Oblatio" 1 (2012), p. 338-340.

¹⁹ Delegates of the 1972 Chapter, "Missionary Outlook," #16e. Our Constitutions deal with Ecumenism in # 6 (not 8 as in the index, p. 187), and 66a. See Fernand JETTE, OMI, *O.M.I. The Apostolic Man*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 72-74, where he call concern for Ecumenism and Dialogue "truly a new one."

²⁰ Harry WINTER, OMI, *Mission and Unity in the Spirit of de Mazenod*, "Vie Oblate Life" 34 (1975), p. 213-232; for the 1974 and 1980 chapters, see *Missionary Ecumenism*, "Vie Oblate Life" 39 (1980), p. 21-44.

²¹ *First American Regional Conference on Mission and Unity*, "OMI Documentation" 57/75 (April 15, 1975) p. 1-4; a longer description is by Tom WRZOS, OMI, in the "USA Communications" 21 (Dec. 25, 1974), p. 3-5. Currently, "OMI Documentation" is only available on the omiworld website from issue 221, May 1998, except for the Zago description of Assisi, 147, Feb. 1987. There are copies of both reports in "OMI

Documentation” and “USA Communications” in my personal folder “USA Mission-Unity, 1974 Conference.”

²² Charles MORRISSEY, OMI, spent at least a year on the staff of the Chicago Ecumenical Institute, focusing on fundraising.

²³ The seminar was described in “The Oblate World”, Summer, 1978, p. 6; in “USA OMI Communications” 39 (June 11, 1978), p. 8 and in Catholic newspapers such as Austin’s “Texas Catholic Herald”, May 12, 1978, p. 1.

²⁴ Harry WINTER, OMI, *Texas Conference of Churches-South of God*, “Ecumenical Trends”, 8 (July/Aug., 1979,7), p. 101-06.

²⁵ See Texas Conference of Churches newsletter “Texas Ecumenical Action” for Bishop Pfeifer’s leadership in the 1980’s and 1990’s; he also began one of the first inter-faith groups in central Texas.

²⁶ Harry WINTER, OMI, *Why Another Newsletter?*, “Mission/Unity” 1 (Jan. 1980). Each issue was a single sheet, two sides.

²⁷ Marcello ZAGO, OMI, *Towards a Wider Ecumenism* “Mission/Unity” 26 (Dec. 1987) Msgr. Pierre Duprey, M.Afr., complained that Zago’s term “wider ecumenism” was misleading, Duprey to Winter, March 21, 1989. I suspect that his letter was more of a reflection that some Vatican officials considered Zago too liberal, as was shown by the way the 25th anniversary of the 1986 Assisi gathering was redirected.

²⁸ The three papers by Oblates are published in Mary Motte, FMM and Joseph LANG, MM (eds.) *Mission in Dialogue*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1982. Walbert BUHLMAN, OFMCA, *The Coming of the Third Church*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1978. I described the seminar in “Mission/Unity” 9 (May, 1981) and 10 (July, 1981).

²⁹ Francis GEORGE, OMI, *Oblate Interest*, “Mission/Unity” 30 (Oct. 1994), also on www.harrywinter.org/Manhattan Declaration. See Charles COLSON and Richard NEUHAUS, eds., *Evangelicals & Catholics Together*, Dallas, TX, Word Publishing, 1995.

³⁰ Henri Goudreault, OMI, to Harry Winter, OMI, Oct. 5, 1994, enclosing Malcolm MARTIN, SA, *The Missionary Influence in the Origins of the Ecumenical Movement and its Development in Latin America*, Ottawa, Canada, 1972. The Institute of Missions Studies seems to have been recently absorbed by the Faculty of Theology of St. Paul’s University.

³¹ Harry WINTER, OMI, ed., *Oblate Missiologists*, Washington, DC, Oblate Center for Mission Studies, 1997, internet edition www.harrywinter.org/Oblate Missiologists, updated regularly; Marcello ZAGO, OMI, *The Missionary Importance of the Encyclical Ut Unum Sint*, “Omnis Terra” 263 (Dec. 1995), p. 488-92; Avery DULLES, SJ, *Why Catholics Don’t Evangelize and Why They Must*, NY, Society for the Propagation of the Faith, nd, probably 1992.

³² Oblate initial publicity in “Oblate World”, Oct. 1995, p. 2; general publicity in US Catholic Mission Association “Mission Update”, March/ April, 1995, p. 4; “International Bulletin of Missionary Research”, Jan. 1996, p. 19.

³³ Tony RIGOLI, OMI, *Funny Things that Happened to Me on the Way to Heaven*, Bloomington, IN, Author House, 2004; Harry WINTER, OMI, *Dividing or Strengthening? Five Ways of Christianity*, Buffalo, NY, Keller Brothers, 2003, internet copy: www.harrywinter.org/Five Ways (updated regularly). The most recent presentation was to the May 26, 2015 meeting of the North American Conference of Oblate Retreat and Renewal Centers (NCORCC), Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN.

³⁴ The statistics were published: *Area Meetings*, “Mission-Unity-Dialogue”, 6 (Third series, Aug. 2009).

³⁵ www.harrywinter.org, originally developed during 2001, in Buffalo, NY, the website is linked with the national USA Oblate website www.omiusa.org, “Looking for Something?,” third down on right. I’m indebted to Will Shaw and Charles Hurkes, OMI, for referring periodically to this website, as Shaw publicizes Oblate items every Wednesday on the national website, and Hurkes in “OMI/USA.”

³⁶ “Renewing the Province Mission, Report on Implementation”, #2, September 25, 2013, Addendum A, p. 11.

³⁷ James FLAVIN, OMI, *St. Stephen’s Gate*, Milton, Mass., Unity Street Books, 2005.

³⁸ www.omiusa.org, Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, interviewed by David Uribe, OMI, “Slideshow”, May 23/24, 2015.

³⁹ Harry Winter, OMI, to Gilberto Pinon, OMI, June 6, 2015; Gilberto Pinon to Harry Winter, June 8, 2015.

⁴⁰ Oswald FIRTH, OMI, ed., *Trailblazing Evangelization in the 21st Century: Challenges to Oblate Mission Today*, Colombo, Centre for Society & Religion; Rome, Mission Committee, 2010. Dumais, p. 49.

⁴¹ Louis LOUGEN, OMI, *Praying with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, “Catholic Digest”, July/Aug. 2011, p. 28-29. For the entire article, and Lougen’s comments on working with Muslims, see www.harrywinter.org/Dialogue.

⁴² As Pope Francis explains in the *Joy of the Gospel*, #236, the polyhedron is an effort to get away from Rome or Washington, DC, or San Antonio, as the center with everything circling around it. See also Massimo Faggioli, “Pope Francis, Tradition in Transition,” St. Thomas University, St. Paul, MN presentation of June 2, 2015 on his forthcoming book of the same title.

⁴³ Alan FIGUEROA DECK, SJ, *Hispanic Ministry: New Realities and Choices*, “Origins” 38 (Dec. 4, 2008, #26):405. Also in “Mission-Unity-Dialogue” 6 (third series, Aug. 2009).

THE OBLATE CHARISM AND THE COLONIZATION OF WESTERN CANADA

MARK BLOM, OMI

This reflection not a pleasant reading. It is meant to a caution that we always be vigilant to words and the spirit of the charism and to be ready to challenge ourselves and our institutions in order that we do not betray it or ourselves. But with arms outstretched and belt fastened we may go where we do not wish to go.

We must lead people to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints. preface.

But first we must treat them like they are human beings.

The first people to migrate to North America travelled across a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska when sea levels dropped during the last ice age .Sometime between 40,000 and 17,000 years ago people following herd animals such as mammoth became the first settlers to Canada. Around 10,000 years ago world climate stabilized leading to a rise in population, stone technology and more settled culture. Genetic and linguistic evidence links the native peoples of Canada to the ancient people of eastern Siberia. The oldest artifact of human presence in Canada is a fishing weir on the west coast of Canada believed to be about 13,500 years old.

The first known contact between Europeans and native Canadians occurred circa 990-1050 when Vikings of Scandinavia reached the north eastern shores of present day Newfoundland. In the subsequent conflict the natives prevented the arrivals from establishing any settlements. Exploring for England Italian Giovanni Cabot reached eastern Canada in 1497 and believing that he was in India, like Columbus in 1492 in the Caribbean, called the people there “Indians.”

Jacques Cartier arrived on Canada's east coast for France and sailed up river and erected a cross in what is now Quebec. Between 1600 and 1700 Europeans from several nations came to Newfoundland to fish and hunt whale but their settlements were temporary. From 1700 onwards France and England dominated the exploration of Canada primarily in search of a passage to India and its spices, copper, silver and gold. Instead they discovered rich quantities of fish, fur bearing animals and land.

On July 24 1534 Cartier erected a cross on the shore of New Brunswick. But the local Native Chief Donnacona expressed his offence in this way:

We had returned to our ships when the chief came wearing an old black bear skin in a boat with three of his sons and his brother [...] and held forth at us, pointing at said cross and making a cross with his two fingers, and then pointing to the ground all around us as if he wanted to say that all the land was his and we should not have erected said cross without his permission.

We will be able to see in this archetypal scene the pattern that much of the Christian mission to the native people of Canada would take for the next four hundred years.

In 1608, Samuel de Champlain founded the first Catholic colony in Quebec City. Later, in 1611, he established a fur trading post on the Island of Montreal, which later became a Catholic colony for trade and missionary activity. In 1620, George Calvert, purchased a tract of land in Newfoundland and established a colony, calling it Avalon. In 1627 Calvert brought two Roman Catholic priests to Avalon. This began Roman Catholic ministry in British North America. Despite the severe religious conflicts of the period, Calvert secured the right of Catholics to practice their religion unimpeded in Newfoundland, and embraced the novel principle of religious tolerance. Avalon was thus the first North American jurisdiction to practice religious tolerance.

The first religious in Canada were the Récollets from France. They established a mission in 1609, which was part of the French colony of Acadia. The Récollets were a reform movement within the Franciscan community beginning in Spain and later France. Champlain wanted to bring missionaries on his next voyage but his financiers put pressure on

him to find effective but inexpensive missionaries. The reformed Récollets with their vows of poverty were chosen over the Jesuits who were unpopular at that time in France.

The Récollets established a boarding school for Indians near Quebec City in 1620. As time went on other European missionaries established schools for Indians including Moravians and Anglicans but this was a small effort limited by the resources of the faithful. In 1867 the four colonies in Canada united through the British North America Act. Canada was still linked to Britain but essentially managed its own affairs.

The new governors and bureaucrats questioned what place Indians were to have in the new Canada. There was also a very real threat that the United States was going to invade and assume possession of the vast but lightly populated plains of central Canada.

The government's response to the threat of American invasion was to strategically induce overhunting of the buffalo that roamed the central plains to point of near extinction. This caused conditions of starvation on the plains for the natives who depended on buffalo for food. Then the government negotiated treaties with the tribes in exchange for food, medicine and education. They would have to live in one place called a reserve, usually land unsuitable for farming. Then Canada advertised throughout Western and Eastern Europe that 160 acres of land was being offered to anyone who would establish a homestead and prepare the land for agriculture.

In 1876 the government legislated the "Indian Act" which was a number of policies determined to assimilate the aboriginal peoples into the new Euro/Canadian society. It was believed that the best method of civilizing the "natives" would be through schools. **There were already** day or mission schools in some established areas. But the day school concept was largely abandoned in favor of residential (boarding) schools.

This undertaking grew in structure and purpose from 1831 when the governing officials of early Canada joined with Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, United, and Presbyterian churches in a formal agreement to create and operate the residential school system. The churches were to be compensated by the government for operating the schools.

It is at this time that St. Eugene sends the first six Oblates to Canada. In time the young men of France respond to the challenge of becoming missionaries to a brand new world. The ideal of saving souls of the indigenous people of Canadians led many young men to join the Oblates. The same ideal was alive among the Anglicans but since most of these were married they usually stayed with their family at a mission near the trading post.

Because of their mobility and numbers within ten years the Oblates had established major missionary centres at four locations across the west of Canada from Ottawa to the pacific coast and arctic ocean. From these centres the Oblates supported many other missions throughout the area with personnel, funds and supplies.

The Oblates must have seen the government offer to operate residential schools as an opportunity to form the natives into a Christian society as well as educate them so as not to find themselves on the margins of the new Canada.

Some of our Venerable Oblates, Bishops Grandin of Alberta, Taché of Manitoba and Charlebois of Saskatchewan saw the schools as an opportunity for their native people to obtain skills, education and language that would ensure that they would not simply be dependents of the government living off welfare.

What accelerated the Oblates involvement in building and operating residential schools was the threat that the government would give the protestant denominations permission to open schools among those natives that were being evangelized by Oblates. The competition between the Anglicans in the more northern areas saw the Oblates and their counterparts such as the Grey Nuns rise to the challenge to provide Catholic education to the natives.

The government required that children attend school for ten months of the year. This meant children would be gathered in the fall by boat, plane or bus and taken great distances from their families to return in summer. For over one hundred years nearly all school aged children in Native families were taken out of their own homes and families for their entire youth. For over a hundred years nearly every native young person did not experience what family life was like. For over a hundred years these families did not have the presence of children in their lives.

Residential schooling has had a long history in Catholic culture and the Oblates believed that it would be a great benefit to these first nations children. They most likely rationalized that this sacrifice was required to change these people into the kind of Christians that would be the cornerstone of a new temple in the wilderness. Like most people of western culture they probably hoped that the schools would civilize them.

De Mazenod however did not want his Oblates to be directly involved in teaching. In cases of necessity he authorized establishing schools in France, and later the university of Ottawa. However, these were exceptions and underlined the Oblates adaptability but not a new priority for the order. The vocation of Oblates was to be missionaries preaching the gospel. Education was not their mandate.

In 1935-36, a visit to the Oblates in Canada by the Superior-General Théodore de Labouré resulted in a re-evaluation of their missionary work in the North West. One of his recommendations was that missionaries would need to resume the study of native languages to become skilled linguists as their predecessors. It was this, of course, that had given the Oblates their advantage in relation to other religious denominations in the 19th century.

As well, a number of Oblates documented the lives of Aboriginal Peoples creating what can be considered the first anthropological studies of these communities. Father Vegreville went so far as to state that Aboriginal Peoples governed themselves, a state that challenged the given view that they were uncivilized.

The Superior General also announced that the General Administrative Council of the Oblates had ratified a proposal to establish three schools for the study of Indigenous languages: Grouard, Alberta, for Cree; Beauval, Saskatchewan, for Chipewyan; and Fort Alexander, Manitoba, for Saulteaux. He also dealt with the administration of the residential schools, which were generally operated by female religious communities with an Oblate principal. He ruled that Oblates should not reside in the schools and that they should reside in separate Oblate residences.

But in rural and northern Canada in the 1800's there were no other educational institutions like in France or Quebec. Early missionaries in all language groups learned as much native language as they could

often recording family genealogies. They used a series of symbols that translated the syllables of their spoken language. From these the Oblates produced simple catechisms and began translating the scriptures into native language in written form.

The Oblates could not have conducted the residential schools without the help of the Grey Nuns (Sisters of Charity of Montreal). The Grey Nuns made it possible for the Oblates to stabilize their educational endeavors in the north and west. The nuns exemplified a new role for women in the church beyond the cloister. The Grey Nuns came from Quebec and so represented the largest contingent of Canadians in the missions. Their connections with family improved fundraising just when contributions from France were declining.

As education institutions on the whole the residential schools were a massive failure. Government financial compensation and supplies were frequently insufficient. Much of the students' time was spent not learning but doing chores from net fishing, gardening, cutting firewood, caring for cattle and putting up hay so as to survive the winter. Because of poor food quality and quantity and the difficulty to keep large buildings warm in the Canadian north in winter saw continual sickness. And under these conditions tuberculosis, influenza and pneumonia caused many deaths.

Other frequent causes of death were from fires, accidents and exposure while trying to escape the school. But by far tuberculosis took most lives. In the early 1900's some schools reported that 25 % of the students died of TB. Recent estimates of the children who died during the residential school era to be over 5000. Frequently parents were not informed and record keeping was very incomplete when it came to deaths of students and often their names were not listed.

Some schools were better than others. Some staff were better than others. Religious women and men poured out their lives in efforts to serve the students and treat them well. Others became frustrated by a system and children that were not meant for each other. Some were mean and physically abusive. And some sexually abused children.

Some former students have fond memories of their time at residential schools, and certainly some of the priests and nuns who ran the schools treated the students as best they could given the circumstances.

But even these “good” experiences occurred within a system aimed at destroying Aboriginal cultures and assimilating Aboriginal students.

Former students of schools begin sharing their stories of physical and sexual abuse in the 1980s. Many in the 1990s file lawsuits against the Government of Canada. Groups of survivors of abuse emerge and in 2000 class action law suits are made against the government. The Government named the various dioceses, religious orders and churches as third party to the lawsuits against it. 70 % of the schools were operated by Catholic church and in most of these Oblates were in charge.

Apologies were made public by the headquarters of the various institution United Church of Canada (1986) Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, Anglican Church (1993) Presbyterian Church (1994)

Government of Canada (2008). In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI expressed “sorrow” to a delegation from Canada’s Assembly of First Nations over the abuse and ”deplorable” treatment that aboriginal students suffered at residential schools run by the Roman Catholic Church.

In 2006 the federal government, legal representatives of former students, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, and churches sign the historic Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The agreement is an out of court settlement that Government, Dioceses and Religious orders will pay to the survivors of the schools.

Under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, \$1.9 billion was set aside for all former residents of the schools. Every former student would receive \$10,000 for the first year of schooling, and \$3,000 for each subsequent year. According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 98% of the estimated 80,000 eligible former students had received payment by the end of December 2012, with over \$1.6 billion in total approved for payment.

The Settlement Agreement also set aside \$60 million for a five-year Truth and Reconciliation Commission that would provide opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to share their experiences. The Commission, established in 2008, was directed to raise public awareness through national and local events. It would also create a “comprehensive historical record” on the residential schools.

It is clear that the schools have been, arguably, the most damaging of the many elements of Canada’s colonization of this land’s original

peoples and, as their consequences still affect the lives of Aboriginal people today, they remain so.

The residential school system is viewed by much of the Canadian public as part of a distant past, disassociated from today's events. In many ways, this is a misconception. The last residential school did not close its doors until 1986. Many of the leaders, teachers, parents, and grandparents of today's Aboriginal communities are residential school survivors. There is, in addition, an intergenerational effect: many descendants of residential school survivors share the same burdens as their ancestors even if they did not attend the schools themselves.

These include transmitted personal trauma and compromised family systems, as well as the loss in Aboriginal communities of language, culture, and the teaching of tradition from one generation to another.

The residential schools laid the foundation for the epidemic we see today of domestic abuse and violence against Aboriginal women and children. Generations of children have grown up without a nurturing family life. As adults, many of them lack adequate parenting skills and, having only experienced abuse, in turn abuse their children and family members. The high incidence of domestic violence among Aboriginal families results in many broken homes, perpetuating the cycle of abuse and dysfunction over generations.

Many observers have argued that the sense of worthlessness that was instilled in students by the residential school system contributed to extremely low self-esteem. This has manifested itself in self-abuse, resulting in high rates of alcoholism, substance abuse, and suicide. Among First Nations people aged 10 to 44, suicide and self-inflicted injury is the number one cause of death, responsible for almost 40 percent of mortalities.¹⁸ First Nations women attempt suicide eight times more often than other Canadian women, and First Nations men attempt suicide five times more often than other Canadian men.¹⁹ Some communities experience what have been called suicide epidemics.

Many Aboriginal children have grown up feeling that they do not belong in "either world": they are neither truly Aboriginal nor part of the dominant society. They struggle to fit in but face discrimination from both societies, which makes it difficult to obtain education and skills. The result is poverty for many Aboriginal people. In addition, the residential schools and other negative experiences with state-sponsored

education have fostered mistrust of education in general, making it difficult for Aboriginal communities and individuals to break the cycle of poverty.

Unwittingly the Oblates became part of this human and ecclesial tragedy. And for many decades already Oblates have been serving to soak up the pain, sorrow and distress of this tragedy. Our legal obligations and in kind service will never be able to make up for our part in an evil policy of assimilation and the fracturing of families. Now Oblates in the spirit of the charism cross the borders of hurt, anger, suspicion, hopelessness to meet survivors and descendants of the residential schools in many different ways. We meet them in our northern and urban parishes. We gather them in programs like Returning to Spirit so we can hear their stories. We let them evangelize us in the way that they are accepting of the woundedness of others. As we receive the value in their persons, their culture and their struggles we can receive a greater measure of our true selves too. As we share our gifts of Word and Sacrament we grow together as a new humanity, as a new church and a new sanctity.

In this the charism renews itself in us.

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WALKING ON THE EDGE AND DARING TO CROSSOVER: MINISTRY AMONG THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF CANADA

FRANÇOIS PARADIS, OMI

Before I share my reflections on how I experienced the Oblate charism in my life in the context of my missionary activities among the Aboriginal people of Canada, I want to share two chapters from my research paper that I submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, ON, Canada, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mission Studies, April 2003. I will be sharing chapters one and five. My research paper title is: “Intrareligious Dialogue. A Matrix for a New Praxis of Evangelizing Mission among today’s Western Canadian Aboriginal Christian Communities.” There are six chapters:

1. “Called by God into Mission”;
2. “It is enough to lose the Faith”. It looks at missionary conquest, cultural genocide, responses to evangelization and present day challenges to evangelization;
3. God Converses with the World. Evangelization and cultures;
4. “The Holy Spirit Speaks”. Dialogue and evangelization; interreligious and intrareligious dialogue;
5. “The Holy Spirit Calls Forth”. Personal journey on the road of intrareligious dialogue;
6. “Launch into the deep”. Conclusions.

The purpose of sharing these chapters is to create the context for my reflections on the interaction that I experienced with the Oblate charism entrusted to me by God in the very calling into the congregation of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

Here are chapters one and five of my research paper in sections B and C respectively. I have not change the numbering within the chapter.

I have been a missionary among the aboriginal communities of Ojibway descent for twenty-six years.¹ I have observed, on the one hand, the revival or emergence both “traditional” religion among those who are considered Christians, and an increasing expression of negativism regarding the impact of Christianity upon the life of these communities and its members.

Meanwhile, the concepts of inculturation and dialogue were becoming recognized in the church. As a missionary among the aboriginal communities, I was introduced in a haphazard way to these concepts through conferences or study days in which missionaries and aboriginal people together began to tackle the question of Christian life and leadership in the aboriginal communities of faith. A few of us priests with a few pastoral co-workers embarked more and more on the cross-cultural dialogue which brought us, under the guidance of a few Elders, to experience first-hand some of the religious ceremonies of the Ojibway/Cree people in the mid- 1980s. In 1992, I made the decision to enter more intensely into this dialogue within the aboriginal communities where I ministered. During this same time, I participated in an interprovincial experience in Saddle Lake, Alberta. This latter experience, requested by the Lebret Task Force, brought together priests, religious pastoral agents and lay people for an eight- day experience of the traditional fast.² These gatherings occurred in the month of August from 1994 to 1998 with an average of twenty to twenty-five persons attending annually, of whom five to seven were priests.

My personal journey in dialogue started in the mid-1980s and included participation in ten traditional fasts. I was able to do the fast for seven consecutive years from 1994 to 2001. I danced for four successive years the Eagle Nest Sun Dance (1994-1997). Under the encouragement of a few Elders, I held the Sacred Fire about twice a year from 1995 to 2000 in front of the parochial church in Sagkeeng, Manitoba, where I lived and ministered from 1983 to 2000. The Sacred Fire involves prayer and vigil around a fire for four nights and four days.

People come and go and stay whatever length of time they wish. I participated in the Pipe Ceremonies on many occasions and for various purposes, in the Sharing Circle, the Healing Circle, and the Sweat Lodges – too numerous to count. In the last few years that I was in Sag-

keeng, I went to at least three Sweat Lodges a month. I am also a Sacred Pipe Carrier and have been given an Eagle Fan that, it is said, I have earned. I have over the years received three “Indian” spiritual names.

The dialogue journey was difficult in many ways as there were very few resources available to guide my journey. Many fears, prejudices and questions needed to be faced along the way and many still need to be addressed. I also carry along with the former members of the Lebreton Task Force a concern for a new approach to our evangelizing mission within aboriginal communities: a respectful, dialogical and culturally sensitive approach replacing the old Western approach, tainted with paternalism, colonialism and ethnocentrism.

The reason I came to Saint Paul University to pursue a M. A. in Mission Studies was to acquire the concepts and skills to be able to conceptualize and synthesize my experience in journeying with the aboriginal people and to revision my ministry in their midst: a renewed praxis that would favour the inculturation of the Gospel.

Through this specific research project, I want to achieve a clearer understanding of why dialogue is an indispensable part of a praxis of an evangelizing mission in today’s Western Canadian Aboriginal Christian communities. This research is important, first of all, that I might gain a more solid foundation behind my reasons to be involved in dialogue as well as to clarify its purpose and direction; secondly, for those who are involved in an aboriginal church ministry, that they may be challenged and encouraged to undertake such a dialogue; thirdly, for the Church’s authorities, that they will not send and/or place pastoral agents in aboriginal communities without proper cross-cultural and cross-religious preparation; fourthly, for the Christian aboriginal people themselves, that they may have the space necessary to inculturate the Gospel.

Firstly, I will examine the results of past praxes of evangelization in North America. This will provide the context and the issues leading to my specific research question. Secondly, I will examine the relationship between evangelization and cultures. This will provide the theoretical framework for this research. Thirdly, I will suggest a use of dialogue as a praxis whereby the specific research question may be answered. Fourthly, by means of stories and narratives from my own experience in dialogue, I will propose an answer or certain aspects of it. Lastly, I will conclude by summarizing the answer and its implication for the future.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLS FORTH

I have journeyed through intrareligious dialogue. Through the narration of a portion of that journey, I will illustrate how I perceive intrareligious as that mission praxis that is indispensable in helping the evangelizers—in the extended sense as expressed in the second chapter—address the challenges expressed in chapter two and expounded in the following chapters.

I will, in a first step, narrate how I slowly moved into intrareligious dialogue. I will express the struggles of that journey into the unknown world of the other at the cutting edge of a new praxis of mission. In a second step, I will narrate my first experience of dancing in an Ojibway Eagle Nest Sun Dance. This will include both my experience of it and a description along with a few commentaries on the Eagle Nest Sun Dance. The latter are important to grasp and understand as much as is possible the elements involved in my experience. Finally, I will reflect on my experiences of intrareligious dialogue to draw out important points to illustrate my thesis. The thesis is that intrareligious dialogue is indispensable. As a mission praxis, it creates a matrix from which and through which a new praxis of an evangelizing mission in its full dimension can emerge and address the challenges evoked earlier.

“That Is Paganism!”

“Bosho, Wabishki-mashkode-pijiki inini nind ijinikas. Migisi nin todem. Hello. My name is White Buffalo man. I am from the Bald Eagle clan.”

For the Ojibway in Southern Manitoba, this is the traditional way of opening when one is asked to share in a religious ceremony, in a sharing circle or in a gathering within their culture. The Ojibway name and the clan indicate the place of one in relation to all things in creation. It indicates one’s calling in life. Toward the end of this paper, I will give you what insights I have concerning this Indian spiritual name that I was given during a Sweat Lodge ceremony without seeking it. I had received two previous names which I reveal to you as we journey together through this paper.

My encounter with the traditional religious elements of the Ojibway culture occurred in my first mission in the mid-70. I heard from a

parishioner that a Sweat Lodge ceremony had taken place in the community during the past weekend. Someone had led it from another First Nation community. My spontaneous reaction was that of many other missionaries at the time: “That is paganism! Don’t tell me that the Christians will be drawn back to paganism.” Sometime later, I was visiting another of my missions some 180 km away. I met there at the home of an Ojibway Elder a few parishioners from the Metis community where I had my main residence.

They were visiting him for the purpose of traditional healing. I was becoming aware that a revival of the traditional religion was happening.

At the first Amerindian Christian Leadership Institute in Ottawa in 1975, though there was an effort made to relate the question of leadership to cultural elements, there was no mention of the religious dimension of these cultures. It was only in 1976, in Edmonton, as recounted in the introduction to the chapter on dialogue, that the issue of the traditional religion started to be touched upon. In the following years, the relationship between the Christian faith and the traditional religions as well as their associated cultures was always one of the topics discussed at the gathering. In the United States, the same phenomenon was happening within the Tekakwitha Conference.

In September 1983, after a two-year sabbatical, I was stationed in Sagkeeng, Manitoba, among the Ojibway people. In August of that year, I had the opportunity to attend the Tekakwitha Conference in Collegeville, Minnesota. I attended my first Sweat Lodge. An Ojibway Roman Catholic deacon conducted the Sweat Lodge. With many other priests participating in the Sweat Lodge, I felt it was a safe place to experience it. My first experience was in fact positive. It felt like a good prayer meeting. Through the years and through these different events and/or sessions, a certain inner transformation was taking place and I was intellectually more open to enter into that kind of dialogue.

As I started my ministry in Sagkeeng, I realized that there was a sizable group of Catholics and Anglicans that were involved in their original Ojibway cultural ceremonies. The churchgoers shunned upon this group. There were stories of “bad medicine” being cast on people and “fire balls” being seen.³ There was a certain level of fear coming from the churchgoers. Some of these resorted to sprinkling holy water

and holy salt around the reserve to ban the evil spirits and the bad medicine. This element of bad medicine is often thrown around as a reason not to be involved with the religious core of First Nations' cultures both by the aboriginal Christians— those who are part of the second group as identified earlier— and by the missionaries. I personally was caught in that mode of thinking, especially as through the Charismatic Movement I had experienced the presence and/or activities of evil spirits at various times in my ministry. It is in this context that I invited Fr. John Hascall to come in the early spring of 1984 to give a retreat in Sagkeeng for the Roman Catholics. This turned out to be an ecumenical and “inter-faith” experience as described in the introduction of the previous chapter. I had met Fr. John Hascall on various occasions either at the Tekakwitha Conference or at the Amerindian Christian Leadership Institute. Fr. John Hascall's sharing of his inner spiritual journey and the time of prayer spent together brought about a breakthrough for the community. It strengthened in me the idea that this was the road that we needed to follow. My second experience of a Sweat Lodge was on this occasion. Again it presented itself as a safe occasion, being conducted by Fr. John Hascall. This event brought me closer to all the groups who were involved in the retreat.

In June 1984, from another Oblate who had attended as an observer the local Sun Dance, I learned that receiving an Indian spiritual name opens the door to participating more deeply in the ceremonies and other cultural religious events. I accompany him when he went to see White Wolf, a local Elder in Sagkeeng, for a spiritual name. Inspired by him, I decided to seek an Indian Spiritual name. I approached White Wolf with the customary offering of tobacco.

Accepting my tobacco, he told me to come back in a week's time. This was to allow him during his prayer time to receive a vision concerning my name. A week later, on a night of a full moon, I visited his home. White Wolf said that I had come on a good night as it was proper to my name. After praying a beautiful prayer with his Sacred Pipe, praying for me and the work I was doing as a priest, he revealed my name, Black Wolf. I asked him what the meaning of my name was. He responded that it was my responsibility to find out. It is by experience that one comes to find the meaning of his/her name. Not too long after, I met another aboriginal Catholic from another reserve about 250

km away; he had already heard that I had received an Indian name and what the name was. I guess it was good news among the First Nations people! This simple request was already opening doors for me. Simple in a way, but also a big step as I did not know where it would lead me.

That same summer of 1984, I attended my first meeting in Little Red River.⁴ It is there that I experienced my first four-day fast. I was able to return for a second time the next summer. It is at these meetings that the Elder Joseph Couture warned us priests that it would take at least five to six fast experiences before we could begin to understand. This has to do with the ways of knowing; it is difficult to pass from the rational mode of knowledge to another mode of knowledge which is as valuable as the other. It is learning to function in a different way. These meetings at Little Red River allowed me again to experience First Nations' spirituality in a safe environment.

In the fall of 1984, I was attending a *powwow* at the local high school. The Elder White Wolf approached me and offered me a cigarette. I knew by the gesture that he had something important to communicate to me. I accepted the cigarette and he told me about a dream he had. In this dream, he saw me receiving a Sacred Pipe. The pipe's bowl and stem were to be black. I accepted the message of his dream. After receiving instructions, I proceeded into getting my first Sacred Pipe. According to John Hascall, the colour black for the Ojibway is the colour of prayer. According to another young Elder in Sagkeeng, when he heard that my Sacred Pipe was to be all black, he said it was a pipe with lots of spiritual power.

From September 1983 to the fall of 1985, I only had the parish in Sagkeeng to look after.

I did have more time to meet the people. By November 1985, I inherited five more out laying missions. As I look back, between then and 1992, I see two different realities concerning intrareligious dialogue. The first reality is that I did very little in the line of intrareligious dialogue as far as the spiritual ceremonies are concerned. During those years, I attended a few more sessions of the Amerindian Christian Leadership Institute. We had in the summer of 1986 in Lebret, Saskatchewan, the cross-Canada gathering of all the Oblates and their co-workers working in an aboriginal ministry. There were annual study days within the Oblate Province of Manitoba of those working in an aboriginal ministry. It

is on the occasion of one of these study days that we had as guest presenter Vincent Donovan. I prayed with my Sacred Pipe only occasionally. The opportunity to attend First Nations' ceremonies in a safe place outside the communities where I ministered did not present itself.

There was exteriorly an intellectual commitment to the issues of faith and culture. But interiorly and affectionally, there was a struggle. There were deep down various kinds of fear: the fear of distorting the truth, of leading the people unto the wrong path, of getting involved with something that was contrary to the Gospel, of betraying the Gospel. In fact, it was a struggle between the different positions within the theology of religions, which I eventually came to understand, for example, as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. These theologies of religions try to relate in these various ways the Christ event in relationship to these other religions. It was a struggle happening at the level of both my head and my hearth. My head sometimes said that it was okay, but at other moments it brought arguments against it. On the one hand, my hearth knew that the few experiences with the religious cultural ceremonies had been positive, but on the other hand, there were those fears. At the same time, most of the people coming to church on Sundays were members of that second group who did not want to have anything to do with the traditional culture, more specifically its religious core. But again, there were some who were moving toward the rediscovery of those elements of their culture; in fact, I encouraged them.

As I read Tinker and a few other authors dealing with the negative impact of evangelization in collusion with colonisation, I recognized within myself some of the same cultural biases and reflexes that caused so much destruction in the long run. This really was not what I wanted. At that time, I did not know what I know today, that is, all the above concepts, such as inculturation, dialogue, and interreligious dialogue, expounded briefly for this paper, and others. In the midst of these interior struggles, there was something that kept pushing me forward. I love the Lord Jesus and I love the people whom God has created and who are called to share life with him. Pained by the pain I was picking up in the people and by the destructive elements that imprisoned them, I was searching for the path of healing, reconciliation and liberation for all. I pained that the Gospel could have done this! Faith and hope were keeping me probing my way forward.

The second reality was that an intrareligious dialogue was taking place not in direct relationship to the First Nations' spirituality, but in relationship to the life of the people with whom I was journeying. This occurred especially in two neighbouring missions among the new missions that came under my ministry in the fall of 1985. It took the form of a prayer group. It included times of faith sharing, adult education and healing ceremonies. This followed a Life in the Spirit Seminar attended by parents who had children for Confirmation. There were adults from at least twenty-five families. For many, this was a new encounter and experience of Jesus Christ and of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. This, in turn, occasioned in the people's lives an inner dialogue between this new experience and their past experiences both of Christianity in its claims and of how it had been lived and experienced in their families and community life. This eventually led many to examine the relationship of their faith with their culture and its religious core. This examination was influenced to some extent by the Church as we, a few other pastoral agents and I, would invite them to sessions dealing with the issues of faith and culture. New leaders for the aboriginal Christian community were emerging from the people participating in these faith-sharing groups.

When I started in the above missions, there was a whole group of people who had just started on the path of sobriety. Through the meetings, mentioned above, the people started to rebuild their lives from the onslaught of addictions and poor self-images. Others who were still drinking alcohol made the decisions for sobriety through these gatherings. As healing was taking place, their self-image was changing. As a positive self-image was replacing the negative one, the issues of cultural identity came forward. At the same time this was happening, the whole community was beginning to take hold and control of the issues of widespread sexual abuses in the families; it was one of the underlying causes to their alcohol addictions. These issues of sexual abuses emerged as more and more people were sobering up. An organisation, built on a network of community agencies, including the Churches, came out of the "ashes"—so to speak— to address these issues in such a way that individuals, families and the community could heal and be restored. As individuals were healing in various groups' sharing circles, within the Church or elsewhere, the community itself was being trans-

formed. In this context, the cultural revival, which had started with a few people previously, was amplified. In this instance, the Church was part of the revival. She was part of the revival basically through the dialogical process that had been adopted by the mission staff. It was an intrareligious dialogue that addressed the people at where they were and gave them a voice in their own journey of faith.

Dancing in an Eagle Nest Sun Dance

The first Manitoba Aboriginal Catholic Conference (MACC) took place in Sagkeeng in August 1992. The MACC was a consequence of the Amerindian Christian Leadership Institute. One shortfall of the Amerindian Christian Leadership Institute was the lack of consistent input from the local communities. The delegates from these communities changed from one conference to the other; this affected the continuity from one conference to the other. Another problem was the lack of information flowing from the national to the local. Hence, the MACC was instituted to continue at the provincial level what was done at the national level. The MACC included aboriginal communities from the three dioceses covering most of Manitoba. The MACC was held annually. Different aboriginal communities from the three dioceses hosted the conference. As a principle, it rotated among the dioceses from year to year, each in turn. It is only Sagkeeng who hosted it twice. The MACC had its tenth and final meeting in Sagkeeng in August 2001. The MACC is an example of interreligious dialogue. At the same time, it was inviting the aboriginal people to enter into intrareligious dialogue between their cultural heritage and the Gospel. The non-aboriginal participants were invited in this inner dialogue with the aboriginal cultural heritage.

During this first conference in Sagkeeng, we had traditional Elders make presentations on the Sacred Pipe and the Sweat Lodges. On Saturday afternoon, an opportunity to experience the Sweat Lodge ceremony was given to the participants. I was sitting with one of the Sweat Lodge keeper—let us call him John. We were waiting for the rocks to be ready. He turned to me and said: “Father, I do believe in Jesus.” I also knew that Elder John was the Sun Dance keeper. At that moment, within me, there seems to be a voice telling me that I needed to be involved with these Elders at the local level. At the end of the conference on Sunday

afternoon, I interiorly decided to get involved when I would come back from my sabbatical.

I took a four-month sabbatical that fall of 1992. This sabbatical brought me to southern France at the place where my religious congregation was founded. One day during the thirty-day retreat at Notre-Dame-de-Lumières, while I was meditating up on the mountain on my mission and on the call to get involved in dialogue with the local Elders, I detected a persistent inner thought or an inner movement of the Holy Spirit that was saying: “Why are you afraid? Don’t you know that I am with you?” This experience in the mountain confirmed my decision to get involved with the local Elders.

I came back into the ministry at the beginning of January 1993. Coming back into a ministry in midyear demanded all my energies. That spring I attended a weekend conference that was happening at the same time as the Sun Dance. In September 1993, I started attending the Sweat Lodge ceremonies at the Elder John’s place. At some time during that fall I decided to participate, if I was allowed, in the next Sun Dance. I knew that the preparation for the Sun Dance for next June started at the beginning of December. In November, I approached the Elder John and offered him some tobacco. Having accepted my tobacco, I asked him if he saw me participating in the Sun Dance. To my astonishment, he revealed to me the vision he had during the last Sun Dance. In his vision, he saw me dressed in my alb praying with my hands extended over the Sun Dance. I guess he was just waiting for me to come forward! That evening, John and his wife shared with me their Christian faith and John shared that one day the two ways would come together. He told me that he was not coming to Church because of some hurts received from his experience at the Residential School and also that when he started to follow the ways of his ancestors he was condemned by the churchgoers. But, one day he might be in Church.

Making the decision to “Sun Dance” did not remove by itself the inner struggles mentioned earlier. On the one hand, I participated in the traditional preparations to the Sun Dance and participated in the Sweat Lodges whenever I could. There are three one-evening Sun Dance preparation meetings in December, February and April. These preparations involved dancing, praying for the Sun Dance’s success and for the sun dancers. It also involved “doctoring” those in need of special help or

healing. On the other hand, I had two prayer groups pray for me, one from the local parish and the other from the mission mentioned above. I also had the Fraternity of Priests pray over me for the same reason.⁵ It was during this time that it became clear to me for what reason I should dance. The Sun Dance as explained to me by the Elder John is a celebration of life. It is a thanksgiving for life, but at the same time a request for the blessings needed for life: a renewal of life, in all of creation as in our personal/family/community life. The sun dancers are called to offer their dance and their sufferings—the sun dancer fast totally from food and water during the whole ceremony— as a prayer for a blessing, most often a healing, for someone else: a member of the family, their family or a friend. Sometimes a dancer will dance to receive gifts he or she needs to minister to the people as a keeper or carrier of a ceremony or of the Sacred Pipe. The sun dancers dance not for themselves, but always for others or in relationship to others. I felt called to dance for the reconciliation between the First Nations and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and also between First Nations and the dominant society. There was a convergence emerging from the different groups who were praying for me: they all confirmed my participation in the Sun Dance. One of the priests who prayed over me had an interior vision of a hawk sinking his claws into my upper back. This indicated that possibly I should also pierce during the Sun Dance. In fact, just before we enter into the Sun Dance ceremony, another Elder from another Ojibway community in North Dakota, having been given some tobacco, verified and confirmed that I was called to undergo piercing. I also knew that by my decision to Sun Dance in June 1994, I was committing myself to dance for four consecutive years. My decision to dance was communicated to my Bishop. His answer was that it was okay if there was nothing against the faith. We did not discuss it any further, as I did not know until I would experience it. Many of my own parishioners were sun dancers.

The Sun Dance in Sagkeeng takes place after the emergence of the first leaves, hence during the first week of June. The arrival and the setting up of one's camp take place on Wednesday and Thursday. The sun dancers are expected to purify themselves in a cleansing Sweat Lodge ceremony. This occurs on Thursday afternoon or evening. The next morning at sunrise, a group of sun dancers accompanies the Sun Dance

keeper to the bush to cut down the center tree, the tree of life, previously chosen by Sun Dance keeper: a tree that is strong and tall with a good fork at the crown. A special ceremony that includes an offering of tobacco is performed before cutting down the tree. Most of the branches are trimmed except for a few around the fork at the top. The sun dancers carry the tree. It is carried to the spot where the Sun Dance Lodge will be built. The tree is not to touch the ground at any point while it is being hauled. Once at the Sun Dance Lodge's spot, the tree is lowered into the hole dug while the tree was being cut.

After breakfast, under the guidance of the Sun Dance keeper and his helpers, the sun dancers construct the Sun Dance Lodge. The construction consists, firstly, of planting equidistant in a circle around the central tree eight solid posts topped by a fork. These are about six feet tall. These are placed in such a way that four sides of this hexagon faced the four cardinal directions; these will be known as the doorways. Only the doorway of the South will be left opened; this will be the entrance into the Sun Dance Lodge. Eight tree trunks are erected between these posts, forming crossbeams; another eight trunks are erected connecting each post to the central tree, the tree of life. These tree trunks, connecting the outer circle to the central tree, form eight sections; these eight sections plus the tree of life equal nine. For human beings, there are nine months of gestation for new life to emerge! All around this circle except for the South doorway, young poplar trees are leaned side by side to each other against the crossbeams, thus forming the Sun Dance Lodge enclosure. At the top of the tree of life, where all the tips of the tree trunks intersect, a nest is built into which the tobacco offerings from each sun dancer will be placed. This is known as the eagle's nest and hence, the name Eagle's Nest Sun Dance. One- metre-long colour cloths, known as flags, are hung on the tree trunks forming the top of the lodge. On the East and West side of the tree of life, about eight feet from the ground, a smiling face will be carved in the tree of life. While dancing, the sun dancers are requested to look at this face on the tree of life; it is a point of concentration. The male sun dancers are positioned in the West side of the lodge, while the female sun dancers are in the East side. Each sun dancer builds for him/herself, out of willow branches, a small stall just big enough to sit and sleep in. They will enter into their stall by squeezing through the poplar trees of the exterior wall. The year I

first danced we were so many that there were two rows of stalls. I had to come in through my neighbour's stall that was behind me. In the front of each stall, two small leafy poplar trees are planted into the ground at shoulder width. On these, each sun dancer ties his personal colour flags; these poplar trees will be shaken as he or she dances.

The Sun Dance proper starts at sunset Friday evening. It starts with a feast: it is the last time the sun dancers will eat and drink before the end of the Sun Dance. This is followed by a ceremonious entry into the Sun Dance Lodge. We then dance on and off until about midnight.

The drum group is situated toward the North doorway between the male and female dancers. They will drum and chant. Each time they are drumming and singing, the sun dancers are to dance. This can go from ten minutes to a half hour or more at a time. We dance whenever the Sun Dance keeper wants us to dance; we dance whenever someone is piercing or being doctored at the tree of life. All the dancers have an Eagle-bone whistle which they blow as they dance on the spot, shaking at the same time the two small poplar trees planted in front of them, while looking at the tree of life. After a while, especially as the dance goes on for a half hour, your leg muscles can just start burning and aching. As the drum stops, the sun dancers sit down. This could be for a few minutes, and sometime it may be a longer break. This will vary during the day at different times. There are many drummers and singers replacing each other at the drum during the day.

We sleep under the stars in our stalls: we are allowed to have a ground sheet, a foam mattress and a sleeping bag. But, in Sagkeeng in June, the mosquitoes are very numerous and very voracious. We are awoken – if we have been able to sleep – just before sunrise, so as to be dancing as the sun rises. This day the temperature rises to 31° Celsius under a clear sky.

By mid-afternoon, I am feeling the heat of the day and I am getting exhausted; I can hardly move my legs to the beat of the drum. My mouth is dry. I feel faint. I think of the people in the draught stricken Ethiopia who are walking miles upon miles seeking food and refuge from the draught. My head bows toward the ground. The sun dancer behind me tells me to just look at the tree of life and that I would get strength from it. The teaching is that the tree is giving its life so that we may have life and the blessings we seek. I look to the tree intensively. I

look up to where the nest is situated; behold to my astonishment, out of the branches and leaves at the top, I perceive the thorn-crowned head of Christ as on the cross. I look away and then I look again; still, I perceive the same image. I try to look from different angles, and I still perceive the same image of the suffering Christ on the cross. At that moment, I sense a movement within my spirit and a rush of new energy invades my whole body; my spirit is lifted. This energy remained with me till Sunday afternoon as we were approaching the end, waiting for the end of the giveaway. The next day I could no longer perceive the same image.

An hour or so after, they call me for the piercing ceremony. The piercing involve having two smooth wood skewers, about 2 ½-3" long made from chokecherry branches—its wood is naturally antibiotic— inserted just under the skin in two double parallel slits on both sides of your upper chest. These are hooked through a loop to two ropes that are then attached high up on the tree of life. The ceremony involves dancing toward the tree to the beat of the drum while blowing on the eagle-bone whistle; at the tree, we touch our head to the tree in prayer, we dance backward away from the tree as far as we can go having the ropes pull tight on the skewers without ripping the skin. You keep your eyes focus on the tree or more properly on the Eagle's Nest on top of the tree. This is done four times. During this time, all the sun dancers are praying for the one who is piercing. On the fourth time we back up quickly to the end in such a way as to tear out the skewers. Immediately, they put some natural medicines on your wounds to stop any bleeding and infection. My experience of the piercing is that it looks more painful than what, in fact, I experienced. I experienced a slight burning sensation when they cut the skin with a single use surgical scalpel and pushed the skewer through the slits.

The teaching that goes with this ceremony is that you offer your suffering as a prayer for the requested blessings. What came to me was my participation in the sufferings of Christ, not that I needed to add to what Christ did for us, but it was sharing existentially in his suffering.

This teaching is connected to the reality that there is a cost to everything: there is a cost to life; love can be painful and costly. It is not a cheap prayer made with empty words; it calls for a commitment. The Elder who led the piercing told me afterwards that it was easy for me

because I kept my eyes on the Creator and not on the Creator's helpers, that is, the spirits.

The Sun Dance finishes with the sun dancers breaking through the willow barrier in front of us—it is a new birth—and wrapping the tree of life with our flags, dancing out of the Sun Dance lodge, circling around the Sacred Fire some six metres from the South doorway, dancing back to the lodge where we are greeted at the door with a fresh glass of water. The final ceremony is the feast. Be careful at how much you eat and what you eat!

During the feast I met another Elder from another of my mission. As we were talking, he made reference to the piercing as the wounds of Christ. In a way he was referring to the tree as representing the cross, the tree of life. As mentioned by Peelman, there are certain Christological interpretations being given by Christian aboriginals.⁶⁶ It is not the purpose of this paper to give theological interpretations to these ceremonies, but only to account for the intrareligious dialogue as a worthwhile experience or not.

What were the reactions of the people to my dancing? Depending on their attitudes towards the Christians, members of the first group either were suspicious of my motives to Sun Dance or accepting it with a certain caution. The members of the second group said that I was going too fast and it was not the time for me to do that. Some members of this group quietly disapproved of my dancing. These were the ones that blame the burning of the Church—which occurred three weeks after—to my dancing in the Sun Dance. The members of the third group said that it was about time that I danced. They were there to support and encourage me. In fact, a young man was my helper and my substitute when I needed to absent myself from the lodge for a short while. The members of the fourth group had no comments.

This experience of the Sun Dance was a pivotal point for me. At the end of the experience, I was euphoric. I had conquered my fears and I was not any worst for it. I had entered the Sun Dance as a Christian and I came out as an enriched Christian. The spiritual experience described above was unexpected. I felt a deepening of my faith. With the aboriginal people involved in the rediscovery of their culture, my relationship improved. The Elder John became a friend and a teacher. My involvement with him increased. I started attending regularly his Sweat

Lodge ceremonies and other ceremonies he would have from time to time. Through him I met many other persons and Elders who were in his network of contacts. I became one with them.

When he heard that I had lost my Sacred Pipe in the fire that destroyed the rectory and the Church, he met me one day on the road a few weeks later. He had another Sacred Pipe for me.

He said that he heard Black Wolf calling for the pipe. For Easter 1995 in front of the burned structure of the Church, under his suggestion and that of another Elder, we had a Sacred Fire leading us for four days into Easter. The other Elder, who only came to Church for funerals, usually had at his place this Sacred Fire in honour of Christ twice a year: at Easter and at Christmas. He accepted to do his at the Church. John opened the Sacred Fire. We again had the Sacred Fire during the four days prior to the blessing of the new Church. John and a group of drum singers were part of the blessing of the new Church. One year later, at the Christmas 1996 midnight mass, Elder John chanted a few drum songs. I was learning more and more about aboriginal culture and its religious ceremonies. I had great hope for a deeper interreligious dialogue, but unfortunately, two weeks prior my fourth Sun Dance, Elder John died of pneumonia. His funeral lasted for four hours, extended by the extensive viewing before the mass by a record crowd. A highlight for me was the singing of a “piercing song” before closing the casket.⁷ His close associates stood in a circle around his casket, which was situated underneath the hanging cross of Christ.⁸ The funeral mass proper was only one hour long. It was the added ceremonies and a few eulogies that extended the time we spent in the Church. I am still searching for a teacher or teachers of his caliber to replace him.

I came to realize the richness of the Elders’ knowledge. This I experienced in all the various religious ceremonies I attended. There is an embedded process in all of these various ceremonies helping persons grow in a more harmonious way and heal from elements destroying their life. There is an experiential learning process that rivals many of our feeble ways of teaching. The rituals in these ceremonies put to shame many of our liturgies. I learned much about rituals and symbols through their religious ceremonies. The process of the four-day fast reminded me of certain elements of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. For example, there is a process of discernment of the spirits that enables

one to identify the kind of spirits, good or evil, if they come to visit you during the fast. Or again, before entering the fast, we meet one of the Elders leading the fast and we express our intention for the fast and the benefits we are seeking; this is similar to expressing, in the Ignatian Exercises, the intention and the grace sought before a prayer exercise. I have time and again received as much if not more benefices for my spiritual life from the four-day fast than from the annual retreat.

To finish this part, I would like to share my experience when I got my second “Indian” spiritual name. In early 1998, I was discerning if it was time for me to leave Sagkeeng for another mission. We surveyed the communities concerning the question of the possibility of my leaving the area. An evaluation of my ministry was also done. At one Sweat Lodge ceremony, I offered to the Sweat Lodge keeper some tobacco so that he and the group present would pray concerning that same question. After the second round, the Elder Janet who was sitting at the North door in the Sweat Lodge called me: “Black Wolf, you are to have a new name. You are now to be called ‘Flying-from-the-East-White-Head’ Eagle man.” We did not know at the time its meaning. The next week I prepared a dish of cooked fish to honour my new name in the Sweat Lodge. Janet was wondering if I would not be called someday to lead a Sweat Lodge.

That was far from my intention! After the first round, Janet’s granddaughter exclaimed that she knew the meaning of my name. During the sweat, she saw an eagle enter into our new church through the big round window we have behind the altar. She said that it meant “one who opens a new path.” It very much described what I was all about in that community. As to my present name, that is, my third name, White Buffalo, I am still trying to get its full meaning. The buffalo for the Ojibway in Sagkeeng represents respect, one of the seven teachings. The White Buffalo legend is also important. The buffalo is the keeper of the West door in the Ojibway Sweat Lodge in Sagkeeng. This is where I am at; it is yet to be fathomed.

Reflections

I could share many more experiences of intrareligious dialogue with many other elements of the rich heritage of the aboriginal people, especially the Ojibway. But, I think that we have enough, notwithstand-

ing adding a few short episodes, to illustrate why I believe intrareligious dialogue is indispensable for pastoral agents ministering among the aboriginal people. What are some of the points that can be extracted from my experiences in intrareligious dialogue from those above and others?

Firstly, to enter into intrareligious dialogue reveals and challenges your preconceptions about the other and your fears. To move forward, you need to deal with these. This becomes clear if one recognises why in certain context I felt safe to participate in a spiritual experience and not in another. In the first context— outside the local community – there was something or someone that was related to my world and I felt that this would protect me from the unknown in the other. In the other context— within the local community – I was finding all kind of fears and excuses that block my reaching to them in dialogue. These fears were mostly based on those preconceptions and biases. Also deep down there was an attitude that I had what I needed and that I did not need what they had to offer: a sense of possessing the fullness of the truth. In short, intrareligious dialogue makes you aware of the cultural biases and other personal concepts and beliefs that can distort your relationship with the cultural others and distort your ministry among these same others.

Secondly, on the one hand, I accepted the concepts of dialogue, culture and inculturation; on the other hand, I had difficulties to enter into actual dialogue, or accept certain cultural beliefs. Using Spiro, I would say that, on the one hand, I knew and understood to some degree elements of their culture and of their beliefs: I could cognitively accept these, but this was only at the first, second or third level of Spiro hierarchy of cognitive significance. These elements remained superficial, that is, they did not affect me or motivate me. They were still strange to me. When I entertained to enter or actually entered into intrareligious dialogue with the local Elders, it would then trigger the fear of the unknown, of the alien at the affectional or motivational levels.

After experientially encountering repeatedly these strange cultural elements, they slowly became more and more familiar. I became more able to cognitively accept them at the fourth and fifth level, that is, at the affectional and motivational level where they became part of my beliefs system and behaviour: they are no longer strange or alien. I come to understand them from the inside. In short, intrareligious dialogue has the

potential for personal transformation, removing the blockages that may prevent one from being able to give and to receive. It favours cultural and religious “interpenetration” and exchange.⁹

Thirdly, there are many other ways to enter into cross-cultural communication. But, religious cultural beliefs, when they are not “cultural clichés” but are embedded deeply into the cultural system—which they often are—can reveal to us dimensions of thinking and of behaving that we would not be able to reach and understand in the other forms of cultural communication. It is like touching the soul of the other in what is the most sacred to him/her. I believe this is why Elder Joseph Couture mentioned that to participate in a four-day traditional fast is the best cross-cultural awareness workshop we can take. By my experience, I have to agree with him. In short, intrareligious dialogue allows one to probe and touch the depth of others’ cultural reality, creating a fundamental condition through which an exchange with the other becomes possible. It becomes possible to the degree that meaningful and relevant communication can happen: both being on the same wavelength, so to speak.

Fourthly, when we do express a willingness to enter into the world of others—in my case, the Ojibway’s and express an acceptance of what these others culturally value, a whole new world opens up to us that we would be unaware of even if we stayed twenty years or more in their midst. Goulet writes:

It was only in coactivity with them [the Dene Tha] in their rituals that I would gradually develop an appreciation for their inner dynamics and their many levels of meanings. Thus, consistent with their [Dene Tha] view of knowledge as firsthand experience, they offered me little in the way of instructions or body of interpretations before I engaged with them in rituals. Rather, the invitation was there to join and to learn from within, in the process of taking part in the ceremonies themselves.¹⁰

In short, intrareligious dialogue is a fundamental condition to learn some of the most important cultural elements for a serious exchange/interaction between the Gospel and the aboriginal cultures.

Fifthly, my experience with the aboriginal spirituality questioned many aspects of the ways of my culture of seeing the world, of relating

to all living things, of knowing, of teaching our beliefs, and of celebrating the liturgy. It taught me the importance of knowing not only intellectually, but also of being able to experientially know and relate it to my very existence: to enter into a different mode of knowing. It taught me to see things in a holistic way: I am related to the others around me and to all things in creation, seen and unseen. I am called to live in harmony: within myself, with others and with all things in creation. In short, intrareligious dialogue creates the meeting place where one can be enriched by the cultural worldview of the other and be transformed by it. From such an encounter and exchange, a new creativity in expressing one's faith and beliefs evolves.

Sixthly, as Panikkar would say, intrareligious dialogue is a religious act.¹¹ It calls upon your faith and your trust in the action of the Holy Spirit within your spiritual life. It is truly an endeavour to discover the mysteries of God's action and love that existed among these people before the coming of the Gospel. It is equally a search to discover and recognize what He is doing now in our/their midst. In short, intrareligious dialogue is an integral part of the evangelizing mission, expanding our knowledge of God's action and presence in the world.

Seventhly, on the one hand, intrareligious dialogue within the local community where we reside is more demanding. I felt that it was safer in the context previously described. Within the local community, people think they know us and we think we know the people; unfortunately, more often than not, we know the stories or better, the gossip about them and vice versa. Within the local community, we are subjected to the local politics, that is, the various power plays taking place between the groups. But also, you become aware of the biases that you have towards them. On the other hand, intrareligious dialogue can help one go beyond the superficial and the power plays to reach in truth the people involved. In all cases or situations, discernment of the Elders and of their authority is needed. In fact, we need a certain level of trust before we can commit ourselves to intrareligious dialogue. It is only when I reached that level of trust in the Elder John that I was able to commit myself to participating in the Sun Dance. In short, intrareligious dialogue is somewhat a process of incarnating oneself into a local community other than one's own. As Christ's incarnation, it demands from one

a *kenosis*, that is, an emptying of oneself to be able to welcome within oneself the others and become part of them.

Eighthly, intrareligious dialogue is not a solitary act, that is, one should have a support group or another person to whom he can confide. I was able to enter into intrareligious dialogue because I had various kind of support: the local apostolic team with whom I lived in community, the Lebrecht Task Force which included other Oblates who were involved in the same kind of ministry at the cutting edge, the various conferences to which I referred in this paper, the local prayer groups of whom I was an active member, the Fraternity of Priests and a few Oblates of my own province. In short, intrareligious dialogue as evangelization is the affair of the community of faith and not only of individuals.

Ninthly, in the same way that Fr. John's Hascall sharing of his journey encouraged many who were struggling with the same issues, my entering into intrareligious dialogue encouraged many of the parishioners to do the same. There was a woman—let us call her Anna—who was a regular churchgoer and who also became a prayer leader for Sunday's celebration in the absence of a priest. Anna was suffering because her family, except for a daughter, did not attend Church. Most of them were involved in the cultural religious revival. Through her attending upon invitation different sessions addressing the subject of faith and culture and eventually her coming with our group to experience the four-day fast (Vision Quest), she was able to reconcile herself with that reality within her family and become open to and acceptive of their journey.

She became aware of many cultural beliefs that were part of her life, but which she had not identified earlier as cultural. Her family became the family that requested most often the experimental "Nishnawbe Rite of Baptism," an inculturated rite of baptism produced by the diocesan Native Pastoral Council of the diocese of Thunder Bay, under the direction of Sister Eva Solomon, an Ojibway. There is another woman—let us call her Stella—who came to me for spiritual direction. Stella used to say that I would never understand her. Anyway she kept being involved in the Church and attended many of the sessions mentioned and others. As I was getting involved in intrareligious dialogue and as she herself was going through a lot of personal growth and growing in self-confidence, she joined the others and I in both the Sweat Lodge ceremonies and the Vision Quests. In the last years, I have not heard her say that I would

never understand her. In short, intrareligious dialogue creates that condition and context where one can become a credible witness and leader as he or she has shared in the very fabric of the other's cultural life.

Tenthly, intrareligious dialogue will reveal areas in the shared spiritual experiences that call for theological reflections, either a revisiting, a reformulation or an enhanced development of this or that theological concept or question. It becomes the condition and the context for some deeper theological reflections, which may take the form of interreligious dialogue or that of an interior dialogue. In short, intrareligious dialogue is a fundamental condition for a development of a theology of religions and/or of theologies in its various manifestations, such as, Christology, Ecclesiology or Pneumatology.

Intrareligious dialogue becomes a matrix for a new praxis of an evangelizing mission. The narration of my journey and all the above points— I am sure that we could find even more in a fine tooth analyse of my intrareligious experiences and that of the others- reveal that intrareligious dialogue is a fundamental condition, a context and/or meeting place. From this condition, context or meeting place and/or through them, the Church's or the pastoral agents' evangelizing mission will or can be affected, modified or formed.

If one would be able to analyse my homilies from the beginning of my ministry to today, she/he would definitely see a difference in the images, symbols and/or language that I used at the beginning and those used in the last years. Slowly over the years as I was more and more involved in intrareligious dialogue and many other people within the community, it started to influence the liturgy. Certain basic forms are slowly making their way into the liturgy or the environment of the liturgy. When Sagkeeng R.C. church burned down, two thirds of the people, who answered the questionnaire sent out concerning the structure of the church, wanted a circular structure. This brought us to build a church structure where the pews, the altar, the lectern, the presidential chair and the main cross reflect in their outlay the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is a basic structure of the Ojibway religious ceremonies and teachings. The teachings of the Medicine Wheel as to the various symbols of the four directions are included in the various aspects of the celebration of marriage and of funerals, e.g., respecting the meaning of the four different doorways. These are particularly accentuated in the

Nishnawbe Rite of Baptism that we mentioned earlier. The drum songs and the drum became part of the liturgy more often, especially at funerals. The praying with the sacred medicines, such as sweet grass, cedar and sage, and the smudging with the smoke from these were incorporated into the funeral service, replacing the usual incensing of the body. This latter action goes beyond honouring the body; it includes a last farewell and an entrusting of the dead person to God. Forming a matrix, intrareligious dialogue allows creativity to come forth that is culturally and religiously sensitive and relevant but without distorting the Gospel, that is, a faithful dialogue allows for a critical interaction between the Gospel and the culture. It gives us insights as to how we might catechize and teach the faith: a catechesis that would be more attuned to the people's spiritual needs, their ways of learning and knowing, and their cultural worldview. As expressed earlier, it is a fundamental condition for a theology that would address the gifts of the aboriginal peoples' spirituality without distorting the Gospel. A pastoral counselling coming forth from this matrix would be more in tuned with the thought patterns and worldview of the aboriginal people. These are just a few of all the possibilities. Intrareligious dialogue as a praxis that forms this matrix is fairly new in the history of the Church. The full development and effect of it are yet to be seen and fully tested. It is also a long and slow process!

WALKING ON THE EDGE AND DARING TO CROSSOVER

My initial contact with the charism as I started my Oblate journey was my reading of the preface to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules. The words that particularly spoke to me after the founder's description of the situation of the church and of the faith after the French Revolution are:

We must lead man to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints.

This is one aspect of the charism that spoke to me. It spoke because I am sure that it touched some elements of the charism already at work within myself. I have a deep belief that I met God in my mother's womb. Around age two, I was very sick and my parents consecrated me

to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is not by accident that I became an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. I followed my brothers to the Juniorate.

Throughout Juniorate, then the Novitiate and the Scholasticate, I was always interested in self-awareness. Early, I understood the meaning that being fully human was the way God wanted me to be. Also, of course, there was also that search to be fully alive in God. During my Scholasticate, I encountered Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in a whole new depth through my involvement with the charismatic renewal. It is thanks to that encounter that I am still here.

I have been on the edge, on the line of transition, of change. I experienced a traditional Juniorate and Novitiate. The first year of Scholasticate was a year of slow rebellion against the traditional system of formation. The stress created by this rebellion to the system literally shut down the pores of my epidermis, forcing me to go around with a short-sleeved shirt instead of the cassocks that everyone else had to wear. It was to minimize the sweating and the burning itch it caused under my skin.

The following years were spend in Ottawa where I continued my formation at Saint Paul University. The traditional system at St. Joseph's Scholasticate had imploded two years before. It was a whole new tentative approach to formation: where the huge groups of scholastics were replaced by small groups each under a moderator. This was more personal and less institutional.

It was during those years that I experienced a personal conversion during a time of spiritual battle and deep questioning of my vocation. Again, to be involved with the starting Charismatic Renewal was not necessarily seen in a good eye!

After my second year at the St. Joseph's Scholasticate, which was experiencing ongoing turmoil and diminishment with permanent vowed scholastics and some Oblate priests leaving, I, being the only Oblate scholastic there from the West, was allowed to stay with an Oblate group that worked with the marginalized and help them fight for their rights in the poor district of Hull. Again, I was on the edge!

My first years of missionary work among the First Nations' communities brought me face to face with the deplorable conditions left behind as an impact of the Indian Residential Schools. Similar to the Founder's experience of the Church and the faith post French Revolu-

tion, I sensed some things were missing: low Sunday church attendance, seemingly lack of knowledge of Jesus-Christ, of the Holy Spirit, high level of irregular marriages and co-habitation, etc. Not yet acknowledging the full impact of the Indian Residential Schools, unknowingly I was blaming the victims for their situations. I set out to re-evangelize them with adult education sessions, baptismal sessions, charismatic prayer groups, Marriage Encounters, Teen Encounter Christ weekends, and many other activities. All these pastoral activities had a limited success. At one point, rebelling to my requests and my bringing forth the requirements as I had learned in my theological and seminary formation, there was a petition to have me removed from the community. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it brought everything to a head. After seven years of frantic activities and travels between many communities, I experienced a burn-out.

In all of this, there were a few elements from my years of formation that help me survive the situation:

- My personal conversion and charismatic experience
- My own sense of growing personal awareness
- The dignity of each person – both re-enforced by my charismatic experience and my experience living with the Oblate group standing by the marginalized of Hull, Quebec, Canada.

Also, from the very beginning of my ministry, I have endeavor to have a community, either of Oblate or others, to live in. I have been fortunate to have that throughout my years as an Oblate. During those first years, I had a small community and apostolic team to live and work with. Also, I had an Oblate sharing group which met every six weeks. These two groups help to keep some sanity in my life!

I requested a sabbatical, not a study sabbatical, but one where I could take care of whatever was happening to me at that moment in my life. I ended taking two years: two years of personal growth and reconciliation with my past from birth and onward.

During this sabbatical, I had a very powerful dream. As I worked with the dream, it revealed to me that I belong to the universe, truly a child of God, and that I was definitely called to journey with the First Nations. It was a deeper confirmation of my initial choice to minister among the Aboriginal people of Canada.

I was commissioned to Sagkeeng at the end of my sabbatical. Because of the work done during my sabbatical, there was a whole new space in me to receive even more deeply the people and also they must have been sensing the same as they were a lot more open to me. By then, I had journeyed even deeper into seeing the dignity of each person and desiring that for everyone. The desire to bring healing and reconciliation around the legacy of the Indian Residential School brought me to go more deeply into the interreligious dialogue expounded in section C of this paper, or, Chapter 5 of my research paper. It was the deeper intuition of the charism as expressed by the Founder, expressed here in my interpretation: “lead the person to the depth of his/her human dignity, then, there will be room for a deeper encounter with Jesus-Christ and all that He reveals.”

Again, during my “de Mazenod Experience” in Aix-en-Provence, during the retreat at Notre Dame des Lumières, I experience one day at prayer in the mountain a strong inner voice that clearly asked me why I was afraid as the Holy Spirit was with me. With that inner movement I receive what I needed to dare the crossover: enter fully into the intra-religious dialogue by allowing myself to experience the First Nations’ ceremonies with the local elders.

As I dared on this path, I still experienced it as walking on the edge with many fears and doubts, especially whether I was being faithful to my calling as an Oblate missionary. It is during my last sabbatical as I was working on obtaining my Master of Arts in Mission Studies that I encountered a text of Fabrice Blée. As I read the text, it was another “Kairos” moment. That text and all the other courses, including the research work for the paper, brought clarity and confirmation to my journey. I have included at the end of this paper, in the Appendices, that section of my research paper that summarizes the text and my relationship to it and what it contributed to my journey.

A few years back into ministry, an urban First Nations’ ministry, I experienced the “Returning to Spirit” workshops. Workshops designed to address in a powerful way the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools. In it, I found a powerful tool to continue that journey of creating space for the healing and reconciliation of the Aboriginal people of Canada. With the space created, and hopefully with non-Aboriginal pastoral agents entering into a new and different relationship with the

Aboriginal people, there will be the full space for the Aboriginal people, who so wish, to take their full place within the Church and Christianity.

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¹ I will be using various terms in this paper to refer to the people who occupied North America before the arrival of the Europeans. The term *aboriginal* refers to all the descendants of these original people, whether they are Indians, Metis or Inuit. The term *Indians*, also the term *Natives*, in Canada, refer to those who are under the Department of Indian Affairs, that is, they have a status with the government through the treaties. *Metis* are the descendants of mixed blood who do not have the privileges of the treaties. *Inuit* are the original people of the Canadian Arctic. American writers use the terms *American Natives* or *American Indians* to refer to the original tribes of the land. In Canada, the Indians, at least the politicised, prefer to use the term *First Nations* in referring to themselves. In the United States, the preferred term seems to be *American Natives*. Another term used in Canada is *Amerindians*, increasingly used more in the Church or missiology contexts. In both countries, more and more they are identifying themselves by their original tribal name.

² The Lebreton Task Force was established by the Canadian Oblate Conference to follow through on resolutions taken by the missionaries of the congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at a Canadian-wide conference in Lebreton, Saskatchewan in 1986. The task force was composed of one representative from each of the eight Canadian Oblate provinces. Many of the representatives were involved in an increasing dialogical ministry.

³ According to an inquiry I made from John Hascall, “fire balls” would be considered in the domain of bad medicine, that is, a curse, hoax or activity aimed at harming someone else. According to a young Elder in Sagkeeng, bad medicine is related to the work of evil spirits.

⁴ The meetings in Little Red River (1983-1987) brought together approximately 20 persons, mostly Catholic priests, who undertook a collective and formal training program under the direction of native elders in order to acquire a better understanding of Amerindian spirituality as it is experienced by native persons today. There is a photograph of that event in Achiel PEELMAN’s book *Christ Is a Native American*, Wipf & Stock Pub, 2006, p. 145. I am the second person from the right.

⁵ This was a group of priests, diocesan and religious, who met for a four hour meeting monthly to pray, to share and to minister to one another.

⁶ PEELMAN, *Christ is Native American*, p. 215-18.

⁷ A “piercing song” is a drum song that is sung when one pierces at a Sun Dance.

⁸ The rows of pews in the new Church that was built in 1995 in Sagkeeng form a complete circle: the altar, the lectern and the presidential chair are part of the first inner row. In the middle of the circle, hanging from the ceiling is the cross of Christ, the tree of Life. Baptisms and marriages take place under the cross in the middle. The casket is placed there at funerals.

⁹ On interpenetration, cf. PANIKKAR, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, Paulist Press; Revised edition, 1998, p. 9.

¹⁰ Jean-Guy GOULET, "Dreams and Visions in Other Lifeworlds," in YOUNG and GOULET, *Being Changed*, University of Toronto Press, Higher Education Division, 1994, p. 26-27.

¹¹ Cf. Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, p. xvii.

ST EUGENE'S CHARISM IN THE LOWELL HISTORIC NATIONAL PARK¹

JAMES M. FEE, OMI

My personal relating the Charism of the Missionary Oblates with the reality of Hispanic Ministry had its initial actualizing moments toward the end of my assignment to the ministry of First Formation after eleven years. I was a formator in Washington DC at our Oblate College, the then Scholasticate of the former Eastern Province of the United States.

Our Provincial consulted me as to what future ministry I would like to do after formation ministry. That was in 1984.

In the years running up to that change in obedience for me, our province had opened up and become engaged initially in responding to a very challenging and rapidly increasing presence of Hispanic immigrants pouring into the United States from Puerto Rico (persons already U.S. citizens from a freely associated state) and from other Caribbean countries, - Cuba, Dominican Republic, Columbia, chief among them. During my years as a formator (1973-84), interest was sparking among the younger Oblates. We had begun encouraging, even mandating the learning of Spanish as a second language by our seminarians. Summer apostolic experiences included Hispanic ministry sites. (It would be still years, however, before the first Hispanic, a man born in Cuba, would seek to join us as a candidate).

Compared with other provincial ministries then current, e.g., Anglo parishes in the Northeast, Appalachian ministries in the hills of West Virginia and Kentucky, and the then newly opened parishes and high school in Florida, the promise and specter of responding to persons in another language and to persons newly arrived, and to persons not entirely welcome here by my reading of the public discourse – those aspects and many more – made the Hispanic mission attractive to me.

Hispanics were a group economically poor, for the most part, not integrated into the local church or society by any stretch of the imagination, and seen by many to be a lower, less acceptable class of people. Not unlike the peasants in Aix-en-Provence, the hearers (in their own *patois*) of St. Eugene's Lenten sermon at the Magdalena.

One of the focal points of my experience within Hispanic ministry in the United States of North America was the eventual establishment of an ethnic Latino parish in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1990. It was the result of at least a five year process involving the Archdiocese of Boston and the newly ordained Puerto Rican Auxiliary Bishop (Franciscan). The goals or purposes of erecting a canonical parish for Latinos involved, among others, the claiming and living of a recognized ecclesial dignity by the people. The environment of the small (population: 110,000) City included at least five historically established and ethnically identifiable parishes, which had served their own past-generations of immigrants. The new Hispanic parish provided a sense of identity and self-esteem of comparable equality with the long-time residents and members of the local church. Becoming a parish entered the Hispanic community onto the ecclesial radar screen.

Another ecclesial value pursued in the foundation of a parish was the desire to improve the sense of community and unity among the three existing separate groups of Hispanic Catholics in the City, each of whom had their own worship space and organization. Fostering collaboration among the Hispanics themselves had been an effort spearheaded by the Missionary Oblate community already serving the three different groups.

However, the proverbial Oblate discussion about the role of us missionaries working in and, in this case, founding an Oblate ethnic parish (and the presumed blessing - or not - of St. Eugene), was not missing from the process. All of us Oblates assigned to the local community at that period in time were cautious about whether attending to parochial diocesan requirements might infringe upon our missionary mobility in other areas: social justice involvement in community organizing, public housing promotion, twelve-step support groups for persons addicted to alcohol and drugs, increased administrative tasks, as well as possible further stretching of an already tight budget. In the end, despite hesitation, the desire and need of the people for equal participation in the life

of the local church with the other faithful, and the determination that we Oblates would continue to foster a “missionary parish” won the day.

The celebration day of the Hispanic community’s taking possession of a church building of a then recently suppressed French-Canadian parish was an extremely emotional event. From a basement church, where one of the three beachheads of Catholic Hispanics had been worshipping, we walked in procession carrying the Blessed Sacrament across the town, pausing on the way to impart a Blessing from the steps of City Hall, seat of secular, political decision-making, not yet including any Hispanic representative.

We arrived at and entered into the former church, now bearing the new name of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, to thunderous applause and stomping of feet and banging on benches, as we adored the Eucharistic Lord in his new Hispanic parish. It was like the Song of Thanksgiving after Moses crossed the Red Sea or Joshua crossed the Jordan. It was the first Hispanic parish in the history of the Archdiocese of Boston. The echoes of St. Eugene telling the working-class people that in the eyes of God, they were princes had another incarnation in North America.

There was yet another aspect of my involvement with Hispanic ministry during those same years which had an intimate relation with our Oblate Charism. It was community life.

Our Hispanic Missionary Center, existing long before any talk about establishing a parish, was the first integrated Oblate community sponsored equally by two U.S. Provinces comprised of members from both. Members of the former Northern Province of St. Jean Baptiste and of the former Eastern Province of Our Lady of Hope (“First U.S. Province”) were assigned to a common house and common ministry in Lowell, Massachusetts. It was part of the beginnings of “cross-cultural” communities within our United States Oblate religious life. Given the separateness of the five U.S. Provinces in those days, our common life was not without importance. Today, of course, interprovincial assignment seems to be much more common and necessary, encouraged as a key part of our missionary identity.

The element of our Charism in that house which was poignantly expressed was that of common life, community life. The quality of real connection, interpersonal openness as Oblate men, was enhanced particularly by the presence of an Oblate Brother as part of our communi-

ty. His own personality, forthrightness and challenging honesty helped keep all us priests more honest and open in our relationships. This quality was an asset in our discerning the mission to which we felt called, a quality added to by our prayer life, and our common care for our meals and the housekeeping chores we shared together. It was a realization of our apostolate, our mission, flowing from our community life.

Finally, a word about a common expression used today in reference to our Charism, that our missionary identity involves us in the “crossing of borders”, acknowledging that borders are not only political lines in the sand, but include cross-overs to other sociological groups distinct from ourselves: younger/older, richer/poorer, professionally educated/day laborer, Christian/other than Christian, etc.

After about 25 years of ministering with the Hispanic populations here in the United States, I had the good fortune to be assigned to our prenovitiate house in Tijuana, Baja California, México. It was the first time actually living in a foreign country. In my experience within the United States, I had come to know, to appreciate somewhat, and even to acculturate some aspects of Hispanic/Latino cultural realities. However, there was a special experience, almost indescribable in words, there ‘across the border’ in Mexico, after spending some time in “their” country. “Aha, now I know what they (the ones I knew here in the U.S.) were really saying, meaning, living, singing (“the songs of the Lord in a foreign land”), dancing, praying, loving.” It was a different experience to be in their shoes, in their home, on their turf. It was good! It was a gift, a blessing of being a missionary, from the Lord and from the people.

The vibrant life of the Hispanic community in the North American context is acknowledged at times because Hispanic Catholics and residents are in the majority in some localities. At other times public awareness recognizes statistically that the immigration of new Hispanics to this nation has provided growth in our Catholic Church.

The future of Hispanic ministry must tackle the large and growing problem of disaffection of Hispanic Catholics with the Church and religion, - similar indeed to the wider phenomenon of abandonment of the religion of baptism on the part of many North American Catholics and other Christians.

The aspect of our charism that bumps up against this now and future phenomenon is the Constitution which sends us Oblates, wherever the Church is well established, to those it touches least. In the United States, statistics reveal to us that the second largest “religious” denomination or group is ‘fallen-away Catholics’. With our smaller number of Oblates, like the small number of men that DeMazenod had when he was asked to send out missionaries, we also must discern and “leave nothing undared”.

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¹ The Lowell Historic National Park was established within the confines of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts by the United States Federal Government in 1979. The City was part of the origins Industrial Revolution in the U.S. Lowell, Massachusetts was the home to many textile mills and the home to many immigrant laborers, the mill workers, mostly Catholics. Lowell was also home, for many years, to the greatest number of Oblate vocations from any one single city in the world.

THE CHARISM IN THE CONTEXT OF INTER-ETHNIC/URBAN PARISH MINISTRY IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

QUILIN BOUZI, OMI

The motto of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: “He has sent me to evangelize the poor. The poor are evangelized”. For the past five years I have been blessed to minister in Buffalo, New York where the Oblates have ministered for over 160 years.

I worked as a parochial vicar and formation assistant at the pre-novitiate program in Buffalo. Recently, I was asked to be the pastor of three parishes where the Mission Center at Holy Angels is the platform.

“No ministry is alien to us as long as we never lose sight of the main purpose of the Congregation: the evangelization of the most abandoned.” (Oblate Constitutions & Rules)

Saint Eugene looks at humanity with God’s eyes when, for Lent of 1813, he gathers together the poor of Aix-en-Provence, those whom many pass by without noticing them, those who are without hope and he tells them, in the Church of the Madeleine: “Come, especially you, the poor of Jesus Christ! Please God I may make my voice heard in the four corners of the world... We shall begin by teaching you who you are, what your noble origins are, the rights you derive from them, as well as the obligations they impose upon you”.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE MISSION CENTER – BUFFALO, NEW YORK

We the members of the Oblate Mission Center in Buffalo, New York, seek to read the signs of the times in the Buffalo area. Inspired by the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, we seek to follow the commandment of Jesus Christ to preach the Good News to the poor, the

most abandoned, those whose voice is not easily heard as well as those removed from active participation in the life of the Church.

We commit ourselves to regular meetings where we share prayer, insight, and fellowship and where we plan for community life and apostolic outreach. We review on a regular basis the “essential elements” of a mission center as presented by our leadership and use them as a guide to growth in community and outreach.

My name is Quilin Bouzi. I am the pastor of three parishes (Holy Angels, Our Lady of Hope and Holy Cross) in Buffalo, New York. We have six Oblates at the Mission Center which is home based at the Holy Angels complex.

The mission center itself is as diverse as the neighborhood it serves. Two priests hail from the U.S., Paul Nourie assistant formator for the pre-novitiate, Steve Vasek, (mission and retreat preaching), one is from Puerto Rico David Munoz, Parochial vicar; one is from Cuba Alejandro Roque, director of the pre-novitiate program, one is from Zambia, Africa Humphrey Milimo, parochial vicar and the pastor Quilin Bouzi is from Haiti.

The three parishes the Oblates minister to are known for their minority population. Parishioners hail from Puerto Rico, Myanmar and all over Africa. Many are refugees fleeing from war-stricken countries and coming to a new country with a strange culture and unfamiliar language.

Interpreters translate Mass to their communities. The sign of peace is shared in seven languages.

The message we have for the people of Buffalo is that the West Side of our great city is not dead. It is very much alive. There are a lot of things happening.

In reading the signs of the times we empower the laity to work side by side with us. David Muñoz also works with a group of Oblate associates, a lay group of 40 who work alongside the team, helping out, where there is need.

To revitalize the parishes on the West Side of Buffalo by building bridges across the many cultures and generations of the three parishes and engage young families of all cultures in meaningful relationships that make *out of many one*, Holy Angels, Holy Cross and Our Lady of

Hope have been linked as part of the Mission Center of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Our Lady of Hope Parish which is one of the parishes was born out of a three parish merger on the West Side of Buffalo. What makes this parish unique is that since the merger, it has received an influx of young refugee families who are becoming ever more involved in the mission, ministry and leadership of the parish.

One challenge for our parishes is building relationships across the diverse cultures. Within the three parishes boundaries 1200 families and almost 3000 members who hail from Burundi, Burma, Rwanda, Togo, Kenya, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Vietnam, Puerto Rico, Trinidad Tobago, Cameroon, the Congo. They represent language groups such as English, Spanish, Italian, Burmese, Chin, Karen, Karenni, Kirundi, Vietnamese and French. Some parishioners understand English and are capable of serving as interpreters for their communities.

Another challenge is responding to the needs to the many of struggling young families, living in the neighborhood, where people are busy about the task of survival and enculturation. According to all the research these families will be the most influential force in the lives of their children. These inter-ethnic/urban parishes are in a privileged position to provide them with resources and support so desperately needed.

The challenge within the Sudanese and Burmese communities especially is being able to effectively communicate with the cultural, tribal and ethnic differences.

An example of this is our tri-parish food pantry which needs always to be aware of the ethnic foods that are needed by the different people whom we serve. In order to serve them we must become aware of their cultural background and ethnic differences.

Building a vital and active parish, challenges us to reflect on the degree to which our mission parishes are alive and active. A thriving parish must consider the strategic questions regarding, identity, capacity and purpose. To thrive, and not merely survive in the years ahead, a vital parish must remain true to its identity, and communicate a compelling sense of purpose. We must be able to revitalize our people and mobilize them around an evangelizing plan of action.

Working along with us our dedicated staff assist us in our daily mission.

Collaborating with us are the religious sisters of St. Mary of Namur and the Gray Nuns of the Sacred Heart who have a long history in the city of Buffalo and surrounding areas. During this year dedicated to the consecrated life we are eager to work together in order to make the kingdom a reality among the people we serve.

The most pressing challenge for our three parishes is financial. Neither the parishes nor the parishioners possess the funds needed to satisfy all the pressing needs. What we have is a culturally competent pastoral team, committed lay leaders and devoted parents who cherish their Catholic faith. We as Oblates are trying to follow the footsteps of our founder Saint Eugene de Mazenod and the mandate of the Bishops.

Our present focus rests in the heart of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

In 2011 the U.S. Bishops name “Our response to the reality of cultural diversity as one of their top priorities. In their document *Encuentro & Mission* the U.S. Bishops stated,

Every action taken in the life of the faith community should nurture and strengthen the fraternal bonds between all its members. Whether through a formation group, and advocacy strategy, a liturgical celebration, or a whole pastoral plan, fraternal human relationships and a truly Christian experience of community should be strengthened with each cultural group across all cultures.

A final note; The Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has selected our linked parishes among 30 in the United States to participate in an in-depth study of parish life in the United States. This study, commissioned by the USCCB and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), focuses on cultural diversity in the Catholic Church. Our participation is key to help the Catholic Church better understand and minister to parishes with very culturally diverse communities, the fastest growing part of the church in the United States. The study aims to provide an accurate portrait of multicultural Catholic parish life.

It is our hope that the results of this study will further enable us as Oblates to better serve this new dimension presently challenging the church today within the United States.

All of us are new at this process of pastor service to the inter-cultural mission to the people of God within the U. S. Catholic Church. Our gathering this week gives us hope that we are becoming more aware of the challenge facing us as we seek to serve all of God's People.

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INSIGHTS ON THE MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS OF IMMIGRATION IN LIGHT OF THE OBLATE CHARISM: A NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

VICTOR CARMONA

How may one see immigrants through Oblate eyes? Does one who has an Oblate heart serve immigrants in a distinct way? Is there a future for migrant ministry in an Oblate key? In this paper, I will suggest that the answer is most surely yes on each count. I believe that the Oblate charism offers distinct insights into the meaning and implications of immigration.¹ I will develop these insights in three sections, one focusing on recent developments on the discernment of immigration as an aspect of the Oblate charism, another laying out some challenges in living the charism in the midst of migrant ministry today, and finally one that briefly explores the future of that ministry in the Oblate world.

SEEING IMMIGRANTS WITH OBLATE EYES

Last January, the provincials of the United States and Mexico met in *Tepoztlán*, Mexico, along with other members of the Oblate family, for a three-day workshop on the pastoral care of immigrants. Our objective was to discern potential initiatives to provide such care within and across provinces. (As I understand it, this was the first bi-provincial meeting dedicated to a specific pastoral need.)

The see – judge – act method framed the meeting. During the first day, our facilitators introduced participants to the complexity of global and regional immigration systems, inviting us to identify the ways in which this reality and the Oblate presence across Mexico and the United States overlap. The Oblate parish in Roma, TX, for instance, is providing humanitarian assistance to undocumented immigrants.

The second day offered an opportunity to reflect on the practical challenges and possibilities involved in providing direct service to immigrants. It also offered Nicolás Domínguez, OMI, (of the Mexico province) an opportunity to reflect on the challenging family life and instability that St. Eugene lived during his early years, experiences which echo those of immigrants today, a point which Domínguez used to propose that ministry to immigrants is innate—not foreign—to the Oblate charism.² This is a stance that I share for other reasons (which I will lay out below).

In the third and final day, Antonio Ponce, OMI (of the U.S. province) turned to pope Francis's biting critique of the globalization of indifference towards immigrants, particularly those who are fleeing poverty, to underline the importance of identifying next steps.³ The participants from the United States agreed on the need to take stock of the pastoral responses that Oblate communities are already engaged in, especially along the Texas-Mexico border, to better identify on-the-ground challenges and possibilities. They also suggested raising awareness, within the broader province, of the realities that immigrants are facing across Mexico and Central America. Antonio Ponce, OMI, who directs the *Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation* office of the U.S. province, is spearheading these initiatives.

So, how may one see immigrants through Oblate eyes? Does the Oblate charism offer a distinct perspective? In light of the provincial workshop in Tepoztlán, I believe so. On the one hand, as Domínguez suggests, St. Eugene suffered *some* of the effects that forced migrations continue to have on families, including those brought on by political instability and economic stress.⁴ Thus, we should see gleams of St. Eugene in each immigrant we meet. On the other hand, in his commentary on article 5 of the Constitutions, Fernand Jetté, OMI, reminds us that the 1972 General Chapter of the Oblates identified immigrants as one of the faces of poverty.⁵

Immigrants are among those who are to benefit from Oblate missionary activity because their condition, as article 5 states, “cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring.”⁶ If Christ frees us from sin, then the liberation that he brings extends to *all* dimensions of personal and social existence, and while each of these dimensions enjoys its proper autonomy, none lies beyond the grace of

Christ—not even the sins that give rise to forced migrations or the relentless suffering they create for many who are innocent, especially undocumented immigrant children.⁷ Thus, we should see the face of the poor in each immigrant we meet.⁸

SERVING IMMIGRANTS WITH OBLATE HEARTS

I have faced many challenges in attempting to live the Oblate charism, as a layperson, in my service to immigrants. Nearly fifteen years ago, I directed a clinic and a community center at the *San Eugenio* mission in *La Morita*. The experience—and through it, the Oblate charism—left its mark.

There, we served many who were recent arrivals from Southern Mexico, some desiring to make it across the border to the United States, a few hoping to return there after having been deported. Most were looking for work in the assembly plants. In that experience, I struggled with the hopelessness that goes hand in hand with a realistic awareness of the sheer immensity of poverty and the many ways it killed those who we served, some of them my friends. Poverty killed them physically and spiritually, slowly and silently.

More recently, I have begun serving Honduran and Salvadoran immigrant women and children who are detained at a detention center in Texas.⁹ There, I am struggling against the desire to make sense of the hopelessness that the most recent victims of our country's broken immigration system—mothers and sons and daughters—are suffering. Through conversation and prayer they have spoken powerfully of sheer desperation and powerlessness, of not knowing how long they will be detained, of seeing their children grow as detainees (in one case for nearly a year). Their suffering speaks to the fact that it is possible for a woman to suffer *as* an immigrant *and* a widow *and* an orphan.¹⁰ In the face of such unjust suffering, my heart cannot be but still and silent.¹¹

Closer to home, I strive to serve students at Oblate School of Theology who are immigrants themselves. Like other students, they are facing the difficult transitions that go hand in hand with formation as well as the rigors of graduate school.¹² Unlike most of my students, though, they are also facing the additional burden of finding their footing in a new land. They require a particular pedagogical preferential option.¹³ A few, I would venture to say, suffer in ways that remind me of

St. Eugene's experiences. At times, they also remind me of those who I served in *La Morita*.

So, is there something distinct about serving immigrants with an Oblate heart? I do not assume that my heart is fully aflame with the Oblate charism. Nevertheless, I have been around Oblates long enough, and in situations difficult enough, to have a basic sense of what daring with humility and trust means. To me, it means learning to hope against all hope—more so in the face of a poverty that can lead to spiritual and physical death. My experiences have also convinced me of the wisdom behind rule 8 of the Constitutions: “We will let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized as we work with them, for they can make us hear in new ways the Gospel we proclaim.”¹⁴

The desire for closeness with immigrant men, women, and children, has graced me with a humbling awareness of the Oblation they make with their lives. In “Fruit of the Vine and Work of Human Hands: Immigration and the Eucharist,” Daniel Groody invites us to see the deep connection that exists between the broken bread of the Eucharist and the brokenness that immigrants endure for the sake of their loved ones.¹⁵ In Groody's words: “[immigrants] take up the decision to leave their homeland, bless God for the gift of their lives and families (even in the midst of tremendous suffering), break themselves open so they can feed those they love, and give themselves away for the nourishment of others, even at the cost of their lives.”¹⁶ I have seen this self-giving love with my own eyes – in *La Morita*, at the detention center, and even in the classroom – and it speaks to my heart. Some immigrant men, women, and children are living witnesses of oblation.

THE FUTURE OF MIGRANT MINISTRY IN AN OBLATE KEY

Is there a future for immigrant ministry in an Oblate key? I believe so. While I have further research to do, the evidence so far suggests that the bi-national workshop on the pastoral care of migrants is not an isolated event. Neither is this an exclusively North American concern. As I mentioned above, the 1972 General Chapter made a simple yet important claim nearly 45 years ago.¹⁷ More recently, the 2010 General Chapter (the 35th) affirmed “that ministry to migrants is a valued Oblate ministry flowing from the charism of our Founder.”¹⁸ The document goes on to acknowledge the need to highlight this ministry during first

formation, the need for specialized studies for those who are assigned to it, and the support due to “various groups who are working to alleviate the plight of migrants around the world.”¹⁹

For these and other reasons, I believe that the Oblate charism has much fruit to bear in the pastoral care of migrants. It also has insights to offer the broader church in terms of the meaning and implications of immigration today. This ministry is close to the Oblate heart. I hope that in light of the 200th anniversary, the Mazenodian family discerns the potential it has for setting many hearts aflame.

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¹ In this paper I will focus on immigrants. The process of international migration has three distinct phases (broadly construed): emigration, transit, and immigration. The first phase of the migratory process spans from the time a family or an individual begins to discern whether or not to leave their community until they do so; for this reason the first phase takes place (for the most part) in Central America and Mexico. The second phase of the migratory process spans from the moment the migrant leaves his or her community until he or she arrives at his or her intended destination. This phase includes extremely dangerous border crossings along the Guatemala-Mexico and/or the Mexico-U.S. borders. The final phase begins once the immigrant arrives at his or her destination and may last for the remainder of his or her life. Each phase presents the OMIs with distinct pastoral challenges and possibilities of a spiritual, psychological, physical, ecclesial, socioeconomic, and political nature. For a useful primer on the study of international migrations, see Stephen CASTLES and Mark J. MILLER, *The Age of Migration: International*

Population Movements in the Modern World, FOURTH ed., New York, Guilford Press, 2009.

² Nicolás DOMÍNGUEZ, OMI, *The Oblate Charism*, in *Bi-Provincial Workshop for the Pastoral Care of Immigrants*, Tepoztlán, Mexico, 2015.

³ Antonio PONCE, omi, *Pastoral Care of Migrants*, *ibid.* Ponce was referencing Pope Francis' homily at Lampedusa, Italy. See FRANCIS, *Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis*, Vatican City, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa_francesco_20130708_omelia_lampedusa_en.html

⁴ DOMÍNGUEZ, *The Oblate Charism*. For a basic sense of the effects that political instability and economic stress had on St. Eugene and his parents see Alfred A. HUBENIG, OMI, *Living in the Spirit's Fire: Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, Ottawa, ON, Novalis, 1995, p. 1-33.

⁵ Fernand JETTÉ, OMI, *The Apostolic Man: A Commentary on the 1982 Edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*, Rome, General House, 1992, p. 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷ I am influenced by Gustavo Gutierrez's liberation theology on this point. See Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, OP, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (1986), in *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1990; Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ and Daniel G. GROODY, *Spiritual Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 2011.

⁸ Gutierrez reaches a similar conclusion in terms of the preferential option for the poor in the context of immigration and poverty. See Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, OP, *Poverty, Migration, and the Option for the Poor*, in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel GROODY and Gioacchino CAMPESE, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

⁹ I cannot identify the detention center due to privacy concerns.

¹⁰ Biblical reflections on migration and theologies of migration tend to focus on one of the three. The women at the detention center explained to me that some of them had lost their parents and their husbands to the gang violence that prevails in Honduras and El Salvador. Their experience reminds me of the need to be aware of the deep connection that exists between care for these three groups in Leviticus. Care for widows, orphans, and strangers, is meant to set Israel apart as a 'contrast society.' Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts suggests that other societies espoused a concern for widows and orphans, but only Israel extended such concern to strangers in the land. John Donahue's clarity on this point is helpful: "Care for such persons in Israel is part of the 'contrast society' that is created through the exodus. In Israel this concern functions more as a critical principle against the misuses of power, while in some of the surrounding cultures it is a way in which those in power dampen down revolutionary tendencies of the people and thus maintain a divinely sanctioned hierarchy of power." See John R. DONAHUE, SJ, *The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching: Will This Engagement Lead to Marriage?* in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. HIMES and Lisa Sowle CAHILL, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2005, p. 19-20. For an account of biblical and theological interpretations of migration, please see Victor CARMONA, *Theologizing Immigration*, in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, ed. Orlando ESPIN, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

¹¹ On this point, I am influenced by Gustavo Gutierrez's interpretation of the book of Job and the insights it offers on love, justice, and the suffering of the innocent. See Gustavo GUTIÉRREZ, OP, *On Job: God. Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1987.

¹² Last year, Oblate's Ph.D., D.Min., and Masters programs served 138 students: 46 of them self-identified as U.S. Hispanic, 46 as white, 10 as African-Americans, 10 as Asian-Americans, and 28 as international students. Of the international students, 10 are from Latin America (mainly Mexico) and the rest from Africa (mainly Zambia) and Southeast Asia (mainly Vietnam). Mario Porter, "Student Population at OST," (San Antonio, TX: Oblate School of Theology, 2015).

¹³ The Oblate charism, I believe, calls Oblate institutions of higher education to continue developing the theological, ministerial, and pedagogical know-how to train underserved student populations, including immigrants and minorities that have much to offer the church and broader society. These are student populations that few of our peer institutions are equipped to serve. Fewer still desire to serve them.

¹⁴ JETTÉ, *The Apostolic Man*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Daniel G. GROODY, *Fruit of the Vine and Work of Human Hands: Immigration and the Eucharist*, in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. GROODY and Gioacchino CAMPESE, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁷ JETTÉ, *The Apostolic Man*, p. 64.

¹⁸ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *Acts of the 35th General Chapter (2010): Conversion*, Rome, General House, 2010, p. 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

**CHARISM AS EXPERIENCED
BY A YOUNG OBLATE MISSIONARY:
FOCUS ON JAMES BAY AREA AMONG THE CREE PEOPLE**

PALI PITSO, OMI

The Oblate Missionaries form a big family whose members are identified by their Charism. When it became obvious that there was a need of personnel to work in the missions among the Aboriginal Peoples, our brothers of Notre-Dame-du-Cap Province appealed for missionaries to come and help out in this particular mission among the First Nations Peoples.

The invitation required missionaries able to learn a new language, work with others, adjust to a new culture, live in solitude, to be creative and resourceful and to accept a ten-year stay in Canada. The requirements of such a challenging mission demanded some discernment. Ultimately two missionaries were sent from the Oblate Province of Lesotho to the Oblate province of Notre-Dame-du-Cap in Canada: Fr Maboe Matsau and myself, Fr. Pali Pitso.

We have been in this mission almost six years. But each one working in different communities. In spite of being separated from each other, we have moments of coming together whenever possible to share about the mission. This happens mostly in winter time when there are winter roads.

In summer we meet only when we have diocesan meetings. It is interesting to note that it is only Oblate Missionaries who work in this diocese.

At the moment we have only one French Canadian Missionary, Fr Rodrigue Vezina, OMI. He worked in these communities all his life. Now he is over 80 years and ready to retire. The bishop of the diocese Bishop Vincent Cadieux is also an Oblate. Having reached 75 years last February, he already submitted his resignation as a Bishop to the Holy Father Pope Francis. At the moment, we are waiting for the appointment of a new bishop.

Therefore, this presentation will focus on the Cree People of the James Bay area in the diocese of Moosonee where we were assigned.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since 1841 the Oblates have been involved among the Aboriginal Peoples, who often deprived, neglected and ignored in one way or another, are always searching for their identity, autonomy and cultural recognition. These people, who were a nomadic “hunting-gathering” people, had their own traditional religion intimately linked with nature in which all living things are imbued with a spirit. All their affirmations, actions, reactions and behaviours stem from their cultural origin. They were never farmers nor town dwellers but lived in small family groups travelling from place to place bent on survival in a harsh and difficult environment. Family was central and most important to them.

During the missionary expansion, there was little government involvement due to the remoteness of the small scattered populations. The missionaries provided for the peoples’ spiritual and material welfare. But today things have changed, the government is more involved in the peoples’ material welfare. The government provides the programs that enhance in helping peoples’ well-being such as providing counselling to those who have not overcome their historical tragedy or catastrophe.

As missionaries, our aim is to spiritually journey with the people fostering a relationship with Jesus our Saviour.

OUR PRESENCE

Before the presence of the missionaries for more than a century, these people were not touched by the Church’s structures and ministry. As young Oblate Missionaries journeying together with them, we realize the significance of our presence in their midst. In spite of suffering stemming from profoundly injured communities by government education policy and residential schools, many still find a sense of security with our presence.

Our Charism is fulfilled in the sharing of our faith and in our spiritual and Christian accompaniment. In this process of working together, we encourage collaborative leadership, openness, mutual understanding and trust between the church and the people. Our joint presence and proximity becomes a living witness to the gospel. Our Oblate Constitutions and Rules inspire and motivate such proximity with the people:

We will always be close to the people with whom we work, taking into account their values and aspirations. To seek out new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts often calls for daring; to present Gospel demands in all clarity should never intimidate us. Awareness of our own shortcomings humbles us, yet God's power makes us confident as we strive to bring all people - especially the poor - to full consciousness of their dignity as human beings and as sons and daughters of God. (C 8)

We will let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized as we work with them, for they can make us hear in new ways the Gospel we proclaim. We must always be sensitive to the mentality of the people, drawing on the riches of their culture and religious traditions. (R 8a)

CHALLENGES

Moving from one culture to another is always a challenge since one is moving from a known to an unknown experience. Those who invited us specified clearly the challenges to be considered and undertaken in accepting the call to work with the Aboriginal Peoples..

In today's context, mission work becomes more challenging as we realize that we are dealing with a community of spiritual people who are lacking a true "sense of church belonging". Many questions and discernments arise on how to harmonize both, i.e. individual prayer vs communal worship.

Another critical situation is the absence of young people in our churches. The church seems to have no meaning for them. Maybe there is nothing that attracts them in our liturgy. This makes the mission even more challenging because there is no new blood, no fresh water, no fresh air. This brings about many questions as to how long Christianity or Catholicism will exist and mission be sustained.

Taking a step further, there exists also a tension in the process of "inculturation". This is brought about by their being made to abandon their traditional beliefs in the past and their present rediscovery of traditional spirituality.

Our mission consists in dealing with injured communities who at times manifest much resentment towards the institutional church. Com-

munication is difficult due to the existence of unhealed wounds, mistrust and lack of openness to engage in conversation as to how to bring harmony between the gospel and their culture. This requires much patience, understanding and the guidance of the gospel.

In matters of church leadership the process of change is very slow due to a tradition of mission work where many former missionaries accomplished everything for the people thus undermining their undertaking leadership. This resulted in a lack of volunteering which is necessary for the growth of the church community. The reality is that their involvement in all aspects of church life is a must because the church is theirs and not the priests'. We hope that in due time they will understand and own their church.

For decades some of these communities identified themselves either as Catholics or Anglicans. The advent of Pentecostalism added obvious confusion in regards to the two traditional identities. "The sense of belonging" is again affected: relationship between Christian denominations, the challenge of ecumenism, etc.

CONCLUSION

In this given context it is necessary for a young missionary to have room for learning in order to foster harmony between the culture of the People, the Oblate rule and the Gospel. In working with these people, there are indeed many challenges as mentioned above. However, living the Gospel and being close to them is what gives direction as to how to continue being witnesses of good news to them.... "Do this and you shall live..." Jesus once said this to an expert in the law (cf. *Lk.* 10:28). This text of the scripture is very meaningful to us because we trust that in living the gospel and our Charism will bring life to these communities.

St Eugene considered his rule as a divine gift and law from God not of human origin and since our Charism is lived within respective various contexts, it finds its way of existing by being experienced in our life.

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PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS AT THE PERIPHERY IN TIJUANA, MEXICO

NICHOLAS J. HARDING, OMI

Oblates often refer to Pope Pius XI's characterization of the OMIs as "specialists in the most difficult missions of the church". Indeed we minister in places where few others want to go, including Mexico's strife-torn northern cities where the innocent are sometimes caught in the crossfire of ruthless drug traffickers. In 1996 the Missionary Oblates began the mission at *La Morita* colony on the eastern edge of Tijuana precisely because of the poverty and instability of its population. From the beginning it was also clear that the area would be in a continual state of flux as the peripheries of the city proper were already bursting with people seeking secure places to live and work. Tijuana itself is located at the periphery of Mexico, where Latin America meets the USA. Some describe it as the intersection of the Third World with the First World. It is good to keep in mind Pope John Paul II insisting in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (1999) that we are one America as a continent and need to be in solidarity. It is at once beautiful but chaotic with many challenges.

SOME BACKGROUND

Our simple first church in la Morita was built in 1996 and named after OMI founder St Eugene de Mazenod. Oblate missionaries began evangelization in Mexicali and other parts of Baja California in the 1980's. Our efforts were preceded by Franciscan and Jesuit and Dominican missionaries dating back to the seventeenth century. I have been a part of the work for the past eight years.

Many of the residents have been uprooted from their homes in the south and have lost their connections with the faith communities that

anchored daily life there. They fan out into the hilly outskirts of Tijuana where there are no churches, schools or clinics, and little municipal infrastructure like running water, sanitation or electricity. The shacks they build are often made from garage doors “re-cycled” from California.

Our parish of over 150,000 has no post office, no police station, no fire station. In one of our *colonias*, 38 houses burned down last November since it typically takes close to an hour for firefighters to get here. Unpaved roads clog the nostrils with suffocating dust in the dry season; the same roads clog our tires with impassable mud in the wet season. The parish area has rural parts (horse drawn plows, pastors with herds of sheep) and typical urban areas with gangs and graffiti.

Due to the mushrooming growth of Tijuana, the government can’t keep pace by building the needed infrastructure, such as constructing more schools and paving roads. Many children in the parish cannot attend school, lacking as they do birth certificates and money for uniforms, fees and school supplies. But also they are told “*no hay cupo*” ...no space even though each school has two shifts daily. For example, for the fall of 2015, it was just announced there will not be space for over 5,000 who would like to go to high school. This past year, students missed many weeks due to teacher strikes.

In one of our 15 satellite *colonias*, a community of about 3,000 families, we have no land so as to build a church and classrooms. At present, we celebrate mass and hold catechism classes outdoors in a park. In previous years, the government used to donate land to the Catholic Church, but with the increase in other religions, they no longer do so.

Development or “progress” is coming. There is a planned connection between building roads, then factories, small houses (designed to keep families small) for workers, then movie theaters and super-markets. Not far from the parish is a Walmart! This, in turn, has a negative effect on the traditional outdoor markets (*tianguis* or *sobreruedas*).

BORDER REALITY (“LA LINEA”)

Our mission parish is special and wonderful, but challenged by many difficulties; foremost are those problems which arise from our proximity to the US. It is considered the busiest border crossing in the world (inhumanly taking up to four or even five hours to pass into the

USA from Mexico). First, many are migrants who come to Tijuana hoping to cross the border (without documents) or to find work locally at one of the many *maquiladoras* – assembly plants for luxury goods for the American market. For example, in the western part of our parish there is one factory for Mattel toys and another for Jacuzzis (neither of whose products the locals could ever afford).

For a grueling 50 hour work week, the average wage is 750 pesos (or a mere \$65 USD). The single mothers take the graveyard shift so they can work while their children sleep....*but when do the moms sleep?* Many factory workers are deeply indebted by taking out easy credit but saddled with exorbitant interest rates.

Factory jobs are not really so plentiful, so unemployment is very high. Lots of people eke out a living recycling plastic and metal scraps or selling little things on the street.

Because people come from literally every one of Mexico's 32 states and even from other countries, and because each region has its own particular practices, it is impossible to conduct church life in ways that feel familiar to everybody. For example, having left their home regions, newcomers seldom have anyone in Tijuana to trust as *padrinos* (sponsors) for the sacraments.

Many couples delay sacramental marriage, hoping one day to get married back in their home territory. Families often want to bury loved ones back in their home soil or "*tierra*". So we are a community in flux, where life is as precarious. Local people self-describe it as a *pueblo flotante* or even "nomadic." Some areas in our parish have substantial populations of *indigenas* from Oaxaca and Chiapas who still speak in Indian dialects.

At the same time, this cultural diversity is a source of great richness in our liturgies, as we try to respect different popular piety traditions. Our 15 satellite chapels and 17 catechetical centers are places of communion, where people can connect, feel at home, even begin to piece together a "community of small communities".

Secondly, our parish suffers under the scourge of crime due to drug-trafficking and human- trafficking (by *coyotes* or *polleros*). In the past, drugs passed swiftly through our area en route to consumers in the USA. But in the recent years, there has been a campaign to foster an additional local market by offering free hits to hook young people. The

most common drug seems to be the awful crystal meth. To counteract these deplorable trends we maintain a strong pastoral youth programs. We help when we can with *becas* (grants) to for pay for drug rehab programs.

Crime here brings appalling murder rates. In 2007 when I arrived there were about 900 homicides in Tijuana, including many decapitations. In the same time period just across the border in San Diego, CA a city with about the same population of two and a half million there were only around 50 murders. In 2014 Tijuana had 32.50 homicides per 100,000 residents making it one of the 50 most violent cities in the world.

Particularly distressing is the torture and beheading of victims, and the gruesome desecration of the bodies of loved ones. Just one horrific example from among many: in one part of our parish, there is an infamous spot where an estimated 350 bodies of drug cartel victims were found partially dissolved in vats of acid. In another area a mass grave with 80 skeletons was found.

True, recently, the local homicide rate has declined due to increased military/police activity, but the so-called “cockroach effect” has pushed the violence into the interior sections of Mexico, creating a different problem. Now we have Mexicans who are *true refugees* in their own country, fleeing violence, extortion, kidnapping threats within the Mexican states of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Jalisco as well as from world murder capitals in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Additionally, we have funerals for people who have attempted to cross the borders but fall victim to kidnapping, and extortion. *Secuestrando* is quite an industry. The cartels have managed to corrupt officials at many levels of government. Many small businesses have closed due to extortion and kidnapping.

Thirdly, there is material poverty and inadequate infrastructure provided by the government. Since newcomers arrive with almost nothing (including some recently deported from the USA) they desperately invade or overrun the countryside. A train track runs through the length of the parish. Many new arrivals simply settle or squat on the sides of the track since the land there is not privately owned. The train tracks, of course, have no running water or sewage. Immigrants typically ille-

gally siphon off electricity from power lines, but using barbed wire and other makeshift materials have led to a number of electrocutions.

A fourth consequence of our border location is that residents are much more exposed to the insidious secularizing influence of the “Colossus to the North.” Even the most ramshackle shanties may sprout dish antennas to tune in to US TV stations (they are offered free for two months to hook them). And then there is the ubiquitous and at times even aggressive proselytizing by members of such sects as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh Day Adventists.

On the other hand, because of our proximity to the US we welcome volunteer work groups from American Catholic parishes and even from some other communities of Christians with an ecumenical spirit. These teams make mission trips to La Morita to build houses, bring food and clothes, and try to generally improve life here in any way they can. Young college students are especially moved when they perceive the drastic differences between living conditions in our parish and those in affluent San Diego, which is just a few miles away. Yet these young people often comment on the human richness they see in La Morita: lots of happy children playing outdoors, more faith and community than they notice in San Diego. Volunteers often characterize their trips here as “conversion experiences.”

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MISSIONARY IN LA MORITA

I had a funeral for a two-year-old boy who died in a home accident. His mother, a single parent, had left the three boys alone at home and they climbed onto the stove which toppled over. *Here there is no day care. Normally in Mexico the extended family is strong, but in the border area many people are disconnected from their traditional way of life where the mother or grandmother stays at home to care for the children.*

I also had a funeral for a 35-year-old woman who died of leukemia (*could it be the great number of young persons with cancer here has to do with pesticides, chemicals?*) One of the other Oblate priests celebrated a funeral mass this same day for 38-year-old man who died of meningitis (the quality of health care, and access to it, is far lower than that right across the border in San Diego).

A pregnant thirteen-year-old was presented to me for a blessing. Even if abortion were legal here (which fortunately it is not, except in Mexico City), it would be an unthinkable option to the vast majority. But, unfortunately, neither is adoption considered as a possibility. *What are the root causes for the epidemic of pregnancy teenage girls here? The church, as part of her mission to evangelize, needs to diagnose and offer a remedy.*

In the same 24 hour period, I met with a mother, recently arrived from Sinaloa, with 18 family members in tow. Her husband had been shot and killed, so the survivors, feeling threatened, fled. A shack was lent to them, but of course it had no electricity, running water, or food. When I visited this humble shelter, I found that three of the refugees were deaf mute and two blind. *What can be done about the lack of widow benefits or government disability program?*

Also, I had a request for a deliverance prayer for a young man whose family kept him chained up because he seemed to be demonically possessed. Many Mexicans adhere to a popular cult devoted to the death goddess *Santisma Muerte*. In Mexico there is a whole different view about the spirit world than the one that prevails in the United States. Witchcraft practices cause a wide range of tragedies. *What are we failing to do that drives people to superstition and false idols?*

PRESENCE OF OMI MISSION AS A RESPONSE

Our OMI team lives in apostolic community as co-workers of our Savior. We have a healthy mix of age and nationalities. Besides myself from W. Virginia, USA, we have Fr Marek from Poland, Fr Julio from Mexico, Fr Webert from Haiti and the recently ordained Fr Jesse (born in Mexico but grew up in LA). Also, we have a religious brother Peter (who recently celebrated 50 years of consecrated life) originally from Brawley, CA. Our community life is a witness to our parishioners of how very different people can live together united by the Holy Spirit and our common Oblate charism. For example, once a week, after our morning Liturgy of the Hours, we Oblates have faith-sharing based on the upcoming Sunday gospel. We offer the opportunity for laypeople to learn how to pray Vespers.

In the midst of the poverty here we try to keep a simple lifestyle: Our food comes from the local market. I drive a 1998 Toyota pickup

with over 200,000 miles. Our rectory is without heating or air-conditioning. We don't have big walls or security cameras. Hopefully, we witness to "small and simple is beautiful."

We are enriched with the help of twelve religious women from four congregations: Missionaries of Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate, Missionary Franciscans, and Incarnate Word. Also Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity run a catechism center for the people living along the train tracks as well as in an adjoining area of 1,800 new-arrival shacks.

I appreciate the Maryknoll paradox that observes that "a missionary is someone who goes where he is needed but not wanted, and stays until he is wanted but not needed!" Our founder St Eugene told us that to be a missionary involves three stages: *to lead people to act like human beings, and then like Christians, and finally we must help them to become saints*. Therefore, we still help in every way we can to provide for basic human needs.

Our little clinic offers medical and dental care. Last year it saw 59,000 patient visits. We focus some energy on health education, training of *promotores de salud* (lay health care workers) and explaining preventative care (e.g. hygiene, nutrition, etc.) In the rainy season we distribute tarps for the roofs of shacks. Our communal meal centers for the elderly combat both malnutrition and loneliness.

"Faith + charity + zeal = mission." We see our mission as one of accompanying *with*. "The people are subjects not objects." We especially want to help build up families as *iglesia domestica*.

At the beginning of the school year we subsidize the cost of uniforms, shoes and school supplies. In addition, we distribute such staples as beans, rice, flour, and cooking oil. We are cautious to limit assistance to those who truly need it. We don't want to foster a dependency mentality, but rather help people help themselves. We take to heart the wisdom of the ancient Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." In the spirit of justice and peace promoted by Pope Francis, we ask the still deeper questions (for systemic change): "Why do they not know how to fish? Why don't they have a fishing rod? Why are there few or no fish in the river?" It is interesting that previously much of the poverty and lack of development was all blamed on exploitation by the USA. Recently, one

sees not so much the victim mentality but rather a self-criticism for lack of rule of law, poor educational system, corruption, lack of investment by rich Mexicans (e.g. Carlos Slim invests much outside Mexico).

To help people to help themselves, we offer micro-loans as seed money for little enterprises. We promote education in various ways. We have a social worker who helps people replace lost legal documents without which they cannot get employment. We offer GED (called INEA here in Mexico). It is surprising how many adults have not finished primary school. There is mental health counseling for the depressed and suicidal. We support and channel people to programs for drug addicts and alcoholics. We celebrate mass once a week at *Albergue Memorias* where the hundred or so residents (including women and children) are HIV positive. This center includes a hospice for those dying of AIDS.

Three years ago we began a program to educate special needs children and youth. In our parish, with its estimated population of 150,000 people, we have many afflicted with autism and Down Syndrome. A small bus enables us to do outreach of various sorts. We encourage the people to be good citizens and informed voters. The Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation workshops that we have held were very well attended. As mountains get devoured for cement and concrete, our people mobilized to put a stop due to the dust and danger of excavating close to residences. We have solar panels and promote re-cycling (here the joke is that Tijuana “recycles” school buses for public transport, tires, cars, second-hand clothes and toys etc from the USA).

Of course, to fulfill our mission of proclaiming Christ and his Kingdom, we have a big catechetical program with 263 catechists in our fifteen chapels or mission stations. Each year about 500 youth are confirmed, and we have a strong youth ministry program. We have about forty extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to help with home visits. We have more than one hundred lay ministers of mission who go two by two to evangelize. As Oblates we give high priority to home visitations to be close to the people, a crucial aspect of our OMI charism. To avoid clericalism, we have strengthened collaboration/consultation with the laity in governance issues. We have a good number of Oblate Affiliates and Oblate Associates. We aspire for a community (family of families) of disciples in mission. We take very seriously the teaching of the Church (catechism num 2448) to have a “preferential love for those

oppressed by misery” and poverty. We strive for the Eucharist to truly be the center and summit of our Christian faith and life.

In the midst of all the chaos and suffering, the people generally are full of hope based on the Good News of the death and resurrection of Our Lord, the motherly presence of Our Lady of Guadalupe, nourished in community by God’s Word and Eucharist.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Ecclesia semper reformanda means OMI’s *semper reformanda*. An essential aspect of who we are is continual honest evaluation. Therefore, as we give thanks for the gift of the Oblate charism two hundred years ago, we humbly ask: how approving would St Eugene be as to our radically living out the charism he received and transmitted as we seek to evangelize in Tijuana? Would our founder challenge us to be more daring and creative in implementing the *New Evangelization* (in “ardor, method and expression”)? How well do we practice the distinctively Oblate method of evangelization? In promoting JPIC, can we realistically do anything about the corruption and impunity (which the bishop considers the greatest problem in the diocese)? With so many irons in the fire, are we sometimes satisfied with merely conserving and maintaining the status quo? How can we be more innovative in our outreach to “*alejados y marginados*,” the “poorest of the poor”, the unchurched, indifferent, non-practicing, fallen away, and secularized? Here I think of the “holiday” or “occasional” Catholics who show up only on an Ash Wednesday, December 12, Palm Sunday or for *quince años* festivities or for funerals, baptisms or who impetuously vow to give up alcohol?

How are we in striking the balance or *equilibrio* due to so many unavoidable tensions? *In medio virtus est!* Do we Oblates dedicate enough time to *oraison* and to adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? Are we true contemplatives in action, or “active contemplatives” thus able to recognize with patience and love that Christ is mystically present in the needy and abandoned? In our rectory/ community we want to be hospitable to “outsiders” but respect limits and privacy to preserve our Oblate “nuclear family” life. Every Oblate wants to be “close to the people” yet not be *too* close nor use it as an excuse to escape Oblate apostolic community priorities. Each Oblate wants to be humble and non-judgmental but also capable of charitable fraternal

correction. We are to be generous with what we have but how balance that with responsible stewardship (e.g. loaning cars or other community items, food etc.)? As a pastor there is a tightrope to walk in terms of delegation (sharing) duties to Oblate parochial vicars but maintaining a center of unity; there needs to be consultation but not necessarily strict democracy as to decision-making; there has to be respect for individual charism and personal responsibility but not unfettered independence. Neither micro-managing nor abdication is appropriate. Like a family we strive for good communication but avoid overdoing it with meetings and too strict accountability or being seen as a control freak. How much do various ideologies and “isms” (political and theological/philosophical) creep into our minds causing cliques within the OMI community? One is “orthodox” another is “prophetic”. An Oblate may be admirably considered zealous and another sees him as workaholic. One might be perceived as easy-going yet others say he is lazy, not wanting to leave his comfort zone. How can an Oblate missionary be *prudent yet daring*? Am I so conscious of being politically correct that I cannot be counter-cultural when the gospel calls for it (for example defending Natural family Planning or the need for some apologetics)? A constant challenge is what, for me, should be normative and where does that norm come from? Concretely, what does “creative fidelity” mean for me? With regard to Oblate superiors: when should there be respect for legitimate subsidiarity of local authority versus direction guidance, even canonical visitation, from above? For each Oblate finished with first formation, is there someone to inquire about his plan of spiritual life: regular spiritual direction and confession, annual retreat etc.? Is there someone who asks about regular annual medical and dental check-up?

Similarly, there is a difficult balance to maintain in pastoral matters: do we let administrative chores take precedence over spiritual counseling and reconciliation? Does the urgent displace the necessary? are we well balanced in wanting to be welcoming/flexible for people to have access to the sacraments whilst avoiding the danger of “sacramentalizing” without first the necessary catechizing/evangelization? How can we be better integrated with the pastoral plan of the Archdiocese, and in turn with the pastoral strategy for the region of Latin America as articulated in *Aparecida* (i.e. balance of respecting diocesan directives

and prophetic consecrated life values)? St Gregory the Great counseled beware of extremes even between compassion (or mercy, love) and the truth. Love and truth always go together. So much of the way to balance lies in the paradox of being Catholic/universal...both/and not either/or. After all, the Holy Spirit is author of both diversity and unity. *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.*

Are we supportive enough of the surprising post-Vatican II phenomenon of the Holy Spirit manifesting in lay ecclesial movements? How well do we go beyond the human assistance/social work level to the second and third spiritual levelsi.e., keeping the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified explicit in who we are and all we do? Do we give priority to teaching the art of praying and *lectio divina*?

Although we have bible studies, how about non-ideological *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*? Are we doing enough to form lay leaders without abdicating our need to be servant leaders?

Similarly, how is the balance of *capacitando* lay ministers (esp. as to *liturgia*) without clericalizing the laity? How can we purify the beautiful *piedad popular* and bring its devotees to a mature adult faith, while respecting that we Oblate foreigners need to be inculturated? In light of the crisis of family life, including the epidemic of divorce, what innovative measures are we implementing to strengthen the domestic church? As Oblates do we have the time/ humility to read and discuss Oblate documents as well as the riches provided by the Magisterium. Given the contemporary thirst for an experience of God's love and hunger for God's Word, do we offer enough kerygmatic retreats? What can we prune and in what way does there need to be weaning for more stewardship and self- sustainability?

"Did not god choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" (*James 2:5*)

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OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND THE OBLATE CHARISM: THOUGHTS ON OBLATE STUDIES

SCOTT WOODWARD

We begin today a celebration of the charism of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate as well as an examination of that charism. We celebrate how that charism has influenced our lives and our work and simultaneously, examine whether that charism influences us as thoroughly as it could in all we do.

If you will, allow me an old political joke that was around during George W. Bush's administration. Someone came to tell the president that Brazilians had joined the coalition fighting in Iraq. That's wonderful, he responded. How many is a Brazilian?

Charism is a term like Brazilian – a term we hear and use but perhaps we don't share a common meaning of the term. Doris Donnelly in *Retrieving Charisms for the 21st Century* defines charism as follows: At the risk of oversimplifying, charisms are a special variety of gifts dispensed through the Holy Spirit in Church and world, as needed, for the common good. She names three "surprises" in this definition. The first is that charisms are found not only in the church, but also in the world. They are not limited to church or even church people. The second surprise is the reason for the first. Charisms are found wherever there is a human need. The spirit can be counted on to send the gifts that are needed. The third is that charisms are unique gifts given for the common good. They are not for my benefit, not for the benefit of the one who carries them, but rather for the benefit of others. Charisms are not possessed, just delivered. They are for building up, for unifying. If they seem divisive, then something is not right.

I like this definition of charism. It helps me understand how the Oblate charism should be at the core of what we do at OST, and for that

matter, all Oblate institutions. You might ask, “Who are you to comment on the Oblate Charism? You are not an Oblate.” Good question. I have been at OST for 25 years. You might call it a 25 year novitiate. Over those years I have had the pleasure of working and planning with many Oblates from around the world. I have worked to initiate many programs at the school that serve the charism well. I have been part of planning groups, both local and international, that work to create programs that reflect the Oblate charism well. As dean, it is my responsibility to support programming and ensure all programs reflect the mission statement of the school. That mission statement itself flows from the Oblate charism. I am also responsible for formation of lay students at OST. As such, I have worked to include aspects of the Oblate Charism in that formation. Those who come to Oblate School of Theology should know something of the Oblate charism. So I studied, read, listened, questioned, and participated in much around the Oblate charism. I’m not an Oblate, but I’m the next best thing, someone who has worked with you for years and wholeheartedly believes in the gift that this congregation is for church and society.

At OST, the Oblate charism is alive and well. What is the Oblate charism? It is one that seeks new, creative ways to bring the gospel to all people. St. Eugene encouraged the Oblates to “let nothing go undared.” This we do well at OST. We are never comfortable with where we are. We try new ways of teaching and learning, new programs that serve new constituencies, frequently ask how changes will affect the poor, how our theology moves students, faculty, and alumni to serve the poor and be influenced by the poor, we look at our own practices in business, finance, and administration to see how they are influenced by the Oblate charism.

It is this idea of leaving nothing undared that has led OST to have lay ministry programs, to have religious and diocesan students studying together, to have Christians from other denominations studying here, to have programs that serve women, African Americans, Latinos, and the incarcerated. These are groups that we see as underserved, as abandoned in some fashion. Sophia community for example, was begun to address the huge imbalance found in lay ministry – over 80% of lay ministers are women but most of them do not have the background academically to serve in the positions they hold. Three things keep them away according to studies – time, money, and access. We try to address

all three. The same could be said for the Sankofa Institute for African American Pastoral Leadership. No one in Texas, and not very many in the US, was offering programs that prepare people for pastoral service in the African American community; an underserved community that brought several challenges to us. This was a new cultural group that was as unfamiliar with us as we were with them and far more ecumenical than we were used to working with. We were told it was a daring move but it seemed a natural, we had been doing cross-cultural ministry for decades with Hispanic ministry. Why not extend it? What happened is protestant, African –American students and leaders came here and told us they were far more welcome and comfortable than they ever expected. They loved the hospitality and the spirituality of the place. St. Eugene would rejoice at that message. It certainly demonstrates the daring missionary charism found at OST.

Again, taking the IFP into the Texas Prison system was a daring move. No other Catholic institution was providing formation in Texas prisons. Since Oblates had served as prison chaplains in Texas for many years, doing the daring thing again seemed a natural. Once in place, we had more volunteers than we knew what to do with, most of them our own graduates. That should tell us something. Everyone that leaves here leaves with the idea of service to the poor and the abandoned. Few are more abandoned than prisoners.

Online learning is another means of missionary outreach. It could be driven entirely by financial decision-making. While that is part of the decision, unless we know what it is we hope to accomplish by putting courses on line, it won't succeed. We can simply put credit courses on line as we do now but what other types of programming would make a difference, would further our mission of reaching out to underserved people?

OST really does have a spirit that understands charism as being for others, not for us. We don't keep it in a box, but rather we fly it like a flag. It's found everywhere on campus, from faculty and administration to staff and the maintenance crew. People tell us repeatedly how welcoming the place is. This is the Oblate charism at work – all are welcome, we're happy you're here. When students graduate, they almost always honor someone that never taught them a class, Gerry Villareal, a maintenance worker who makes it a habit to welcome each person he sees. They asked him to call for the blessing at the Baccalaureate lunch

this past year. The charism is found everywhere, especially where there is a human need.

What I have said so far describes the first point I want to make. The charism is alive here, our students are formed in it, and we use it in program planning. Now, I come to the second point which has more to do with what might be called Oblate Studies. We live the Oblate charism well, but we tend to keep that light under a bushel in terms of academia. (In Texas maybe it's an oil barrel.) We don't talk about it much, other than in planning, and we write about it even less. This is the best reason I know for a program of Oblate studies. A program of Oblate Studies would involve research and theological reflection that provides material for action in mission, in classrooms, in parishes, and in specialized ministries. Such theological reflection would help both the Church and the world recognize the surprise that is the Oblate Charism. Theological reflection calls for identifying facts, theological and otherwise, then using those facts to address a particular issue or incident. To uncover the facts, historical research is needed, social science research is needed, and other scientific research is needed. This is the first step. The next step is to take this information, this research, and apply it to particular pastoral needs. A program of Oblate Studies would include historical research into St. Eugene's original mission – to reach out to those who are abandoned by Church and society, to reach out to those who see the church as unimportant in their lives, as irrelevant to today's society. A program of Oblate Studies would do the necessary historical research on the writings, the lives, and the work of the Oblates, tracing how the charism was lived. History shows, for example, that the Oblates were, in many ways, some of the original New Evangelizers. They were so good at it, so willing to do whatever was necessary to lead a divided, weakened Church in France back to life, they were asked to do First Evangelization, to reach out to those who had never heard the gospel. The need today is for a retrieval of that original effort of the Missionaries of Provence, to inspire people, to help them see how life in Christ has something to offer, to return to the Church, and to Christian living. Theological reflection on how this retrieval could happen, on what such a retrieval might look like, and on how to prepare our students, faculty and staff to embody this retrieval, would serve the congregation well. For example, much of the work around reconciliation that was carried out by St. Eugene and the missionaries focused on sacramental recon-

ciliation. This was important since so many were Catholics in name only and found the road to reconciliation frequently harsh and unwelcoming. Today, reconciliation of a sacramental nature is still needed however there is also a need to extend that reconciliation outside of a strictly sacramental action or to something that may lead to a sacramental action. The reconciliation of Christians with one another, of those who call upon the One God as Christians, Jews, and Muslims, of those who seek the divine through other avenues, of various socio-economic backgrounds, of differing ethnic backgrounds, of differing political backgrounds are all areas where the Oblate Charism may be found and where that charism offers hope to society. Can the Oblate Charism help reconcile people and break down walls that exist on racially-divided Sunday mornings? These are topics for seminars that could provide the ground for research and publication. This research and publication would contribute to mission. Oblates also take a vow of perseverance. If there is anything the world needs today it is someone who can say with certainty that if all others leave, I will remain. When my wife and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary some 18 years ago, a colleague of Cathy's commented that she didn't know anyone who had been married that long. What does perseverance look like today among members of the congregation and within the Church? How would it provide some inspiration for people that have no such example of perseverance in their lives? Does it matter to people anymore and why? That needs some theological reflection.

A program of Oblate Studies could move students and faculty to examine best practices in mission, in evangelization, in prison ministry, in youth ministry and define how such success is measured. What does successful evangelization look like today? Most have already been baptized so we can't really use the number of baptisms as an indicator. What then do we use? More items for theological reflection.

The Church today faces major challenges. Statistics show (these are facts) that the Catholic Church in the US is growing but only as a result of immigration. Those same statistics show the largest number of "nones" or those with no religious affiliation are former Catholics. These facts identify a problem. The Church is losing members and more and more of those that leave are not going to another religious institution. Would Oblate Studies have anything to say about this situation? It would have much to say. This is New Evangelization. For the past

15 years or so, faith was frequently presented as an entirely cognitive process. Simply accept this list of statements as true and you will be perfect. We know there is an innate weakness in this approach. Ask the rich young man in the gospels. Cognition is the easy part, being perfect is more difficult and requires selling all that we have. We may need to sell a few things so people today can hear the message of Christ. Theological reflection on evangelization in today's environment would help us name the theology and the values behind the decisions about what we need to sell and what we will do with the spoils. How do we present the gospel so people see it as influential, as adding meaning to their lives, as a way to unite people, to bring about peace, to better humanity, to care for creation? Where do we find the Oblate Charism present in the world? Identifying these occasions of grace would be helpful to all humanity and especially so to those who live the charism of St. Eugene and bring this charism to people preparing for ministry. For many today, community life and the support of the common good is irrelevant. How do we inspire people to see that care for the common good, for the welfare of all God's people, of all God's Creation, is relevant to their lives; especially those who have left organized religion behind. This is what Oblate Studies could offer. Oblate Studies is different from whether we live the charism. Both, Oblate Studies and a charismatic life however, contribute to mission. They both contribute to formation of missionaries, to the shaping of the mission, and to the ultimate outcome of the mission, a shared life in Christ.

We are very good at hospitality, at being a sort of island of how the charism might change the Church and the world. Oblate Studies can help articulate the charism in research and, therefore, help others see the need to proclaim the gospel in new ways, naming best practices, reviving the call to reach out to those who are abandoned, leaving nothing undared in doing so, demonstrating a perseverance the world seldom sees. This would help all Oblates, and those of us who work with them, live the charism more clearly. After all, we don't hold the charism, we just deliver it.

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JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION AND THE OBLATE CHARISM

ANTONIO PONCE, OMI

The answer to living the Oblate charism in the context in which we live as Oblates can lead one to develop certain ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

In the US Province this ministry goes back all the way to February 1999, when the new US Province was formed from the five provinces in the US.

The US Province Justice and Peace Office (later to be called Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office) came into being under the directorship of Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI. At that time, email was something of a rarity, but since then the office has come to use social media extensively with a Website established in 2006 (redesigned in 2008), Facebook, Twitter, and a Blog.

Issues of special concern around the turn of the millennium were: Land Mines, closing the School of the Americas, HIV-AIDS, malaria and TB, with emphasis on access to medicine for all. Fair Trade, especially around coffee and chocolate, emerged as a concern.

The US Oblates have had consistent and ongoing interest in care for creation as seen by the Ecological Missions provided by Fr. Darrell Rupiper, OMI, until his premature death; the Oblate Ecological Initiative and its Earth Literacy Programs; Community-Supported Agriculture-Farm at Godfrey, IL, and the garden at the provincial house begun by Gail Taylor in 2012. Twice over the years the office has put together pamphlets on ecological concerns – 2001 and 2009. In 2013, it published *All Creation Reveals the Glory of God* – a 36-page photo book that encourages meditation on our relationship to God's creation.

The Oblate Justice and Peace Ministry has a long history of interest in socially responsible/faith-consistent investing getting and giving strength from/to the ICCR (Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility) using Oblate-held shares of stocks in corporations. Nearly all issues of interest to Oblates can be touched by this corporate effort – mining/extractive concerns; human rights, supply chain, sweatshop manufacturing, human trafficking, predatory lending; ecology/climate change, land grabbing, water usage; political campaign reform; vulture funds; onerous debt of poor countries; health care, etc. The 2008 financial crisis brought many opportunities for the JPIC Office to try to influence corporations, especially huge banks. To influence corporations, people in the JPIC Office dialogue with corporate personnel, draft and send resolutions, and vote proxy ballots. Impact investing, selecting investments for the good they might do, is emerging as a possible way to help the poor.

Issues that capture a lot of the attention of the office include Immigration Reform, Financial Crises and other concerns, Climate Change, Extractives/mining, human rights, and Human Trafficking. Outside of the US, Africa, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Latin and South America have held special interest for the office. The office also began a connection with the United Nations. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI, has been there since 2007, working with VIVAT International. In addition, for several years, Joseph Gomes, OMI, joined others from Bangladesh at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, testifying on behalf of indigenous people in Bangladesh. In 2004 the office began to import and sell items made by some of these Bangladeshi groups.

Issues that have also been of interest include torture, the death penalty, foreclosures on mortgages, and the nuclear threat. The office has hosted and benefitted from several interns who have spent summers here.

The Oblate Constitution # 8 is a reminder that we as Oblates are called to “lead all, especially the poor, to God and accompany them to become fully aware of their dignity as human beings and children of God.” In the JPIC Office we consider that, in a society in which the dignity of the human person is constantly threatened, the JPIC ministry is an important and urgent one. Therefore our commitment is the promotion of human dignity and respect for God’s creation. This means for

us, walking with and for the poor and most abandoned and also being present where decisions affecting their future are taken.

Because the context in which we carry out this ministry offers many possibilities and many challenges at the same time, a constant discernment and prayer are essential to discover what and how our charism prompts us to develop our ministry of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, as we believe that this ministry is an integral part of our evangelizing work.

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FUNDRAISING: A BUSINESS OR A MINISTRY?

JIM CHAMBERS, OMI

Fundraising was something that the founder did very early on. It was at the heart of our foundation. Not having the resources to open the house in Aix he started a direct mail campaign. St Eugene composed a plan to fund his new Missionaries of Provence.

But an institution, which ought to produce such great fruit, an institution, which can be said to be so necessary, cannot be formed without the help of the faithful who assist with their charity. There is no doubt that those who have in their hearts a sincere love of religion, will consider it a pleasant duty to sow material goods in order to reap spiritual benefits.

Would they want to deprive themselves of the graces which God will grant to those cooperating with this holy enterprise? ...

An easy way of contributing is that of donations or pledges for several years, according to the means of each person. Daily prayers will be said at the Church of the Mission at Aix for the benefactors, and during the missions the people will be asked to do the same.¹

Bill Woestman, OMI, in his article on the *Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate* in the *Dictionary of Oblate values* lays out the history and development of the Association(s) in the Congregation. Though there were attempts to make a third order or to create a uniform Association, for the most part they were unique endeavors of the individual provinces. The main focus of the different MAMI's were funding of Houses of Formation and the missions of the provinces. Within the development of the Association as a means of fundraising was also the development that we should also be about the spiritual formation of its Members. It is this tension between Business and ministerial components of fundraising that I want to reflect on. But before that I will

present a brief history of the Foundation of Fundraising activities of the USP from the provinces before the amalgamation to the current reality.

OBLATE MISSIONS:

Fr. Billy Morell, the current director of OMSI (USP fundraising) and former provincial of the Southern Province provided me the following History of the Oblate Missions Southern US Province (SUSP) and Fundraising:

Fr Cullen Decker was a hopeful but frustrated Philippine missionary-to-be in San Antonio when he began raising funds to support the fledgling Oblate Mission in the Philippines. His close friend, Fr (later bishop) Monjeau, was chosen one of the founders of that mission. Founded in 1939, it was a joint effort of several US provinces, including the southern (SUSP) of which Fr Decker was a member. Oblate superiors did not choose Fr Decker to go to the Philippines although he had eagerly volunteered. His friend, Fr Mongue, consoled him by assuring him he could give as much life to the new mission as much by helping to fund it as by going there as a missionary.

Fr Decker spent his missionary zeal organizing and leading local Texas efforts to support the mission. It was his life's work. And he was faithful to it... and enormously successful. By 1986, his creation The Mary Immaculate League, with its numerous clubs to support various aspects of the missions, had sent to the Philippines about \$ 60,000,000.

At the same time "The League" office also raised funds for the Southern province mission in Mexico as well as for seminarians. Eventually, about 10 years after Fr Cullen retired from the League, its operations were so focused on mission promotion/fund raising, the name was changed to "Oblate Missions."

In the late 70's, as the southern province began to recognize the importance of the communications ministry in church, Oblate Missions expanded its ministry to include a number of efforts in the print and television media.

With local Oblate ministry so deeply and broadly involved in servicing the Spanish speaking community in Texas, Oblate Mission also began to concentrate efforts in and with Hispanic communications and fundraising.

Still, the backbone of OM work remained direct mail solicitations for the missions and seminarians. Many mail appeals also promoted and responded to Marian devotion, especially centered on the Lourdes Grotto and later also on the Tepeyac shine on the hill over the Lourdes grotto. From the first days of Fr Cullen Decker, the Grotto was the center of the devotional life of the League and then the Oblate Missions.

Oblate Missions functioned as a ministry of the Southern Province fully integrated into operation of the province until the single US Province was formed in 1999. At that time, OM became integrated into USP as one of its fundraising activates, operating as a distinct province entity. The Grotto/Tepeyac always remained part of OM operations.

Fr. Billy briefly talked about the Spanish track in fundraising, this was developed, nurtured, animated and grew by the hand of Fr. Lajo Saturino, OMI. The main focus of the Spanish communications is the Grotto and that we will pray for our benefactors with the request to help us with what they can. The Spanish communications is not as Foreign Mission focused as the English program.

MAMI (CENTRAL USP) AND FUNDRAISING

Gleaming from various sources, MAMI in Belleville Illinois had its roots around 1940 at the grounds of St Henry's Preparatory Seminary. Though it appears that a MAMI had existed before that. The Provincial at that time Fr. Alphonse Simon, OMI, due to the needs of St. Henry's Preparatory Seminary, wanted to reestablish the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) by using a direct mail campaign. In that effect he appointed a young priest as the Treasurer of St. Henry Preparatory Seminary, Fr. Edwin J. Guild, OMI, and gave him the task, along with his other duties, to revitalize the MAMI. His first year he increased the membership but lost money. But by the 2nd year he had paid off the debts and was showing a profit which was enough to start building de Mazenod Hall, a gymnasium and science hall for the students at St. Henry. Fr Guild credits the success to advice from Fr. Pohlen, omi whom appears to have been doing fundraising at the Native American reservation in Sisseton SD.

...Fr. Simon arranged for me to take lessons from a master fundraiser, Fr. John Pohlen, OMI. Fr. Pohlen was Director of the Indian

Missions in Sisseton, South Dakota. He had been one of the retreat masters while I was a Student at St Henry's and it was he who suggested I consider joining the Oblates.

Upon meeting me again, Fr. Pohlen treated me like a long-lost son. I remain to this day grateful for his kindness to me and for the interest he took in explaining how to succeed in mail campaigns. His advice was priceless. By the end of our second year of operation, we had paid our debts and were \$5000 in the black.²

A year later (1942) the next major foundational event occurred with the arrival of Fr. Paul Schulte, OMI, at St. Henry's. Fr. Schulte, a German Citizen, who was being interned at St. Henry's, instead of being in an internment Camp during WWII. Fr. Schulte was already a famous missionary "the Flying Priest of the Artic" Fr. Schulte had brought medical aid to and supplies to remote villages and Oblate missions. He founded an organization to bring transportation to isolated missionaries called MIVA in Germany(still doing good work) Fr. Schulte had come to North America(US and Canada especially in the Artic) to expand his organization. The war put end to his efforts in North America Fr. Schulte was a master fundraiser and had a strong devotion to Mary, and had built a small chapel to Our Lady of Snows (after the oldest Marian Church St. Mary Major in Rome) in the Artic. He had brought his devotion with him to St. Henry's Fr. Guild worked and learned from him. Fr. Schulte started a monthly news bulletin which was named Our Lady of the Snows and along with a daily novena to Our Lady of the Snows for the benefit of MAMI members. The students at St. Henry would gather around a small picture in the student chapel that Fr. Schulte had set up for this devotion. Along with this devotion Fr. Schulte shared his mailing list for fundraising and was included in MAMI's list.

The Chapel had moved to several different places on the grounds at St. Henry and it became the spiritual home of MAMI members. In 1951 they broke ground for a new Chapel for St Henry's in the same building they had another smaller chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows. Also in 1951 they started the Outdoor Novena honoring Our Lady of the Snows. Before too long people were coming to the chapel and the grounds of St. Henry to see the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. By 1961 they moved the Shrine to its current location with a purchase of 80 acres of land and building of the outdoor altar for the Shrine and

also replica to Lourdes on the newly purchased grounds. This became and still is the spiritual home for MAMI. Even though they are now administered separately they remain intertwined and support each other's endeavors. In fact fundraising at the Belleville location could not take place without the Shrine.

THE UNITED STATES PROVINCE

In 1999 the 5 provinces in the United States amalgamated into one US Province (USP). After the amalgamation, the different fundraising activities in the original provinces remained pretty much the same as before, although there were regular (at least annual) joint meetings of OM (from the former southern province) and MAMI (from the former central province). But each fundraising unit acted dependently of each other. But in due course it was decided it would be better to house all fundraising activities into one corporation the Oblate Missionary Society Incorporated (OMSI). In July 2007, this was created with its own corporate board made up of the Administration team of the USP, the Executive director of OMIS, another Oblate and 3 lay collaborators. Though there have been few missteps, it was a successful move. OMSI has emerged over the last several years as a single organization under it Oblate Executive Director and Associate Oblate Executive Director with a Leadership Team comprised of key Directors from MAMI, OM, and the CPG (Charitable and Planned Giving) committed to consensus leadership. Currently OMSI has 3 distinct Direct mail programs in 2 languages, 2 at Oblate Missions and 1 at MAMI, a Charitable and Plan giving Department that Solicits Major Donors, takes and processes wills, and also offers charitable gift annuities. Each of these programs also has their own websites and we have 2 e-commerce site taking donations online. We have 6 Oblates that work (full or part time) at OMSI. Fr. John Madigan, OMI is the Oblate Director and the face for the Direct mail at MAMI in Belleville. Fr. Lajo Saturino, OMI is Oblate Director of Spanish communication and the face of Spanish fundraising, he is the writer of all Spanish appeals. Fr. Art Flores, OMI, is Director and face of the English program at OM. All three of these Oblates are the Spiritual directors for the employees that work with them. Fr. Leo Perez is the Director of the Grotto shrine (Lourdes and Tepeyac) in San Antonio. Fr. Billy Morell is the executive Oblate director of OMSI and

I am the Associate Oblate executive Director and Director of OMSI IT. Our roles include the administration of the various Programs and the animation of the Leadership team of OMSI.

Currently we have over 150 employees and a donor database of 5 million plus names in which about 1 million we consider to be current donors. We mail over 30 million pieces of Direct mail a year and we transfer to the USP around \$10,000,000 a year. OM uses outside vendors to print the appeals while MAMI has in house printing facilities that print almost all their appeals and some of OM's. Also OM and MAMI acknowledges all gifts in house and fulfills any gift we promised with the appeal

OMSI and its various departments maintain 6 websites and a number of social media sites. We strive, wherever possibly, to develop personal relationships with our benefactors. We have a large number of employees who provide donor services by phone, the Chaplin Directors each make a number of donor phone calls every week, and 5 donor advisor make frequent home visits throughout the year.

In addition to trying to engage the generosity of the donors, every direct mail appeal is written to educate our benefactors about the mission and the vocation of all the baptized as missionaries.

REFLECTION

A little about me. I came to the Oblates later in life, I was 39 when I started in the Pre-Novitiate. I have a degree in accounting and was in local Politics in Southern Illinois (Murphysboro about 100 miles south of Belleville). I was the City Clerk and Budget Officer for the town at that time with a population 9000. I was with the City for 17 years. I met the Oblates at King's House Retreat House. I went with my Parish group for quiet retreats. It was there my vocation found its voice. At the retreat house there is a Magazine rack with various reading material and one was a magazine that was put out by MAMI called Oblates. (Now it is called Oblateworld) This magazine told the stories of the various missionary and ministry activities of the Oblates throughout the World. It was these stories that resonated with me and surfaced my vocation.

I started with the Oblates at the time that the 5 provinces were being combined into the USP. I started at St. Louis University and then moved to Buffalo NY when the USP came into being. I took 1st vows in

2001. My theology was at CTU in Chicago. Between my 3rd year and 4th year of theology I went to Zambia for a Pastoral year. I fell in love with Zambia and the work of the Oblates in Zambia. I took final vows in 2005 and was ordained to the Priesthood in August 2006 by Bishop Paul Duffy, OMI in my home Parish in Murphysboro and was given my 1st Obedience to the Zambian Delegation. I was in Zambia for 4 years, the majority of the time working with a Development Center that the Oblates ran for the Diocese of Mongo (DMDC).

I came back to the US at the end of 2010 and at that time Fr. Billy Morell, OMI had taken over as Provincial after the election of Fr. Louis Lougen, omi as the Superior General. He was also the Executive Oblate Director of OMSI (OED). He asked me to be part OMSI administration as the Associate Oblate Executive Director (AOED). I have now been working with OMSI for 4 ½ years.

Most of my time at OMSI is about the Business side. I was in charge of the Marketing Department at Oblate Missions for about 1 year, concerned with Production schedules, getting stories, Selecting Donors to Mail, Cost to raise a Dollar, cost to acquire a donor, the Balance between acquiring new donors and net transfers to the province. Now I am in charge of IT and the concerns is security, rights and privileges, PCI compliance, Reports, Data integrity, Data Conversion, SQL servers, business continuity and disaster recovery, implementing new software, creating production processes, internet, email, communications.... All things I was ordained to do.

As AOED along with Fr. Billy as OED I interface with OMSI Board and with USP especially the treasurer's office and the concerns there is the Net transfer, the bottom line- how much we are sending. . And I believe this rightly so, our job is to raise funds for the needs of the province and the missions. We have a clear metric about our effectiveness and it is in dollars.

We are a Business that requires business skills to successfully fulfill our mission. Our product, our message, our brand is the Oblate Charism. We promote the Oblate Charism, it is through the stories of Oblates, our ministries, our closeness to the people that we package. Our Shrines become places for their prayers to be offered and Our Chaplain Directors their spiritual directors. Our mission stories engage their faith (for me it brought out my vocation). We get a clear view of how

our Charism is being heard, people wanting to be part of our ministry through their generosity. We reach more people about who are through direct mail. We find that 70% of our wills are from people who never met an Oblate but only heard from us from our appeals. That is the impact of our Charism. As long as we as Oblates are true to our Charism, we will have resources to meet our needs.

My 5 years in Zambia and the missionary spirit, closeness to the people, the dignity of the poor that it offered me and still resides in me mixed with years as City Clerk and Budget officer they find a unique home in Fundraising (charism promotion). Fr. Guild when he was offered the job of revitalizing MAMI from the Provincial he told him “My desire is to be active Ministry not in office management and fundraising.” He was in Fundraising for about 40 years less a stint as provincial. Fr. Decker whose desire was to be missionary in Philippines, but did not receive that Obedience, was encouraged by his friend who did go to the Philippines, that he could do more for the Mission in the US. 60 million dollars flowed to the Philippines. Unlike Fr. Decker I got to be in Zambia for 5 years and but now like Fr. Decker I can do more for the mission here than I could there and I think also like Fr. Guild whose desire was not to be behind a desk found it to be a ministry that was rewarding and that came from the Charism of the Founder.

I will like to end this with 2 letters we received from Donors recently in at MAMI.

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¹ William WOESTMAN, OMI, *Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate*, in AOSR, *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, Rome, 2000, p. 597.

² Edwin J. GUILD, OMI, *Dreams Realized*, Belleville, The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1988, p. 56-57...

PACKAGING, LABELING, AND PRESENTING OUR OBLATE CHARISM AS VOCATION DIRECTORS

CHARLES BANKS, OMI

For the past ten years (2005-2015) as a vocation director, I have been blessed in many ways by the Lord. The rich experience was one I will never regret. At the same time, during all those years I mentally wrestled with many questions and found few satisfying answers pertaining to effective Oblate vocation promotion at this time in our history.

It would not be wise to retrieve all the customs, traditions and religious practices from our past history; however: – “How do we pick up those pieces worth saving and use them beneficially to move forward? For example, Is there a way to regain the *esprit de corps* that motivated countless Oblates up until the 1960s? What gripped the hearts and provided the magnetic pull to draw those men to the Oblate charism? What was the secret of their faith and passion to go on mission to evangelize the poor - often thousands of miles across the world to unknown places and never again return home?”

How do we present talks about evangelizing the poor and abandoned when vocation inquirers find out the Scalabrini, Camboni, Divine Word, Claretian, Salesian and a score of other apostolic missionary communities of priests and brothers have a similar purpose and provide evangelization, too?

With smaller families today and often only one son, How do we convince parents to bless a son with the freedom to discern a vocation no matter where it may lead that son? Is there a way to connect with families living strong traditional Catholic values, often providing home schooling, and openly encouraging a son to discern a vocation to the consecrated life or priesthood? How do we respond to young men from these families who “look over the OMIs” but end up joining more tradi-

tional religious communities with priests and brothers they perceive as having more intense, communal spiritual fervor than do Oblates? In regard to more traditional families in today's Church, Do we simply shrug our shoulders and glibly say to their youth, "We are who we are" and do nothing? I always tell serious inquirers to look and study the "big picture" of Oblates in ministry. We can be proud of all the good being done by our priests and brothers who frequently minister where others would shy away. We can also take pride in the fact there are currently 48 Oblates in the Church's hierarchy as bishops. Most of them were named by St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. That recognition of Oblates and their appointment to shepherd-leadership in the Church tells me we must be doing something right.

Many people have never heard of St. Eugene. He also seems to be overshadowed by the charisms lived by "the biggies" in the Communion of Saints: Francis, Benedict, Ignatius, Dominic or John of the Cross. Since St. Eugene came from a family shattered by divorce and parental disagreements, I like to present him as a contemporary intercessor for people coming from similar situations where there has been instability and emotional anguish.

St. Eugene has provided us with a spirituality that underlines burning love for Christ – the Eucharist – zeal for evangelizing the poor – love of Mary – fidelity to the Church – as something foundational for Oblate life. As missionaries we have what I call "apostolic flexibility" in the sense we can appropriate these elements of spirituality for our interior life and develop them in the context of our often unique ministerial demands, but are not "tied down" by strict monastic expectations as are some other religious communities.

We must not underestimate the power and far reaching influence of social media. Serious discerners study and examine our web pages, read face book comments, and stay abreast with news from the Oblate world. Some men discerning an Oblate vocation often know more about our history than actual do life-long members of the OMI community.

What is our best promotional point? Happy, committed, generous, positive-minded Oblates living and ministering together!

I have found out that when we have hospitable communities disposed to warmly welcome vocational seekers, that simple gesture has the power to make an impression flowing from our fraternity. When

we strive to be available to respond to people's reasonable ministerial needs, present ourselves as approachable, willing to collaborate to resolve pastoral situations that sometimes "fall between the cracks" of parochial structures, and present ourselves as being close to them in the joyful and painful circumstances of life, that, too, can be powerful in drawing an inquirer to Oblate values.

St. Eugene was crystal clear in pointing out to vocation inquirers the benefit of seeking closeness to Jesus Crucified and Risen, and finding hope symbolized in our Oblate profession cross. By his own personal example Eugene underlined the value of daily Mass celebrated or attended, and taught the importance of seeking spiritual strength and unity with our Eucharistic Lord in daily prayer known as "oraison."

It is very wise to avoid all the "isms" [liberalism, conservatism, traditionalism, radicalism, etc.] in today's world and Church that can divert one's energy and focus from Jesus Christ. Instead, it is helpful to point out the great joy and peace that comes to the heart when a person strives with faith and trust to live oneness or communion with God's people centered in Christ Jesus.

Where does Mary, the Mother of the Lord, fit into this picture? For Oblates, she is our spiritual mother and the mother of the church. Her maternal care extends to all God's children. Hence, we proudly honor her under many different titles in countless cultural environments and a diversity of missionary areas. She may be Guadalupe in Mexico, Immaculate Conception in the United States, and Lourdes in France, but regardless as God's mother and our spiritual mother, she points us to her son, Jesus Christ.

Finally, we must be honest and challenge young men to prayerfully analyze the word: Oblate. It is all about belief and faith, sacrifice, gifting and giving of one self, generosity, availability, risk taking, and much more. These elements are "the bottom line" and cannot be compromised or negotiated by anyone desirous of becoming a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in line with the living charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod.

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LIVING THE OBLATE CARISMA IN THE PRE-NOVITIATE FORMATION HOUSE “SAN EUGENIO DE MAZENOD” TIJUANA B.C. MÉXICO

FRANCISCO GÓMEZ, OMI

Since 1923 the Oblates have attended three big parishes in the San Fernando Valle C.A. now only two (Santa Rosa de Lima, and San Fernando). Among the young people of those parishes was a lot interest to know more about the oblate charisma and their ministry, with the possibility to become Oblates in the future. Unfortunately some of these young people did not have a legal status to go to the seminary in California, or even have not enough skills to speak the English language. In the late eighties arise the idea to open a new formation house for the Pacific Province; it would give answer to this dilemma of these young men. It was until 1990 that some oblates from San Fernando (Jim Dukowsky, OMI, Thom Rush, OMI, Brother Peter Vazquez, OMI, and some more others decided to build the formation house in Tijuana, Mexico. There will be easier for students attend the seminary.

Tijuana is a big populated, large city and is always growing (the population is more than two and half millions of people). It is located across the southern border with California. Tijuana was a touristic city before, now day its majority an industrial city. Many people who live in the peripheries of Tijuana come from different states of Mexico. They bring with them their colorful traditions, culture, public devotion, pilgrim, Posadas, their food, dancing, songs etc. Some other people came with the idea to cross the border and realized the American Dream, or to live in Mexico and work in California. However, the majority of the people who came to Tijuana are looking for better life and better pay work in factories called “maquiladoras”. These factories came to Tijuana from different parts of the world.

The cultural context of Tijuana enriches the view of our students and also face them up with the realities that oblate congregation face up too.

Our house started in Tijuana, Mexico in 1990, with two Oblates as formators, Jim Dukowsky, OMI, Tony Dummer, OMI and four students, all of them from San Fernando Valley. In 1992 the oblates acquired a new property and build a new house in a popular neighborhood called Buena Vista; where we are living today. Since that time (25years ago now) 8 formators and a good numbers of students (fifty) have passed for this formation house. Some of the former students are now Oblates serving in different ministries in the USA province. For instance, we congratulate ourselves to mention Fernando Velazquez who is one of the teacher and staff at OST, Antonio Ponce who is the director of the JPIC, Salvador Gonzalez, Juan Ayala, Porfirio Garcia, Webert Merilan, Julio Narvaez, Brother Lucino Cruz, etc. I also did my pre-novitiate in Tijuana, and I was ordained in La Morita in 2007. In addition, few students are now part of the different dioceses. Some others students didn't continue in religious life but they are good husbands. One of the sad and unfortunately experiences in our house was in 1994, when one pre-novice suffer a car accident and died.

FORMATION PROGRAM

The pre-novitiate is the first doors for our candidates to enter in contact with the Oblate charisma, also with the oblate congregation. Our program is developed according to the General Norms for Oblate Formation. Five different pillars are the bases in our program, intellectual, communitarian, pastoral, human and spiritual. At this time I Fr. Francisco Gómez, OMI, and Fr. Donald Bernard, OMI, are the staff of formation in Tijuana. Our mission is to accompany the students in their process before they go to the novitiate and take the first vows. We try to implement the formation program helping the students to have a balanced social life, prayer life, community life, etc. while they discern their vocation.

Even though we offer the program and accompany them, each student is responsible, with the help of God, for their own formation, growing first as a good person, then as a good Oblate, finally to the holiness, as our founder said.

Our candidates know that Tijuana house belongs to the USA province. Consequently, after they finish their theological studies, they could be sending to work outside Tijuana, especially working with minorities. English is an essential part of our formation program; we practice it twice a week in our Masses as well as in our table conversation.

Our formation house faces the reality as many others formations houses of our time, to be international and intercultural communities. This year we have four students from different states of Mexico, one of them met the oblates in San Antonio. In previous years, we also had students from Central America who met the oblates in USA. Each member enriches our community with their talents and capacities; many of these capacities are developed during their time with us. So we try to live as brothers in faith, no one of us is perfect, they also bring some challenges to our community. For instance, we find they came from dysfunctional families, separation, poor education, abuses, etc. we offer different kind of help to them in order they can make it well. But after all, the students came to us because they like what we are doing, with the hope to be good oblates and work hard for it.

Intellectual

Our candidates go to study philosophy in the local diocesan seminary. School or intellectual development is the most challengers for our students, it requires time and effort. They have 10 different classes and attend school from 9:00am to 1:30 pm from Monday to Friday. At the end of four year of studies the graduated students received the title of master in philosophical studies.

Because they are busy enough with their school work, our challenge in this area is to find time to inform and instruct them into the oblate spirituality and community life.

Ministry

In 1996 The Oblates started a new mission in La Morita; it is one of the biggest and poorest parishes in Tijuana, attending 150,000 people, divided in sixteen chapels. We ask one of our students to do ministry for four hours every week, collaborating and sharing in the catechetical teaching in one of the chapels.

Our students participate as well in different ministerial areas where needy is a big deal such as hospitals, emigrants, youth's groups in a local parish, and catechetical teaching, etc. Supervises of our students are happy to have them in ministry, because they are open to help a lot to them and trait people with dignity.

Spiritual

We start every day with a Morning Prayer or Mass and we also finished our day praying evening pray. Spiritual Direction and reconciliation are very important aspect of our program for candidate; we ask to visit them once a month. The oblates close to us help us with retreats every month, showing different aspect of the oblate life and sharing their own experience. They also direct our students in their ministry. But the most important aspect for our student is to see them working and serving the people in la Morita mission.

Charisma

First of all, we try to live the oblate charisma living in community as brothers, enriching ourselves sharing our talents and cultural diversity. Our house even though is big, do not representing the opulence. We try to live simple life style as possible, as our neighbors does, reflecting the poverty vow. Certainly we do have many challenges such as individualism, consumerism, healing part of our past and to be open to share who we are.

Since we are living in a middle class neighborhood, we have the opportunity to interact and work together with people who live there. For instance, once a month we have a Holy Hour where we pray for vocations, and after that, we share food with the people who came to our house. Be together with people helps us to feel their love for the oblates. Some of them have mentioned that because we are very close to them they feel at home with us. Another group of ladies (Damas de San Eugenio) help the students to prepare tamales and sale it at one of the local parish. They want and love to see our young men as a "real oblates", continuing with the oblate charisma and its tradition. Once a month we celebrate our birthdays with these groups. It is a very special occasion for them and for us, we enjoy as a family. During Christmas we have a

“posada” with the boys and girls together with their parents. It is very good experience for the kids and some of our students too. They learn more about the culture and the oblates’ hospitality. Some other groups support the students selling tickets for different activities such as “rifas” raffle or breakfast. Their help is economical but also spiritual because they pray for our candidates. In addition, from December 3, the canonization day of our funder, to December 12 we have the “Rosarios Guadalupanos” novena to our lady of Guadalupe, we pray together the rosary in their house, for them is a blessing to have oblates as a guess. It is good and comfortable to see all these people connected with the Oblates, many times the people called themselves oblates.

Another important aspect of our program is to have missions experience (Holly Week) outside Tijuana, most of the time in some diocesan parishes. To see another reality help the students to identify themselves as oblates and to put in practice what they have receive in our house. Many times people have commented, “The Oblates are friendly people and live the simplicity”

To be an Oblate student in our pre-novice house is the beginning of the Oblate tradition. It requires dedication and perseverance to develop their own identity as Oblates. As formators we are responsible and are challenged from them, to be models for them, to live our vows and show how to live in community. The program help us a lot to support our candidates in their journey, but we are not along, there are many people who support us with their prayers, their presence and also economically. These collaborators feel the call to live the San Eugenio charisma and are waiting for the students to be full members of the church and the future leaders of our congregation. Even though we have many challenges, I believe we have good potential in our candidates to be the new generation of the Oblates in the USA province, whom will continue living and promoting the Oblate charisma, to be with the poor and the vulnerable. This is our tradition and this is our charisma.

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BROTHERS AS EVANGELIZERS CONTEXT

PATRICK M. MCGEE, OMI

“Blest is the wood through which justice comes about”
(Wisdom 14:7)

In this Region of Canada and the United States, Oblate priests and Brothers have a rich heritage of missionary presence since the 1840s when the Founder began sending out his sons. Brothers have shared with priests in this missionary endeavor of ministering to the people, building the church, and announcing the Good News of God’s Reign of Justice, Love and Peace. In my own Oblate life, significant periods of years have been dedicated to two specific ministries: preaching in retreat centers and initial formation. From this experience, both in Brazil and in the United States, I have been influenced by two things: my own call to preaching ministry, and my own rich experience of collaborative work with other religious men and women.

INTRODUCTION

“One cannot fully understand the vocation of a lay brother without the Mass of the Missionary Oblate priest. The most perfect concept of our community life as Missionary Oblates implies that lay brothers unite themselves with the priests at Mass, humbly serving Mass, participating in the Sacrifice of Jesus on the altar for the salvation of the world. This is, we believe, the sublime vocation of a lay brother.” This text was written by Fr. Leo Deschâtelets, in one of his circular letters of November 1, 1947. I was born on November 1, 1947. There is something serendipitous here! An observation by Fr. William Woestman, OMI, in relationship to this quotation notes: “Although this would not be expressed in the same words today (1984), it would seem that the concept is still valid.”¹ The community gathered together in celebra-

tions of Word and Sacrament is surely the theological setting in which we as Oblates embody that desire of St. Eugene to live in “unity of heart and mind.” (C 37)

A funny thing happened for me in the process of reflecting on this topic *Brothers as Evangelizers*. The more areas I thought about addressing, the more I realized that most everything has already been said! In reading Constitutions and Rules of 2012, along with The General Norms For Oblate Formation of 2011 (with a special addendum which treats of a formation plan for Oblate Brothers dated 2013), we find an affirmation and an updating of the Founder’s original outlook regarding the Brother’s participation in the life and mission of the Congregation.

Brothers were welcomed into the Congregation nearly from the beginning. The Rule of 1818 mentions the Brothers five times, as something “taken for granted,” and leaves two pages blank for further definition of their calling and roles. In September of 1818, de Mazenod withdrew to St. Laurent du Verdon to compose the first Constitutions and Rules, “wherein he introduced the vows of chastity, obedience and perseverance and thus formed a new religious congregation which had henceforth the purpose not only of evangelizing the poor by means of preaching missions but likewise of sanctifying its members. According to the practice of all religious congregations, brothers were given their place beside the priests as this was something that was normal in a religious institute.”² Eugene drew freely from the writings of other founders and congregations, especially the writings of St. Alphonsus Liguori and the Redemptorists.

“The special section of rules for brothers was elaborated it seems by Fr. Tempier at Notre Dame du Laus in 1821 when the layman Ignace Voitot, in the service of the house of Laus from 1819 or 1820, asked to be received as a brother.”³ This section comprises 29 articles, in which the Founder himself included his desire that the Brothers not be regarded only as servants.

This is not a historical study. The article on Brothers by Santiago Rebordinos, OMI, in the *Dictionary of Oblate Values* (Rome, 2000) is a good place to find a survey of the rich history of Congregational understandings of the vocation and mission of the Oblate Brother. It is worth consulting the sources listed in the footnotes of this article.⁴

Each morning I try to spend time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament before our community Celebration of the Eucharist. In our chapel, there is a wall-hanging which came from Recife, Brazil. It is a popular batik depiction of Jesus and the Apostles at the Table. This artistic hanging always puts me in touch with this aspect of our Charism: "The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life. Our Lord grouped the Twelve around him to be his companions and to be sent out as his messengers (cf. *Mk* 3:14). The call and the presence of the Lord among us today bind us together in charity and obedience to create anew in our own lives the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit." (C 3).

In reading that "the community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of our life" (C 3), my imagination is captured. I relate to "the community of the Apostles with Jesus" as an instance of brotherhood. I relate myself to them as another brother. Jesus is my brother, he calls me to join his brotherhood, he leads me and inspires me through his brotherly way. The life and mission of Jesus and the Twelve was an experience of brotherhood extended to all. This is my horizon.

Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology* discusses horizons. As he explains "horizon," he says it is "the limit of one's field of vision." He speaks analogously and relates fields of vision to "the scope of one's knowledge and the range of one's interests," and says that "what lies beyond one's horizon is simply outside the range of one's knowledge and interests: one neither knows nor cares."⁵ Horizons relate to culture, family, education, experience, and personal development. Diverse people "live, in a sense, in different worlds," and we come to recognize a diversity of horizons.

People can leave one horizon and take on a new one: a more adequate one due to new learning, a more just and loving one upon discovering a bias in previous beliefs and so forth. It is conversion, an about-face and a new beginning, working on my intellectual, moral, and religious consciousness, that prompts me to leave one horizon and appropriate a new one. I had an experience many years ago that illustrates this business of horizons.

I had been invited to help with music at the Eucharistic Celebration of vow renewal for the scholastics. Now, for the most part, I can

say that, for the previous fifteen years or so, my “horizon as brother” had been nourished and deepened by a style of communal prayer and Eucharistic celebration that I would characterize as fraternal, mutual, inclusive. This day, after the Lamb of God, I spontaneously left the keyboard and joined the gathering circle of Oblates forming near the altar, as I was used to doing. When the celebrant went around distributing the bread, lightning struck! As he approached, I placed my cupped hands open before him. He looked up, saw that it was me, and walked on by, to the next priest. Here was a conflict of differing horizons, one rubrical, the other communal.

In my experience of Oblate community life, I have come to appreciate, and be challenged by the several theological settings in which our practical incarnating of “the community of the Apostles with Jesus” is realized: the community gathered around the altar and in prayer, the community gathered at table in the dining room, and, the community gathered for study, discussion, leisure and recreation in the community room. The process of understanding, appreciating, and converting our differing horizons is the fraternal work of a community’s lifetime. A commitment to this process means everything; it affects my ability to understand, to work with, and to love my community and God.

INITIATION: *OUR BAPTISMAL VOCATION REMAINS*

Even from the vantage point of fifty years of *reception* of a renewed ecclesiology and sacramental practice, we are still dealing with the continued presence of a type of “baptismal amnesia” in church practice.⁶

Among the many gifts of the Second Vatican Council, we must acknowledge the key significance of the renewed self-understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, the People of God, a community in which all the baptized are welcomed and exercise a “full, conscious and active participation”. Richard Gaillardetz observes: “in baptism we are anointed by God’s Spirit to become sons and daughters of God (*Rom* 8:12-17). The anointing of the Spirit makes us a priestly people (*1 Pet* 2:9) and enables us, as partners in the paschal mystery, to offer the sacrifice of our whole lives to God in gratitude and praise.”⁷ Retrieving this baptismal foundation is crucial to our fully appropriating the Church-as-*communio* of Vatican II; yet at the same time, it is complicated by some of the compromises of the Council, creating of Religious Life

a kind of middle way between clergy and laity. There is also present an ambiguity in treating of Religious as lay; for Oblate (lay) Brothers, there is a need to understand the authority to evangelize as rooted in the baptismal vocation, sharpened by one's Oblation.

In both Congregational documents and Church teaching of the past fifty years, we find elaborations of the core insight about Brothers: "the lay religious life is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself." (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 10) Most Brothers I know have had the experience of being interrogated about their vocational choice as if something is lacking. Variations on the question "why don't you go on to the priesthood?" are asked by well-intentioned people, both outside of and within the Congregation. Let me try to explain what it means to say, in the words of *Perfectae caritatis* (n. 10), that the vocation of Brother is "complete in itself."

The following of Christ, specified in the vows of lay religious life, is the fundamental context for the explanation. The *sequela Christi* of all Consecrated Life is a graced specification of the New Life begun in Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation and the Eucharist. A man comes to religious profession, seeking to live his life as a Brother, already participating in *the common priesthood* of all the Baptized. (cf. R 7c) What does this mean? Thomas Aquinas gave an answer: "The sacramental character is a spiritual power, ordered to certain sacred actions. By receiving the sacrament of confirmation a person receives the power to confess Christ publicly and verbally (*verbis profitendi*) and as it were professionally (*quasi ex officio*), and even the power to preach him (*ad praedicandum*)."⁸ The Catechism references this passage, but ignores the final phrase with its mention of preaching! (#1305)

The first sentence of the first Constitution makes it clear for us Oblates, priests and Brothers: "The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through people's need for salvation, draws us together as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate." (C 1) In coming to Oblate Religious Life, the Brother, led by the Spirit, is responding to the invitation of Christ "to follow him and to share in his mission through word and work." (C 1) One call, one response, diverse expressions of the Oblate Charism.

The Second Vatican Council, and post-Conciliar reflection, helps us appreciate the "universal call to holiness" begun in Baptism. Michael

Downey notes: “by our baptism, we bear the name Christian. Whatever our way or walk in life, whatever our calling, our particular vocation, it is in service of our common call given as a gift in baptism. And the one call is this: to participate in the mission of the Word and the Spirit and, by doing so, to share in the very life of God.”⁹ The retrieval of an ancient understanding of the primacy of our common call as members of the Body of Christ is surely one of the greatest gifts of the Second Vatican Council. All of us, not just some, are called to live full Christian lives of witness, worship and service, in response to the one who invites us.

Brothers have a particular way to share in the one charism of Oblate life, expressed in the one call to mission and the one call to apostolic religious life. Since there is not a “change in state” in the life of the Brother, he lives as “one among many” brothers and sisters of the Lord, witnesses to the love of God in Christ the Savior as a brother to all.

OBLATION: OUR COMMON RELIGIOUS LIFE

For us as Oblates, our profession of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience is our first way of responding to the call of Christ to follow him, share in his mission, and be conformed to him. Constitution 2 says, “We are men ‘set apart for the Gospel’ (*Rom 1:1*), men ready to leave everything to be disciples of Jesus. The desire to cooperate with him draws us to know him more deeply, to identify with him, to let him live in us. We strive to reproduce in ourselves the pattern of his life. Thus, we give ourselves to the Father in obedience even unto death and dedicate ourselves to God’s people in unselfish love. Our apostolic zeal is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves in our oblation, an offering constantly renewed by the challenges of our mission.”

By making profession in the Congregation, each Oblate enters into a Spirit-led process of transformation into Christ who, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” (*Phil 2:6-8* NRSV) This *kenosis* of Christ is not only the example for us, but is indeed, the shape of our Religious Life as Oblates. This is not our work, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, who

transforms and makes holy, not only the work of our hands, but our very lives in all their ordinariness and fragility.

Through our oblation, each one of us, following Eugene de Mazenod, enters into a personal relationship with Christ Crucified. In a sacramental way, our profession is a replication of Eugene's experience before the Crucified One on Good Friday, 1807. We embark on a new journey through profession by which, more and more, we seek to appropriate Paul's words: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ – that is, Jesus Christ *crucified*." (1 Cor 2:2) The universal call to holiness, rooted in the baptismal vocation of every Oblate, takes on a new focus, a sharpening, a specification, through our communal oblation. Something new stands out for each Oblate priest and brother: "it is conformity to Christ, or holiness, understood as participation in the very life of God – inhabiting the cruciform God."¹⁰ This is the life we are to live, through God's grace. The result of this graced living is a long process of transformation, a conversion, a flowering of our oblation, an adopting of a spiritual horizon: "Through the eyes of our crucified Savior we see the world which he redeemed with his blood" (C 4)

MISSION: TO PROCLAIM CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM TO THE MOST ABANDONED

Eugene de Mazenod was fueled by a passionate zeal to proclaim the love of God for all in Christ the Savior, and to remind the poor of their dignity in the eyes of God. This kernel of our charism was the foundation from which Eugene invited others to join with him in a common mission. From the start, our experience of Oblate community has always been ordered toward mission. "Cooperating with the Savior and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor." (C 1)

"Complementary responsibilities in evangelizing" – this is how Constitution 7 describes the ways through which priests and Brothers share in our common mission. It is difficult to try and define the Brother's role only by way of limit or precision. It is, rather, through diverse and creative ways that the Brother develops his way of proclaiming the Word. Rule 7c says further, "missioned by the Church, their technical, professional or pastoral service, as well as the witness of their life, constitute their ministry of evangelization." There is a wideness to this understanding of the Brother's role, acknowledging the breadth of the

Spirit's power which "blows where it wills," and this wideness ought not be narrowed.

Through progressive reflection on the vocation and mission of the Oblate Brother during the past fifty years, one can trace a growing concern among the Brothers themselves that they not be "singled out" (in surveys or congresses) or "treated as a special class". This can be seen as a healthy self-understanding, which highlights the truth that all Oblates share in one charism, all Oblates participate in one mission, and that a familial spirit characterizes our Congregation. The Brothers have come to claim their share in the common mission of evangelizing the poor in its many and varied forms.

APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY — THE WASHING OF FEET

It has been said that the Brothers have a discreet presence in the Congregation, similar to Mary's presence in the history of Salvation.¹¹ Stripped of any vestiges of paternalism or clericalism, this ought to be heard as a prophetic statement. All of us, priests and Brothers, are called to a kind of discreet presence in the Congregation, not calling attention to ourselves, but to the One we exist to proclaim, Christ the Savior. All of us, priests and Brothers, can aspire to a kind of "Marian" presence: She who anchored the community of disciples, praying behind closed doors, awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at that first Pentecost of missionary zeal.

Community is always our "school of asceticism," a *sacramentum caritatis*, in which we are daily called to place the needs of the other before our own, and express again our willingness to wash one another's feet. Eugene's plea, "among yourselves, charity, charity, charity" reminds us that we work toward our sanctification at home, in the community, before we go out among the people. "Like the Apostle, to preach 'Jesus Christ, and him crucified...not in loftiness of speech, but in the showing of the Spirit,' that is to say, by making manifest that we have pondered in our hearts the words which we proclaim, and that we began to practice before setting out to teach." (CCRR, p. 24)

The notion of complementarity should not be related only to work, but also to the life we share in community. Complementarity guides the generous sharing of the gifts each of us has been given; community is a kind of "breaking the bread" of our lives. As Constitution 18 reminds

us: “We will find our support in friendship and in fraternal life, in apostolic commitment to all, in self-denial and prayer.” One of the concerns of the Triennium of preparation for our 200th anniversary has been a “call back to community life.” Our communities are places in which we can exercise a complementarity of evangelization through practices like shared prayer (beyond the Office), *lectio divina*, faith sharing sessions, and communal homily preparation. We should not expend all of our zeal and energy for “proclaiming the Gospel” outside the community. St. Eugene called his Oblates back to the house, not to sit quietly in the library preparing mission talks in isolation, but to engage in “breaking open the word” for and with one another, priests and Brothers, together in faith. This dimension of our life is one of the thorniest challenges to the renewal of Oblate life today.

It is here, in our apostolic communities, where we can live according to Jesus’ vision: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you (any of you) servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you (all of you) everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 15: 12-15) In the same circular letter cited above (cf. footnote 9), Fr. Zago noted: “The presence of Brothers in a clerical Congregation reminds us that our specific mission is entrusted to the community before it is to persons. To carry out its mission a community needs different and complementary contributions.” This complementarity flourishes in healthy Oblate communities.

CONCLUSION — A WORK IN PROGRESS

In conclusion, I highlight a couple of areas of importance.

Taking cognizance of advances in ecclesiology and sacramental practice. During a long period of (mostly clerical) internal struggles over the correct interpretation of Vatican II, lay ecclesial ministries flourished, especially in this North American church. It is no longer tolerable to proceed as if the ministerial priesthood is some kind of chief executive officer of a sacramental and apostolic company. No one “serves Father’s mass” anymore; the whole gathered assembly celebrates the sacraments. The ordained members of our church commu-

nities are not the only ones called to lead the community's prayer or to preach the Word of God. The complementarity which we recognize between the priests and the Brothers in the Congregation must also be extended more widely to embrace the participation in the Charism of Associate members, Partners, Honorary Oblates, and a wide range of lay collaborators in Oblate life and mission. My hope is for a continued flourishing of the full range of gifts and ministries of those who share in the Charism of St. Eugene. Oblates should naturally be animators of a new springtime of lay preaching!

The continued strengthening of our initial formation according to the Charism: a pedagogy of *kenosis*. I remember participating in a session for formators in Rome in 1983, when Fr. Jetté said: "So do not hesitate to put the candidate, right from the moment he enters religious life, face to face with Jesus, and with Jesus crucified, with Jesus who saves the world through the mystery of his cross and resurrection. Confront him with this mystery and allow him to react. This is the starting point for Oblate formation."¹² All of us do well to heed these words. This gets to the heart of Oblate spirituality. Today, more than ever, we are all challenged by a globalized culture of individualism. This also affects our ability to incarnate a Charism which is communal and calls us to more and more embrace a way of life which is communal, collaborative, shared. Can we retrieve Eugene's originating vision of a "band of missionaries," and allow it to flourish once again, or will we create endless variations of "itinerant preachers"? How can our formation foster a more robust and collaborative missionary work of proclaiming the joy of the Gospel to the most abandoned of our world today? We are called to intentionally enter more deeply into the Christ-like process of the de-centering of our *egos*; a painful and life-long process. We need one another to do this work.

Finally, what about the title? As I thought about writing this text, I recalled the first Brothers I met in the juniorate. They were a group of about five or six, and they lived above the wood shop. This short text from Wisdom is both evocative and provocative. In the context of Oblate history in this region since the 1840s, the "wood" refers to churches, ambos, altars, schools, residences, clinics, centers from which Oblates have preached the Gospel. In these centers, some Oblates made a contribution through the crafting and construction, as artisans, builders,

carpenters, technicians. Others celebrated the Sacraments, animated the communities, preached the Word. Communities of Oblates, “bands of brothers,” together with brothers and sisters in the wider Mazenodian family, today carry on Eugene’s missionary vision. “Blest is the wood through which justice comes about!”

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¹ William H. WOESTMAN, OMI, *The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: A Clerical Religious Congregation with Brothers*, (Doctoral Dissertation Faculty of Canon Law, Urbanianum) Rome, 1984, p. 239.

² “The Brothers at the Beginning of the Congregation (1818-1843)” by Yvon BEAUDOIN, OMI, in “Vie Oblate Life” 45 (1986), p. 99-114 (online edition).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Especially helpful is the article by Jean-Marie LAROSE, OMI, *Etude sur l’origine des frères convers chez les Oblats (1815-1861)*”, “Etudes Oblates”, 12 (1953), p. 65-126.

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, New York, Herder & Herder, 1972, p. 235-237.

⁶ The expression is used by Paul Lakeland in a talk “The Rediscovery of the Laity: Overcoming Baptismal Amnesia,” presented to the Catholic Community at Stanford, April 29, 2013. Available at <http://youtu.be/XO4aCbcyBw>

⁷ Richard R. GAILLARDETZ and Catherine E. CLIFFORD, *Keys to the Council*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2012, p. 9.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III.72.5 ad 2.

⁹ Michael DOWNEY, *Ministerial Identity: A Question of Common Foundations*, in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood – Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, Susan K. WOOD, editor, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁰ The work of Michael J. Gorman, Pauline scholar, is helpful to me in reflecting on what I have come to see as a key dimension of Oblate (soteriological) spirituality. See especially his *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001; *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009; and *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission*, Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2014.

¹¹ See, for example, Marcello ZAGO, OMI, *Circular Letter to Oblates in First Formation*, January 25, 1992, in which he said: “In a clerical Congregation the Brother takes Mary’s place: he is a presence of Mary, a discreet role and presence, important and necessary. Concretely this often takes on the form of simple services, such as Mary provided at Nazareth; on other occasions it means taking part in community and apos-

tolic activities; always it is a following of Christ and a cooperating in his mission by means of one's being even unto the cross and apparent defeat like on Calvary; more often it means taking part in prayer as in the Cenacle. The Brother is a great gift to the Congregation, a marian presence in view of achieving the same common mission of evangelizing the poor. Can we conceive the mission of Jesus without Mary? Can we think of the Oblate mission without the Brothers?"

¹² Fernand JETTÉ, OMI, *Jesus Christ the first formator of Oblates*, in *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate – Addresses and Written Texts*. Rome, 1985, p. 243.

