

**COMMISSION FOR LAY ASSOCIATES AND OBLATES**  
**Meeting of June 25-28, 2007**  
**General House – Rome**

Present for meeting : Facilitators of the meeting were Assistant General Oswald Firth, General Councillor Federico Labaglay, and Frank Santucci (Centre de Mazenod). The lay faithful who took part in the meeting were Veronica Ntja (Lesotho), Beltran Acosta (Paraguay), Omar Tejera and Laura Nuin (Uruguay), Peter Liu (Hong Kong), David and Trudy Maiden (Australia), Mark Garczynski and Denise Héon (Canada) and Vincenzo Teodori (Italy). Oblate representatives were Jean-Marcel Gatshuya (Congo), Salvatore De George (USA) and Santiago Lyons (Mexico).

These notes are summaries of some of the discussions that took place in the course of the three days. There were also presentations by the Superior General, Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, OMI, and by the facilitators, Oswald and Frank.

**Tuesday, June 26**

**The participants were asked to reflect on these topics :**

- An experience where you really felt that you were part of St. Eugene's charism.
- Why do you participate in the life of Eugene's charism ?

**A summary of comments :**

- Oblates are seen as person who lives the charism by doing something for the poor rather than simply talk about it.
- The charism helps one help others to grow.
- The Oblates appear to put more importance in «being» rather than in «having.»
- The Oblates are with the people (« people priest ») and have a practical approach to serving the poor.
- The Oblates are persons who have been willing to leave their own country to work in other lands.
- The charism of St. Eugene is a way for world to live the Gospel.
- Some have discovered, with the Oblates, the beauty of being of service to poor within the context of community. One cannot do it alone.
- The Oblates have a family spirit that is meant to be shared with others.
- The importance of husband and wife participating together in the charism of the Oblates and the importance of the Oblates recognizing the special vocation of married couples.

**Expectations of the meeting :**

- A hope that the Oblates will be emboldened by the fact that so many people around the world want to walk with them and share their mission within the various culture settings.
- Recognition of married couples as a reality within the charism.
- The need for formation in the basics of Oblate life and charism so that laity can then pass that formation on to other laity.

- Better definition of «associate.»
- New ideas for living our participation in the charism, both as Oblates and as laity.
- More communication among Oblates associates.
- Better communication between associates and Oblates so that the latter will better appreciate what is being done.
- How to recruit new members and how to form them.
- Develop criteria for formation and the life of associate groups.

### **Wednesday, June 27**

Report of small group work on the question of future directions for la commission.

#### **Spanish group :**

Consolidate existing groups of Oblate associates and take them larger.

1. To get associates to know one another better personally... at the local level and regional levels.
2. That each OMI Unit, superiors and provincials have on their agenda an invitation to the lay people to be associated with them (OMI).
3. To have some basic directions for the formation of OMI associates in the world : a basic structure for formation of associates.
4. To create a web page for the Oblate Lay associates where there will be information and also the basic structures spoken of above, news, etc.
5. To have a common prayer and a common day for OMI lay associates so that everyone could be in communion with one another.
6. To create an OMI lay associates group for youth...as a way to promote vocations to the priesthood, consecrated life and married life.

#### **French group :**

1. To create a permanent commission with a permanent coordinator.
2. To create a web page
3. to clarify our lay identity and to be open to non Catholics or other groups ; create a network among associates.
4. To formulate rules and structures to be applied in a flexible way.
5. To invite young people to be part of the lay associates.

#### **English group 1 :**

1. To appoint dedicated resources for the lay associates.
2. To define the different entities that compose the OMI family : MAMI, associates, partners, etc. « Santucci model »
3. To define a formation process to move from « being » to « doing. »
4. So that the process does not die here, to set up a procedure to assure that this will be an on-going process.
5. To re-endorse the mission of working for the poor and not to become miniature Oblates and so that Oblates not feel threatened by the associates.
6. To encourage the Oblate family to communicate more about the Founder and his charism.

#### **English group 2 :**

1. An evaluation of what the associates are doing through the eyes of faith. This needs to be done within a certain time line and by a given person in each region (cfr. Lyons instrument in the making).
2. To provide formation guidelines for the associates ; put together by people who are knowledgeable of the founder and by OMI theologians who could formulate a theology of the associates.
3. To set up a committee (representative of this committee ?) to prepare the next step for the next Chapter and another Aix meeting.
4. To create a name that people will agree on. « Associates » might have canonical ramifications. *Partners in Mission : Partenaires en Missiom. Socios en mision.*
5. To explore achievable, universal guidelines for the regular day-to-day existence of the OMI partners in mission (structural things, networking communication, meeting times, content of meetings etc.)
6. To update the directory : each region take it and put it together.

### **Thursday, June 28**

The following were the points the various small groups discussed ;

1. Setting up the committee
  - with coordinator
  - with dedicated resources
2. Clarify identity
  - Have a uniform name « Partners ? »
  - Not exclusive but inclusive – MAMI, etc.
  - Applicable to all milieus and cultures
  - Focus on mission
  - Relationship with Oblates
3. Formation of « Associates »
  - Define formation process
  - Basic and on-going
  - Formation guidelines – use specialist resources
4. Structures/Mechanism
  - Formulate rules – application flexible, in context
  - Have basic directives – universal guidelines for regular meetings, prayer
  - Net-working, communications, web
5. Consolidate and Expand
  - Invite youth to join
  - Strengthen existing groups
  - Invite married couples and single persons to join

### **Plenary session concerning the above items.**

#### **ISSUES RELATED TO IDENTITY**

- After considerable discussion of the question, there was consensus around

henceforth using the term OBLATE PARTNERS IN MISSION (**PARTENAIRES OBLATS EN MISSION. SOCIOS OBLATOS EN MISION.**) This name is to serve an « umbrella » term that will cover all of the different groups of laity that identify with the Oblate family.

- It was pointed out that there needs to be a clear idea of the fundamental vocation of the lay person before one can truly understand the different manifestations of the charism.

### **ISSUES RELATED TO FORMATION**

- Formation is a two-way street : the laity need to have a basic formation on the Founder, the charism, etc. And the professed Oblates need to have a basic formation on the vocation of the laity and how to be partners with them.
- Basic formation materials could be located on a web site.
- Basic formation would include studies of the Founder and the charism ; prayer, an annual retreat ; a monthly meeting ; concrete guidelines of what needs to be done to become a full partner.
- Partners need to be involved in some ministry with the poor.
- There could be days of formation where Oblates, laity and seminarians be involved.
- Oblate formation programs should include something about working with the laity.

### **RELATED STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS**

- Meetings should include prayer and oraison in silence.
- There could be gatherings of the partner communities around Oblate feasts.
- Involvement with the poor is the « dues » that the partners would pay.
- Annual retreat is necessary, prepared by an Oblate and a lay person.
- Someone must be designated to be the coordinator (accompanied by an Oblate).
- Involvement in ministry should be considered as broader than simply working with the Oblates.
- The personal charism of each individual member must be respected.
- There needs to be some sort of network among the partner groups, possibly facilitated by the General Councillor for the regions.
- The network would have two aspects : administrative and communication.
- If there will be a web page, someone needs to be in charge.

### **CONCERNING CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION**

- Couples as such should be invited to become Oblate Partners in Mission.
- Young people should be made to feel welcome, but probably with their own set of activities.
- Oblates themselves should be encouraged to know and understand the role of their lay partners in mission.
- One should avoid the danger of clericalism ; turning the partners into « little Oblates ».

### **CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE COMMISSION**

- This commission was mandated by General Chapter and is to be considered an on-going entity.
- There needs to be a concerted effort to assure that each region is sufficiently represented on the commission.
- The commission will need to present a budget for the next fiscal year.
- The commission will meet again in the spring, probably after Easter.
- In the intervening period, each member of this commission will consult with appropriate mission partners in their own country/region about the four main subjects we have identified. They will also consult with each other via the internet mechanism.
- The objective of this consultation within home countries and amongst Commission members is to return to the next meeting with a fully developed proposal for the next steps of decision making to be made.
- Denise Héon was unanimously elected to be the Co-coordinator of the Commission.
- Those members of the Commission whose regions are under represented will dialogue with the General Councillors for those regions and their respective presidents to ensure that required representation is guaranteed at the next meeting scheduled for Spring 2008.

Notes submitted by Fr. James Allen, OMI

A decision voted in favour by the entire Commission ;

**« This Commission agrees that it will meet again in March 2008. In the intervening period, each member of this commission will consult with appropriate mission partners in their own country/region about the four main subjects we have identified. They will also consult with each other via the internet mechanism ».**

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