

**“PARTNERS IN MISSION
INSPIRED BY THE CHARISM
OF SAINT EUGENE”**

Oblate Lay Associations Congress

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The actual situation of laity in the family of St. Eugene

A. Introduction

During the last decade, there has been significant development of the phenomenon of lay people manifesting a special commitment to the Oblate charism. The canonization of the Founder has largely contributed to that, and the several initiatives of the General Administration have also encouraged the emergence of different groups of Lay Associates throughout the Congregation. The number of Oblate Units with Lay Associates has doubled during the last ten years.

The 1998 Chapter introduced the new Rule 37a, which, in its first part, officially recognizes that lay people share in the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod "in a spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates." In its second paragraph R 37a specifies that: lay people sharing the charism "gather in associations", Provinces and Delegations "foster the development of such associations" and that the General Administration promotes communication between Oblate Units and a common outlook in the Congregation.

The present General Council wants to express its commitment to closer relationships with the groups of laity that have special ties with the Oblates and with the charism of Saint Eugene, particularly the MAMI, Honorary Oblates and the Lay Associates. Hence, when speaking of Oblate lay associations, all the variations of this rich reality are envisaged without prejudice, neither to their specific identity nor to their internal organization.

Oblates and laity cooperate in the light of the charism

I found the following points interesting for our reflection; they come from an article written by Father Marcello Zago.

Excerpts from "*Oblates and Laity Can Cooperate in the Light of the Charism*"
[*Vie Oblate Life*, April 1995, Marcello Zago]

If we examine the history of cooperation between laity and Oblates there are some tendencies which become apparent.

- From dependence to sharing.
- From external support to cooperation.
- From being the object, to being the subject of mission. From partial to full cooperation.
- From cooperation in doing to communion in being. From being co-operators to being fellow disciples.
- From separation to a sharing, which is differentiated and mutual.

B. The different forms of sharing the charism of St. Eugene

In the following I will try to give a complete picture of the different ways in which the

charism of St. Eugene is lived out, not just by the religious members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I will try to include the historical perspective as well. There is an amazing variety of forms, and some of them show a lot of vital strength. For us Oblates this means that the spirit of our Founder is very much alive and we feel challenged to take our own vocation more seriously.

I. HONORARY OBLATES

1. A brief history

Even if the term "Honorary Oblate" seems to be of recent vintage, the practice of granting a sharing in the prayers and merits of the Oblates harks back to the time of the Founder. So it is that we find an explicit document to this effect dated September 25, 1842 in which Bishop de Mazenod granted to Mr. and Mrs. Olivier Berthelet of Montreal this kind of sharing. Fr. Honorat requested that Bishop de Mazenod issue a letter granting a sharing in the privileges and merits of the Oblates. (cf. Oblate Writings, vol. I, p. 27)

A few years later on May 24, 1848, the same privileged sharing in prayers and merits was granted to the Nursing Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Hôtel-Dieu in Montreal "in recognition of services to members of our Congregation." In it we read: "We grant you for ever a full and entire communication of all the holy sacrifices, prayers, penances and of all works of piety and zeal which by the grace of God are performed and will be performed in future in the various houses of our Institute as much in America as in other parts of the world..." (cf. *ibid.* p. 196)"

Consequently, General Chapters gave their stamp of approval to this expression of our gratitude toward our outstanding benefactors or collaborators.

2. What is an honorary Oblate?

Article 115 of the Administrative Directory published in 1985 gave this definition: *An honorary Oblate is a person who is associated with the Congregation so as to share in all the spiritual benefits of membership. It is the highest mark of esteem that we can bestow on a non-Oblate.*

The following article gives the norms to be followed in making someone an honorary Oblate:

1° The naming of honorary Oblate is reserved to the Superior General. He will consider nominations on the recommendation of a Provincial, who must forward a curriculum vitae of the person proposed. Posthumous nominations will not be considered.

2° A person proposed should be distinguished by years of devoted service to the Congregation and its mission in the Church.

3° The life of the person proposed should give evidence of personal identification with the ideals and goals of the Congregation.

An Oblate cross is conferred along with the certificate of title.

4. Just how many are there?

From the beginnings of the Congregation, we have over 500 honorary Oblates on our roster. In the General Archives, there is a register of 172 names submitted from 1911 to 1961. In the files of the General Secretariate are kept 289 requests presented between

1962 and 1989.

II. MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION OF MARY IMMACULATE

1. A brief history

Three different initiatives led to the foundation of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI). First of all, there were the resolutions taken by the General Chapters of the Founder's day. At the Chapters of 1850 and 1856, motions were made to set up an organization which would be a kind of third order. The Chapter of 1879 approved in principle the idea of a confraternity with a view to affiliating lay people to the Congregation as a benefit for them and as a support of the Congregation in its works.

Drawing its inspiration from initiatives taken by the Oblates in France and England, the General Chapter of 1893 approved two resolutions. One resolution called for the founding of an association or a third order; and the second resolution called for the creation of an association to provide financial support for juniorates. The Chapter of 1898 admitted the Marian Missionary Association (Marianischer Missionsverein which still exists today under this title) of the German province to a sharing in the prayers, suffrages and good works of the Congregation.

In 1896, a pamphlet was published in Paris bearing the title, "Association of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate." However, we still do not know if this association was ever organized.

In 1929, Bishop Augustine Dontenwill, elected Superior General in 1908, wrote circular #141 addressed to all members of the Congregation. The circular treated of the Association. He asked every province to appoint a provincial director and outlined what would be their main responsibilities. He also appointed Father Jean Pietsch as first Secretary General for the Association. (cf. Circular Letter #141). As a result of this circular, there was a real blossoming of the Association throughout the Congregation as one can see from the reports of several provinces at the General Chapter of 1947.

The delegates of this Chapter -- this is the Chapter that elected Leo Deschâtelets as Superior General -- asked him to write a circular which would lay out in detail the conditions for commitment, the spiritual benefits granted to members, Masses to be said, etc. Father Deschâtelets fulfilled this mandate by writing circular #182, dated January 25, 1948, with the title, The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate.

The most positive element of this circular was the emphasis it placed on the spiritual formation of the members.

Associates are our cooperators, and therefore it is along the lines of our own spirituality that they are to be trained, which means especially two things: Devotion to Mary Immaculate, and zeal for souls. That explains why article 10 of our Holy Rules goes on to say that Oblates must foster this devotion in their own hearts. This applies with greater force then, to that select group of the faithful who are joined to us as associates and cooperators in all our missionary undertakings. ... The greatest help that our Associates can ever give is and always will be that of prayer. Their prayers will be all the more fruitful if animated by an earnest and deep piety, and accompanied by a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin. ... Let us often speak to our Associates of the doings of our Missionaries with a view to bringing them closer to souls, of stirring up in them that love, that passion for souls that enkindles the heart of Our Divine Savior, and should enkindle the heart of every true apostle... It cannot be doubted that if our Associates draw the inspiration

for their interior life from this model, their charity will be all the greater and their zeal all the more ardent.

It also indicated what title the Association should bear. The inclusion of *missionary* in the title became obligatory.

A new impetus had been given. Missionary publications of the provinces were considered to be instruments at the service of the Association. But we have to admit that in spite of the effort to unify structures, MAMI remained in point of fact a federation of associations functioning each in its own way just as it had been until that date. The centre and heart of the activities of MAMI were not located at the General House in Rome, but rather in the provinces where account was taken of the history and needs of the local situations. (Source: *William Woestman, o.m.i., article, Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, in Dictionary of Oblate Values, Rome, 2000*)

2. What is the MAMI?

The Association wants to be an extension of our Congregation among the laity. Its aim is to gather around the Oblates the friends of Oblate apostolic works, especially of their missions. Association members commit themselves to work according to their means to support the Oblates and to help them in their missionary apostolate.

That is what is briefly referred to in Rule 37b (formerly Rule 28) rewritten by the 1998 General Chapter: "Faithful to Oblate tradition, the communities will have their heart set on promoting the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate for the formation of lay people and participation in Oblate spirituality and apostolate."

As specified in article 118 of the Administrative Directory: "Lay people become members through enrollment in a provincial Association. Membership obligations, in general, involve some form of prayer and almsgiving and the fostering of missionary vocations. Membership benefits include sharing in the prayers of Oblates throughout the world and in Masses offered daily for members, both living and deceased."

The following article treats of directors: "In the provinces, the MAMI Director is appointed by the provincial to supervise and promote the Association. At the general level, the Director General is appointed by the Superior General to coordinate MAMI throughout the Congregation, to report on its activities to the Superior General and his council, and to organize, as necessary, occasional regional or general meetings of MAMI Directors."

In February of 1978 a meeting of the provincial directors of MAMI was held in Rome. On this occasion, Father Fernand Jetté, elected as Superior General in 1974, gave a speech in which he developed two points in particular: 1) What our lay brothers and sisters of MAMI bring to us; 2) what we, their Oblate brothers, as religious and priests should bring to them. (*cf. Fernand Jetté, The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Rome, 1985, pp. 129-135*)

3. Calendar of Masses celebrated by the Oblates.

It was on the occasion of the publication of the 1947 administrative circular letter that the first "calendar" of Masses to be celebrated by Oblates was established. Indeed, we read on page 18: "Since the Congregation has committed itself to have Mass celebrated each day for the living and deceased members of the Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, it was decided that the responsibility for this was to be shared among the different provincial directors." And it adds: "Consequently, each provincial director will be obliged *sub gravi* to celebrate or to have celebrated a certain number of Masses according to the dates determined by the following timetable...."

From that time on, several editions of this timetable have been published in order to keep pace with the development of the Congregation.

III. LAY ASSOCIATES AND COLLABORATORS

1. A brief history until 1998

The road the Oblates traveled toward new forms of association with the laity started especially in the wake of Vatican II. The new Constitutions and Rules drawn up by the 1966 General Chapter (the first Chapter following the Council) mentions the laity nine times. In every case lay people and the laity are mentioned in a general way. It was not until the important 1972 Chapter document, *The Missionary Outlook*, that for the first time mention was made of "new forms of association" with the Congregation (no. 10), new forms, they add, that, as of yet, are still rare. In the document, *Oblate Community*, published after this Chapter -- after asserting how useful these new forms are -- a bit oddly it is stated that this is "indeed a far reaching and complex question, but we should not be timid in facing it." (no. 19)

The General Chapter of 1980 was the first to introduce two rules on the laity. The one we already mentioned earlier with regard to MAMI is Rule 28; the other is Rule 27 which specifically introduces new forms of association with the mission, the ministries and the community life of the Oblates. The distinction between the two Rules did not seem to be all that clear however; nevertheless life continued to go forward... Experiments and initiatives in this area appeared in various places.

The 1986 Chapter document, *Missionaries in Today's World*, would address this question of the mission of laity in the Church in a general way. Little space would be devoted to the question of lay associates. We would have to wait for the Chapter of 1992 to see treated at length "new ways of associating the laity with the Congregation" in the document *Witnessing as Apostolic Community*. There we see a significant statement: "We are not the owners of our charism; it belongs to the Church. And so we are happy to see that lay persons who are called by God want to share it." (no. 40) Therefore this document promotes these initiatives and provides some guidelines to be followed.

Suffice it to mention briefly the following stages:

- In October of 1993, a questionnaire on the laity was sent to all major superiors.
- In September of 1995, an international seminar on the laity was held in Rome. Nine lay people and three Oblates were in attendance. The conclusions of the seminar encouraged the regions and the provinces to begin walking this path.
- In the course of the Intercapitular meeting in Bangkok in November of 1995, one saw a convergence of views on several points and a growing interest to proceed.
- Another important step, a decisive one, was the first international congress of lay associates held at Aix-en-Provence, May 18 to 21, 1996 in the house where the Oblates were founded. This congress brought together 32 laity and 11 Oblates coming from each of the Oblate regions.

Basing ourselves on the final document of the Aix congress, we can define lay associates as people passionate about Jesus Christ, passionately committed to the mission like Eugene de Mazenod was, people who love the Church, the Body of Christ, and live in a bond of communion with the Oblates, normally with a community.

A second questionnaire was sent to all Oblate units at the beginning of 1998. The

responses revealed that the number of associated groups doubled since 1993: 26 (that is, 40%) of the provinces and delegations then had lay associates. These groups, usually arising from a local initiative and taking their origin from a wide variety of experiences, retained their own nomenclature (Associates, Cooperators, Friends of Saint Eugene, etc.)

As follow-up to the congress at Aix, the General Council took certain initiatives, among others, the publishing of the quarterly, *The Link*, and the suggestion to have the laity speak at the 1998 Chapter, a suggestion which would be accepted by the precapitular commission.

From August 28 to 31, 1998, ten lay representatives from each region gathered in Vermicino, near Rome, to prepare their chapter intervention and to assess the experiments being carried out. And finally, for the first time in the history of the Congregation representatives of the lay associates participated at a plenary session of the General Chapter. Their message had an impact on the capitulants, especially when they heard them say: "Your charism makes us live." (EPM 35).

2. Chapter 1998: What does it mean to be an associate?

To meet expectations and clarify the concept, the 1998 Chapter took in hand again the formulation of Rule 27 which was introduced in 1980. The new Rule (R 37a in the new edition) has as its goal to better express the actual thrust in the Church focussing on the laity and the appeal from certain men and women to be allowed to have a deeper and more active involvement with their dioceses or a closer cooperation with religious groups such as missionary congregations.

It was not by accident that this Rule 37a was placed right in the section which bears the title "The Apostolic Community" and under the Rule which specifically mentions "community and mission."

This new Rule reads as follows:

"The charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it radiates throughout the world. Lay people recognize that they are called to share in the charism according to their state of life, and to live it in ways that vary according to milieu and cultures. They share in the charism in a spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates."

"In order to live more intensely the mission of evangelization according to the Oblate charism, some lay people gather in associations. In concert with the General Administration, Provinces and Delegations will foster the development of such associations, will assure that they faithfully reflect the Oblate charism, will contribute to the formation of the laity by giving them access to the sources of the charism, and will specify the relations between the Congregation and the associations. In this regard the General Administration takes the initiatives that it judges opportune to promote communication between Provinces and Delegations and a common outlook in the Congregation."

3. Chapter 2004

The Congregation continues on the same road. Again Lay Associates participated at the

Chapter during the first days. The document issued by the 2004 Chapter "Witnessing to Hope" states: "Our lay associations are asking for a closer cooperation." (page 9). In the section "Oblate Life Strengthened by our Associates" (page 29) the formation of a "commission of Oblates and associates to explore structures" and an "Aix Congress 2" are recommended.

IV. INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE LINKED WITH THE OBLATES

These institutes are, of course, not part of laity but they offer an interesting parallel to the associations of laity. They also form part of the larger Oblate family and show the breadth and the depth of the charism of St. Eugene in a variety of expressions..

April 22 to 27 of 1991 a first-time event was celebrated in Rome at the General House. Twenty-eight Superiors General (men and women) of institutes either founded by Oblates or linked to the Oblates gathered in congress. Including the Oblates, the individuals there represented 14,000 religious men and women scattered throughout the world: eight in Europe, eight in North America, six in Asia and six in Africa. In all twentyone institutes of religious women and seven of men living examples of various forms of consecrated religious life: religious congregations (actively apostolic and contemplative), secular institutes and societies of consecrated life.

Perhaps it is good to recall here Rule 37c which expresses well this historic fact and the spirit that should animate it. This Rule added by the 1992 Chapter reads as follows: *"Several religious and secular institutes have links to the Congregation because of their origin or because of their spirituality. Each Province or Delegation will seek to strengthen those spiritual bonds, and, if possible, to establish concrete forms of apostolic cooperation, with all due respect for the autonomy of these institutes."*

In a private audience which John-Paul II granted the group, he told them this: "This flowering of religious families is a sign of the greatness of the blessed Bishop of Marseilles whom my predecessor Paul VI described one day as "one passionately committed to Jesus Christ and dedicated to the Church without reserve."

Twenty-eight of the institutes were represented in Rome in 1991 yet the list of those who had Oblates involved in their foundation numbers more than forty.

In May 2004, a follow-up event took place in Aix-en-Provence which gathered 16 superiors general or representatives of these religious institutes.

(Main sources: Maurice Gilbert, Congrégations et Instituts à la fondation desquels les Oblats ont participé, Vie Oblate Life, 1988, 177-208; 313-348; 1989, 103-137, and Report of the Meeting of Institutes Linked to the Oblates, Rome, April 1991, General Archives of the Postulation. For the 2004 meeting see <http://www.omigen.org/irsem/>)

A personal conclusion

I. Four aspects I see as important for lay associations inspired by St. Eugene

At the 1992 Chapter the Oblates said: "*We are not the owners of our charism; it belongs to the Church. And so we are happy to see that lay persons who are called by God want to share it.*" (WAC) I think in these words we find in a nutshell what is important for lay associations in the spirit of St. Eugene. As a personal conclusion I want to spell out, in four points, what I see as essential for any group that takes inspiration from the great Bishop of Marseille.

1. A clear identity

a. Inspired by St. Eugene:

From the very beginning of his ministry in Aix en Provence, where he gathered and formed groups of youth both socially and spiritually, to his ministry as Bishop of Marseille, Eugene de Mazenod formed working relationships with those he sought to minister to. His sermon preached in Aix at the Church of Notre Dame, sees him clearly identifying himself with the poor. He wanted their salvation to be a partnership, a journey to God, together. This type of relationship proved the backbone of his work in the port city of Marseille. Elizabeth Pécout (née Sabatier), better known by everyone as *Babeau*, was the undisputed queen of the fish market. She boasted that she could flatten the best of men. But along with redoubtable fists, Babeau had a generous and gigantic heart. After a remarkable conversion in a mission, she formed the Sodality of Ste-Anne with the other fishwives. Often, they took their bishop into the twisting warren of back streets so he could personally console the sick and the dying.

Bishop de Mazenod's journal shows how he let the poor evangelize him: "*For the third time this week, I went to administer Confirmation in our worst quarters. I always come away edified from those poor dwellings where abject misery is addressed by such genuine charity. It is truly admirable to see so many people hasten to the bedside of the sick.*"

Partnership in mission seems to have been the hallmark of the Oblates from the earliest days with the spirit of Eugene still very much a source of energy and inspiration today. Things have not changed much since the time of Bishop de Mazenod and as Jesus told his disciples, "you will always have the poor with you" (Mk 14:7) we recognize that the world is still in need of salvation and the poor in need of help.

b. A certain structure which need not be standardized:

Groups of people have joined in partnership ventures with the Oblates in answer to the needs of the day and the locality. These groups, each with its own character, identity and mission, are still very much Oblate in reality and have always been organized as both practical and spiritual. Structure is therefore a necessary component but this does not mean that this should be based on a formal or centralized standard. As long as the missionary activity derives its impetus from a need to make Christ's salvific work a present and active reality in the world, our structure will be faithful to Eugene's life and spirituality.

c. A formation curriculum:

Spiritual formation is an essential component of every Christian's life. The need to listen to God's call for each of us, the discernment of our vocation and how we will fulfill this and a deeper knowledge of our faith and the charism of St. Eugene can only really come through a process of formation. The reasoning behind the *Vade Mecum* and the

other prayer resources is that while Oblate Associations may not need to be organized, spiritual formation needs to be formalized and maybe even standardized. As we have seen, Oblate spirituality has always been a centre, drive and unique identity of all groups within the Oblate family.

2. A solid spiritual life

a. Being rooted in Jesus Christ and His body, the church:

Commitment to holiness of life is not solely the prerogative of those who choose the religious life. It is the call of every Christian who through the grace of baptism, seeks to come closer to God. Attaining wholeness of self and hence holiness is a real human desire.

The desire to be closer to God can and is realized in the many world religions. Wherever people seek a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with the divine and those around them, whenever people ultimately realize that they are called to enter into and seek to improve the lives of others as well as their own, then the journey to wholeness and holiness is a reality.

The truth of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is the source of all we are as a Church. Saint Eugene's vocation bears the mark of his realization that Christ's death and resurrection was God's personal gift to him and indeed every believer. This salvific event is the source of the Church's existence, the basis of its teaching and the core of Oblate spirituality. This good news is the message that we seek to bring to the world. As we begin to understand this then we begin to realize our vocation to become holy and hence make the world holy. Saint Eugene's challenge to his Oblates was that they should minister to people so that they may become "first humans, then Christians and then saints".

b. Regular recourse to scripture and the sacraments:

To make people human is to join them in their struggle and to help them realize their infinite worth and value in the eyes of God. To make them Christians is only possible through sharing our intimate knowledge of God and his message of salvation. To know God is to know His story, indeed the history of salvation which can only be learned through the careful study of scripture. Scripture is also the best source of inspiration for prayer, of direction for a way of life and ultimately a guide for activity.

The sacraments of the Church are God's gift to us of Himself. The Eucharist is the source of and summit of all Christian activity and spirituality. The sacrament of Reconciliation is a wonderful opportunity to know God's love and mercy. Through the sacraments God makes Himself tangible to us. Regular recourse then, to scripture and the sacraments is the starting point, centre and destination of our ministry.

What about those who are not Catholics, or not Christians? Eugene's second challenge was to make them Christians. Seeking the conversion of those who work with us and those we work for, is not our first task but should ultimately be the result. Many will join us because they see that we make a difference and want to play their part. As Babeau changed her life because of the example of Eugene, so too may those who join us on our personal and communal journey to holiness.

3. A community built on charity and love

a. Spirit of the Oblate family:

An obvious character of the associations which have gathered around Saint Eugene is the reality that they are made up of like minded people. The bonding is a free association and should never be directly dependent on the Oblates even when Oblates themselves are active members. The *raison d'être* for these associations is usually to answer a need be it personal or for social outreach.

Many of our Oblate works naturally attract and hence gather communities who begin to identify with and in fact even call themselves Oblates. The idea of an extended Oblate family is a reality in most of our missions and ministries with many people proudly identifying themselves in this way. On his death bed, Saint Eugene told the Oblates gathered around him, "*among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity and outside zeal for the salvation of souls.*" It is obvious then that charity is a characteristic of all Oblate communities and associations, which are formed ultimately because of their zeal for the salvation of the world.

b. Formal organization:

The fact that many people who go on to form or become members of existing associations begin as friends of individual Oblates is proof of the common spirit we share. Whilst friendship is a positive thing, our mission both as Oblates and Christians is to go beyond our personal needs and relationships and look to the needs of those around us. To work together for a common good and with common inspiration and spirituality is what it means to work in partnership, to be associated.

As the needs we seek to answer are diverse so too are the forms of associations which result. While a common formation and spirituality is an important factor in our identity, which may be better organized centrally, local formal organization may be a more realistic answer to meeting the real needs of the poor where they are.

4. A mission that is good news to the poor

a. Commitment to the abandoned and poor:

As it was in Marseille in Bishop de Mazenod's day so it is true today. Often the poor and most needy are shy and do not easily seek the help of those who are obviously religious. The partnership of ministry, which Oblates share with Lay Associates whose open ears, eyes and hearts are attentive to the needs of others, means that more people can be helped than if Oblates worked alone.

b. Oblates in partnership:

Often the work of Oblates is done in very difficult areas and it is not always possible for lay people to be directly present or personally involved. Partnership, as we have seen is not solely about working side-by-side. The works of prayer and substantial support *from a distance* are also vital.

Many of our missions are conducted in foreign places under the leadership of Oblates from other countries who would not be able to do so without the help of their friends and associates back home. The ability to share God's gifts with those in other parts of the world, through the work of Oblate missionaries, gives us a chance to extend our Oblate

families to the point that they embrace the world, inspire and encourage vocations thus making disciples for mission. Without a doubt this has to be good news not only for ourselves and our own journey of salvation but ultimately for the poor and abandoned of the world.

II. What I would like to see happen:

- that the many associations create an international network; the *Link* bulletin or something similar could become a central source of information and inspiration ultimately alerting us all to the real needs of the poor with their many faces.
- that as we organize formal local associations and begin formal spiritual formation we aim at the membership of the whole family or at least the couple.
- that the associations slowly become intercultural; the diversity of location of Oblate mission fields and the needs of each form of ministry can best be met if we can all be given the opportunity to share with people of other cultures.
- that in their mission, lay associations adopt the Oblate priority of preferential option for the poor and in truth they show an especial love for the poor, inspired by the life and work of Saint Eugene.
- that Associates and Oblates enrich each other mutually, and sometimes even practically share and work together in their apostolates.

I am very grateful for having had this opportunity to address representatives of Oblate lay associates from all over the world. Thanks to the organizers who made this gathering possible, thanks to you who gave up other commitments and made a big effort to come to Rome. May the Spirit guide you as he did guide St. Eugene de Mazenod, so that the family of St. Eugene's sons and daughters may grow from strength to strength all the time.

APPENDICES

Extract from Superior General's Report to General Chapter 34

Lay Associations

At the 1998 Chapter a special rule (37a) was introduced. It officially recognizes that lay people share in the charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod "in a spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates." The Chapter resolved to foster closer relationships among the groups of laity that have special ties with the Oblates and with the charism of Saint Eugene: the MAMI, Honorary Oblates and the Lay Associates.

The present picture is the following:

At the present, on the list of Honorary Oblates there are 125 persons related to 29 Oblate Provinces and Delegations.

The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate exists in 35 Oblate Units.

The Lay Associates' groups, under various names, are present in 28 Oblate Units.

As concrete means of promoting the communication among these groups and of nurturing a sense of belonging to the Oblate Family, three initiatives were taken:

Directory of Oblate Lay Associations, already going towards its second edition

Recently published Logo for lay associations

A prayer book called Companion of Oblate Life and Mission, recently published as an experimental version.

List of Associations of laity at the time of the 2004 General Chapter

Region	Province / Unit	Name of Lay Association
A. AFRIQUE-MADAGASCAR	Central Province (RSA)	Lay Associates
	Natal	Lay Associates
	Sénégal	Amis de Saint Eugène
B. LATIN AMERICA	Bolivia	Laicos Asociados de los Misioneros OMI
	Chile	Amigos de los Oblatos
	Mexico	AMOS (Asociados Misioneros Oblatos)
	Peru	Asociación de Laicos "Eugenio de Mazenod"
	Pilcomayo	Laicos Asociados OMI
	Recife	AMO (Asociados Missionários Oblatos)
	Uruguay	Familia Oblata
C. ASIA-OCEANIA	Australia	Rosies Youth Group
	Philippines	Oblate Volunteer Program
D. CANADA	Assumption	Lay Associates
	Grandin	Oblate Association
	Manitoba	Association Missionnaire de Marie Immaculée
	Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire	Les Associés O.M.I.
	St-Joseph	Coopératrices et Coopérateurs
	St. Mary's	Lay Associates
	St. Paul's	Lay Associates
	St. Peter's	Lay Associates
E. EUROPE	Germany	Assoziierte Laien
	Anglo-Irish Province	Lay Associates
	Spain	Comunidades de Vida
	France	Laïcs Associés
	Italy	Associati
	Poland	Laïcs Associés
		- Communauté du Bon Pasteur:
		- Communauté de l'Apostolat des Laïcs:
	Scandinavia	Missionsvännen
F. UNITED STATES		Missionary Oblate Associates

Chapter 2004

Oblate Life Strengthened by our Associates

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

9.1 The General Council invite each Oblate Unit to review and evaluate its own experience and commitments to forms of association in the areas of ministry,

formation, community life, charism, and to study some possible ways of sharing leadership while respecting Canon Law and the Constitutions and Rules.

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

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

The final document of the Aix-en-Provence Congress

This text is the final synthesis of the sharing of lay associates and Oblates gathered in congress in Aix-en-Provence in May of 1996. Here, we will find only the first part; the second part deals with concrete proposals, more immediate concerns or dreams that have already been realized or which would soon be realized (cf. *Vie Oblate Life*, 1996, p. 307311).

IMPASSIONED FOR CHRIST, THE CHURCH AND THE MISSION

The identity of lay associates

"In response to a call from Christ, Lay Associates live their baptism, enlightened as they are by the charism of Eugene de Mazenod. Animated by a family spirit, they share among themselves and with Oblates the same spirituality and missionary outlook."

"Lay Associates are impassioned for Jesus Christ. They are disciples of his in the footsteps of the Apostles. They give living witness to Christ the Saviour in the midst of the world. They deepen their relationship with Christ through their frequent contact with the Word of God, meditation, prayer and liturgy. The Eucharist and the Gospel are wellspring and center of their whole life. Their model is Mary who gives Christ to the world."

"Lay Associates are *impassioned for mission*. Impassioned for humanity, they have faith in the dignity of every person before God. They see the reality of the world through the eyes of Christ the Saviour and Evangelizer. Fully involved in secular realities, they make the family one of the priorities of their mission. They live this mission with daring, initiative, creativity and perseverance. They give value to proximity, to attention for and listening to persons. They reach out to them. They make a privileged option for the poor with many faces. They name, denounce and fight injustices, all the while making certain to take an active part in the history of their people."

"Like the Founder, *they love the Church*, the Body of Christ, the People of God, sign and instrument of Jesus Christ in today's world and its new calls. They wish to build as Church, to answer to the challenges of today's world and to new calls."

"Lay Associates have a *living link with the Oblates*, normally with a community. This link may vary in form according to situations, but it is essential."

"Oblates and Lay Associates acknowledge their needs for each other. Theirs is a living relationship of reciprocity in openness trust and respect for every person's vocation. All deepen Eugene de Mazenod's charism according to their own specific vocation and enrich others with their discoveries and experiences. Oblates and Lay Associates live and complement one another in mutual growth."

"Lay Associates and Oblates come together to renew their lives and their commitments in the world -- in the light of the Word of God and of the Founder's charism. The

identity of Associates, however, is realized as well through their associating among themselves."

"To be Associates supposes a simple *life-style*, marked by togetherness, characterized by charity, fraternity and openness to others. They are persons of prayer. Conscious of their poverty before God and before others they live in solidarity with the people of their area."

"Various modes of formal or informal *commitment* are possible, according to Regions and the will of the lay associates themselves."

The list of individuals in charge of lay associates and Oblates who maintain contact with them.

Some Provinces publish annually their Oblate personnel with the names and addresses of all their lay associates along, sometimes, with the community of contact for these associates.

Evangelization and Lay Participation in the Oblate Charism

Excerpts from:

"Evangelization and Lay Participation in the Oblate Charism" [Vie Oblate Life, August 1998, Marcello Zago]

Meetings between associates and Oblates should happen regularly and should take place in an atmosphere of mutual enrichment. Together we can better assess the situations and needs, and we can evaluate the most favourable avenues of ministry; together we can deepen our motivations and expand our zeal. Together Oblates and Associates can renew one another in their forward thrust, in their creativity, and in their effectiveness. This synergy will simultaneously renew everyone's spirituality, since the principal activator in the entire evangelisation process is the Holy Spirit.

Associate Commitment

The text of the public commitment may vary amongst Oblate Associate communities, but should include the following elements: commitment for one or three years, regular prayer and meditation, regular apostolic work with the poor, building community, growth in Oblate spirituality, annual retreat.

`Various degrees of belonging to the *Congregation* should be avoided. We have been going through a long process, especially since the 1966 Chapter, of doing away with internal distinctions between Fathers and Brothers. We do not want to re-introduce these distinctions in some new form. There is only one way of belonging to the Congregation: public vows and acceptance of life in community . ` [Francis George] p. 167

`New forms of association with the Oblates considered as a *movement* would seem to be possible. But these new ways of association must emerge from experience in particular missionary situations, not from theological or juridical principles .' [Francis George] p. 167