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**Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
General Chapter XXXV -- 2010**

The Chapter Call to Conversion

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The Chapter Call to Conversion

A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Oblate Brothers and Fathers, Honorary Oblates, Oblate Associates, friends of the Oblates, and all persons of good will:

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate! Praised too be our beloved Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod!

The 35th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate has just ended and, like the first disciples of Jesus bursting forth from the Pentecost room, we too want to proclaim in many tongues what we have experienced here.

We began our meeting with a Mass of the Holy Spirit on September 8th, a Marian feast on which many of us made our vows as Oblates, and ended one month later with a mass of Thanksgiving. Eighty-nine Oblates took part in the Chapter and more than twenty other Oblates participated as either resource or auxiliary personnel. As well, five Oblate Lay Associates, representing various Oblate Regions joined us for the first week of the Chapter. Our venue was again the Casa La Salle of the Christian Brothers where all of our recent Chapters have taken place. Three talented young Oblates, Filadelfo Estrella, Andriano Titone, and Hipolito Olea, served as our moderators. At their InterChapter meeting in 2007, the Oblate provincials had already designated as theme for the Chapter: Conversion: A new heart, a new spirit, a new mission. Brother Paul Michalenko, ST, was our overall facilitator and, in line with our theme, challenged us throughout the entire Chapter to empty our heads of judgments, our hearts of cynicism, and our wills of fear.

After the Mass of the Holy Spirit, we then spent

several days getting to know each other through a number of small group interactions. Cardinal Francis George, OMI, joined us for part of that time and gave us an inspirational talk. We then entered the first major phase of the Chapter, receiving and processing information. This took place through a series of reports.

First, each Oblate Region gave a report on life in their region, naming both the strengths and the weaknesses of Oblate life there. This was followed by a report from the Standing Committee for Oblate Brothers. The Lay Associates reported next and challenged us to work more closely with them. The next two days were taken up in receiving and processing the report from our Treasurer General, Rufus Whitley. Among other things, he challenged us to be awake to a massive shift in demographics that is happening within the congregation and to what this will mean in terms of financial resources. This initial phase of our Chapter ended with a report from our outgoing Superior General, Guillermo Steckling, on the state of the Congregation. He ended his report by suggesting that four things now constitute the most urgent imperatives for the congregation: i) that we build Christ-centered communities; ii) that we truly love the poor and move towards them; iii) that we face up to the massive demographic changes that are reshaping the face of the congregation; and iv) that we recommit ourselves in our love for the Church. After some dialogue with him on his report, we entered the initial discussions on our Chapter theme, conversion.

Nearly an entire week was then spent on the next phase of our Chapter, examining and debating a

series of proposals that had been submitted to us by a Pre-Chapter Commission that had been set up by the General Council to re-examine our Governmental structures. After much passionate debate, the Chapter voted, for the most part, to retain our present structures. The majority feeling was that, at this time, it is more important that we change our attitudes than that we change our structures. But there was also palpable disappointment among many of the Chapter delegates about this decision.

We then entered a third, and very important, phase of our Chapter: elections. Again, we began this process with a Mass of the Holy Spirit and spent a half day in silent reflection and one-to-one *mumuration*. And the Holy Spirit sent us a very clear message: Fr. Louis Lougen was elected, nearly unanimously, on the first ballot. As Fr. Louis rose and humbly accepted the call to serve, the Chapter delegates rose to their feet, as one, and a thundering applause went on for several minutes. There were tears in eyes of many of the delegates and the feeling in the room at that moment -- the oneness of heart, the sense of the rightness of this choice, the warmth of energy -- will forever remain the highlight of this Chapter.

The energy flowing from that moment carried us forward as we then elected a Vicar General, Paulo Archiati; two Assistants General, Cornelius Ngoka and Gilberto Pinon; and five General Councillors for the Regions, Miguel Fritz, Clement Waidyasekara; Warren Brown, Luis Ignatio Rois Alonso, and. Evans Chinyemba.

We then entered the fourth and final phase of our Chapter: the approval of various proposals that had been submitted to the Chapter and the shaping of a message to send out to the Oblate world. Once again, debate was spirited but the Chapter eventually refined and passed a number of proposals on issues of ministry, finance, higher education, and justice. The final days of the Chapter were taken up with discussions concerning what particular challenges this General Chapter wishes to send out to the Oblate world.

This discussion was not an easy one. A general feeling among the delegates was that the messages

sent out by the last four General Chapters still contain the major challenges we need to face as congregation and that adding another document at this time would not serve us positively. What was needed, it was felt, was something brief, more specifically directive, focused on our theme of conversion, and highlighting very specific areas of conversion to which we feel we are called at this time. Our document *The Chapter Call to Conversion* is predicated on these premises. We state, almost apologetically, that we are not necessarily offering new challenges or challenges beyond those to which our Constitutions and Rules and past General Chapters have called us, but rather that we are offering some important challenges that need to be highlighted in our Oblate world at this time in our history. We leave these challenges with you, inviting you, as we were invited time and again at this Chapter, to empty our heads of judgments, our hearts of cynicism, and our wills of fear.

In conclusion, a word about the atmosphere of this Chapter: Despite our very spirited exchanges on the Chapter floor, the atmosphere of this Chapter has been wonderfully warm, deeply fraternal, free of virtually all politics, and deeply prayerful. Among other things, the delegates spent half an hour each day in common *oraison* before the Blessed Sacrament. One delegate, attending his third General Chapter, commented: "This Chapter was the most fraternal of all. I have never experienced anything like this at an international gathering before." Another delegate, attending his first General Chapter, remarked: "This is my first Chapter and it has been a great experience. One of the things that impacted on me was to see so many Oblates from so many places. It is an experience of the great richness of our religious family. I see a good atmosphere and mutual caring." This truly was an experience of Oblate community and warm fraternity.

Throughout the Chapter, the delegates kept listening, waiting for a particular biblical image to be given us as a key to help us more deeply understand both our experience at this Chapter and the Oblate and ecclesial reality within which we are now living. Again and again, spontaneously in our conversations, the image that came to us was the one given in the Gospel of

Luke, Chapter 24, where the disciples, dispirited and without heart because their religious world had been crucified, meet the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus, feel their hearts burning within them as he speaks to them, eventually recognize him and the new reality they are living, and go back into their religious lives with renewed vision, hope, and energy.

This General Chapter has been an Emmaus walk.

We have examined our crucified worlds, met the resurrected Christ on the road, and leave here with our hearts burning with new vision, new hope, and new energy. Our wish is to share that with you!

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

The Oblate General Chapter of 2010

THE CHAPTER CALL TO CONVERSION

6TH OCTOBER 2010

WE ARE IN NEED OF A PROFOUND PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL
CONVERSION

OUR COMMUNITY

Jesus Christ is the centre of our life and mission, and our religious Life shared in an Oblate community requires planned and regular animation to enable us to live the way of Jesus and the gift of our Oblate Charism. In the light of that witness we will strengthen our Vocation ministry.

As a consequence of this Chapter, our conversion must bring about a new quality of our common life. Report of the Superior General to the 35th General Chapter, p. 34

What is the heart of the Oblate community?

The Call of Jesus Christ has gathered us together in the Church to share our faith, life, mission and culture. This relationship is deepened through our personal and community prayer and through the reflection on and evaluation of our way of living. This opens us to the invitation and gift of the Holy Spirit.

Personal and communal conversion centred on the person of Jesus Christ requires:

1. That each Oblate reflect on the witness of his religious life, living the vows in a prophetic way so as to share these values with the world, as an invitation for others to join our Oblate family.
2. That each Oblate Superior and each community accept personal and shared co-responsibility for the life of the community (House, District, Unit).
3. That Oblate Superiors and the community periodically review their lifestyles in the areas of acquiring and use of finances, sharing of goods, and living in a transparent and accountable way.
4. That Oblate Superiors and the community seek out ways and means of reconciling what is in need of healing within the community.
5. That Oblate Superiors and community be attentive to their personal and community prayer and fidelity to the practice of oraison.
6. That Oblate Superiors and the community be attentive to on-going formation, Scripture reflection and Oblate studies, for their own spiritual good and for the authenticity of their missionary work.
7. That we recognize that our retired and elder Oblates are our mentors and wisdom figures and that their place in the life and mission of the community provides an authentic witness of religious life.

8. That Oblates who live outside the community for the purpose the mission do so as an exception and only with the support of the community.
9. That our communities, where possible, be intercultural, reflecting the changing face of the Congregation

WE ARE IN NEED OF A PROFOUND PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL CONVERSION

OUR OBLATE MISSION

Jesus Christ is the centre of our life and mission to bring the Good News to the poor. In facing the challenges of today from our diverse contexts, including globalization, secularization, inculturation and information technology, we are called to participate in 'crossing borders' and being 'inter-cultural' within an Oblate apostolic community.

Today, do we discern God's will as to our congregational mission to evangelize the poor or just keep doing by inertia what we are used to? Our own saints will show us the right way! When it comes to solidarity with the poor, we have many martyrs of love and even of blood among our confreres, and they all have in common that they loved the poor with God's heart. There will be a personal and communitarian benefit from this for our conversion. Report of the Superior General to the 35th General Chapter, p. 35.

Conversion in our mission requires:

1. That in the framework of a renewed Immense Hope Project, Oblates cooperate with the new Central Government, who will develop a fresh animation for mission and for discerning new missionary strategies and major missionary challenges, in relationship with the local church, in dialogue with other religious, Oblate Associates, and all people of good will.
2. Our Oblate specialists in missiology and our institutions of higher learning are called to define a way to understand the challenges of modernity, secularity, inculturation and religious. fundamentalism as well as our own way of witnessing to the Kingdom of God in the midst of these challenges.
3. That Oblates periodically submit their ministry to the discernment of their local community for evaluation and review. Evaluation of ministry and the service of mission should also happen at Province and Unit level.
4. That we identify the face of Christ in the faces of the poor in the social context of our Units today such as migrants, HIV/AIDS victims, undocumented persons, war victims, and indigenous peoples and that we defend their rights and dignity.
5. That Oblates be open to and involved in inter-denominational and inter-religious dialogue, particularly in terms of positively working with other religions to build God's Kingdom.
6. That Oblate Units and Regions continue to develop in the sharing of resources,

- personnel and finances across the Congregation.
7. That Oblates in Units and Regions discern with their Superiors, their motivation to leave “home” to “cross borders”.
 8. That we recognize that Mary is an integral part of our missionary experience. She is our mother and our model. We see her in her daily life in Nazareth, in the house of Elizabeth, at Cana, at the foot of the cross and in the cenacle

WE ARE IN NEED OF A PROFOUND PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL CONVERSION

SERVICE OF LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY

Jesus Christ is the centre of our life and mission expressed in leadership and authority. We are called to exercise this service and to animate in a dynamic way, with prudent foresight, courage, and joy, in the context in which we live and in response to the changing face of the Congregation today.

In our Congregation there is a huge demographic change just around the corner, the many new faces show it. We must respond to this change with courage and with joy... Where the average age is high we must simply make whatever structural changes are needed to serve our mission best. ..We can count on excellent Oblates and in good numbers in many parts of the world. Some are still young but many could already be entrusted with leadership responsibility. Report of the Superior General to the 35th General Chapter, p. 36

*Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.”
Matt 20:25-27*

Conversion in leadership and authority requires:

1. That we, as missionary Oblates, live a prophetic and inspiring leadership that is at the service of others in the community, and like Jesus who did not come to be served but to serve, we do the same in obedience to the will of God and for the love of the mission; and that superiors at all levels, use appropriately the authority given to them, especially in timely intervention to address difficulties.
2. That Oblate superiors, and those who exercise authority in the community, live according to the encompassing values expressed in C82.
3. That we continue to evaluate and review our mission, particularly at the level of the whole Congregation, so as to establish priorities to guide us in the effective use of personnel and material resources.
4. That we identify future leaders, and adequately form and continually animate

present and future leaders in the various aspects of leadership and governance in our Congregation.

5. The virtue and vow of Obedience expressed in Constitutions 24 to 28 and in Rules 26a and 26b provide the

ethics for the service of leadership and authority.

6. That all Oblates take great care in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and review Church and Congregation policies regularly.

WE ARE IN NEED OF A PROFOUND PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL CONVERSION

FORMATION

Jesus Christ is the centre of our life and mission regarding first and ongoing formation. We are called to improve the quality of our formation. It must be deeply rooted in Christ, and with our Oblate charism, open to the needs of the community and the mission.

Formation is the process which aims at the integral growth of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and develop into the persons we are called to be. Formation involves us in an ever renewed conversion to the Gospel and a readiness to learn and to change in response to new demands. Constitution 47

Conversion in Formation requires:

1. An openness to the development of intercultural and joint houses of formation that indicates our common mission today.
2. That we provide a deeper Oblate missionary spirituality for our candidates and formators. Scholastics should spend at least one year of pastoral experience outside of their culture during their formation journey.
3. A holistic human development formation for our candidates and formators
4. That formation for leadership include skills in finance, administration, animation and communication and JPIC.
5. A good quality formation and training program for full-time formators
6. Sharing of resources among the Units through exchange and collaboration.
7. That houses of formation function with a team of formators, and not just one, and that smaller scholasticates be rationalised to ensure an adequate formation.
8. A clear program for ongoing formation in every Unit. That each Oblate be constantly renewed in the knowledge of the Scriptures for the good of the mission. For this purpose, Oblates are invited to avail of the "Centre De Mazenod" Aix programs for renewal in the Oblate Charism and family.
9. That each local Superior review his responsibility for ongoing formation within his community.
10. That each Unit appoint an Oblate

with responsibility for promoting and programming ongoing formation, in close collaboration with the central government of the Congregation.

11. The development of a post-Novitiate program for Oblate Brothers in each Unit in line with the proposal adopted by the 35th General Chapter.

12. That we recognize that our Constitutions and Rules and General Norms for Oblate Formation contain models for our Oblate Formation and that we take bold steps in creatively and sincerely using the opportunities they provide.

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FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Jesus Christ is the centre of our life and mission, and in affirming our historical solidarity in financial stewardship within the Congregation, we emphasize the need to increase local income and to review the on-going stewardship of our resources. This requires a change of mentality, moving from dependency and indifference to responsible interdependence.

“The changes in the Congregation have today reached a point where a financial paradigm shift is necessary.” Report of the Superior General to the 35th General Chapter, p. 35

“Every Unit of the Congregation is called to share from its abundance (whether it be personnel, expertise or finances) and receive (whether it be personnel, expertise or finances) in service of our mission. The challenge is to transform, explicitly, this model of temporal resource dependency with an emerging model that includes financially sustainable Oblate Units and communities, solidarity in the sharing of expertise, material resources and personnel resources throughout the Congregation, and a new recognition of our dependence on investments as one of the four pillars of our material resources.” Report of the Treasurer General to the 35th General Chapter

Please refer also to *CCRR 154 - 162* and to the *Directory for the Administration of Temporal Goods*

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. Acts 4: 32

Conversion in our stewardship of finances requires:

1. A renewed emphasis on our living and expression of the vow of poverty as a call to follow Jesus in solidarity with the poor with

their many faces in our different contexts.

2. Effective implementation of strategies at all levels towards financial sustainability through an increasing reliance on local sources of revenue, especially in the growing Units.

3. Recognition that the Gospel values of discipleship and stewardship call for a renewed commitment on the part of each Oblate to address the issue of financial responsibility
4. Renewed commitment to the prudent, transparent, and professional management of our material resources at all levels in a way that expresses our vow of poverty and our identification with the poor.
5. Renewed adherence to the principles of effective financial management (budgeting, financial reporting, external review, etc.) to guide long term planning of our material resources.
6. Recognition that the vow of poverty calls for the responsible use of our property and possessions as the patrimony of the poor. There should therefore be a timely and well prepared intervention at the appropriate level of authority to anticipate and address financial crises.
7. Renewed commitment to coordinate with the Office of the Grant Director, in the search for financial resources to support our formation and mission

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