**7. Apostolic Community connects us
to the poor and calls us to live a simple and poor life**

The animator of the encounter arranges the ambience so that all may be comfortably seated in a circle to facilitate prayer and discussion. A candle, the Bible, an Oblate Cross may be placed in the center of the community.

**Song**: chosen by the animator

**Motivation.** For this Faith Sharing Encounter: to reflect upon our experience of apostolic community, particularly in regard to how our common life together connects us to the poor and the importance of simplicity in our lifestyle, also in response to Pope Francis’ message for Lent. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us share our faith, to draw us more closely together and to renew us in the Oblate charism.

### The Word of God – Luke 1:46-55

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy – according to the promise he made to our ancestors – of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

(Time for silent reflection)

### Response to God’s Word (Phil 2:5-11, prayed in 2 choirs)

In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus:

His state was divine yet he did not cling to his equality with God,

but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave,

and became as men are;

and being as men are, he was humbler yet,

even to accepting death, death on a cross.

But God raised him on high

and gave him the name which is above all other names

so that all beings in the heavens and on the earth

and in the underworld should bend the knee at the name of Jesus

and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord

to the glory of God the Father.

**From our Constitutions**

**C 20 –** Our choice of poverty compels us to enter into a closer communion with Jesus and with the poor… When faced with the demands of our mission and the needs to be met, we may feel weak and helpless. It is then that we can learn from the poor, especially making our own their patience, hope and solidarity.

**C 21 –** The Spirit prompted the first Christians to share everything. Under the influence of that same Spirit, we hold all things in common. Our members adopt a simple lifestyle, remembering that it is essential for our religious institute to give collective witness to evangelical detachment.

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*A simple and poor life –* We live our poverty the gateway to the kingdom (Mt. 5:3), in opposition to the seductions of a consumer society. We do not have to look for an illusory security in the possession of material things nor in any choice we might make of a particular work or ministry. Our security, our wealth is a community that is open to God, to our Oblate brothers and to others.

**Going deeper into the theme**

The statutes of the JPIC General Service state that “ministry in favor of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation is at the heart of our life and mission. Inspired by Jesus Christ and by St. Eugene’s love for the poor, we are called to live and promote right relationships with oneself, *among ourselves*, with others, with creation and, ultimately, with God”. “Our mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to seek it before all else (cf. Mt. 6.33). We fulfill this mission in community; and our communities are a sign that, in Jesus, God is everything for us” (C 11).

Apostolic community lived in this way has a power and an effect greater than that which could be achieved by the individual. A simple and poor lifestyle expresses our common commitment to the poor, our desire to be a sign of hope for all and our freedom from the relentless pursuit of material possessions that characterizes much of our world today. Our interdependence expresses our faith and trust in each other. We seek to identify more and more with Jesus Christ who became poor for our sake and did not cling to his equality with God (cf. Phil. 2:3-11)

**The first community. O**n January 25th 1816, Eugene, along with Frs. Tempier and Icard, moved into the former Carmelite convent at the head of the Cours Mirabeau in Aix.

“Tomorrow I celebrate the anniversary of the day when, sixteen years ago, I left my mother's home to take up my residence in the mission. Father Tempier had taken possession of it a few days earlier. Our quarters were not as splendid as the castle of Billens, and however destitute you may be, we were still worse off than that. My camp-bed was placed in the small passageway that leads to the library which was a big room serving as bed-room for Father Tempier and another who is no longer with us; it was also our community room. One lamp was our only illumination and when we had to go to bed, we placed it at the threshold of the door so that it could serve the three of us.

The table that adorned our refectory was some planks placed side by side on two old barrels. Never have we had the good fortune to be so poor since we made the vow to be so. We were thus taking the first steps, without suspecting it, to the perfect state which we now live so imperfectly. But I purposely underline this kind of completely voluntary privation, for it would have been easy to end it and get whatever we needed transported over from my mother's place, to conclude therefrom that God was already then guiding us, even without our thinking about it yet, towards the evangelical counsels we were to profess later on. It was in observing them that we came to know their value. I can assure you that we lost none of our cheerfulness; on the contrary, since this new way of living was in striking contrast with what we had left behind, we often had a hearty laugh over it. I owed you this good remembrance of the holy anniversary of our first day of community life. How happy I would be to continue living it with you!”.

*Letter to Father Mille, to the novices and scholastics of Billens,* January 24, 1831

(Selected Texts, No. 221, p. 254-255)

**Sharing our faith**

The animator invites each Oblate present to share what has inspired him in the reflection and around the questions:

*– Can you remember an experience in which Oblate community helped you, showed support or brought joy to your Oblate life and mission?*

*– Remember an experience in a local community that was filled with life. What made it that way?*

*– What can I do to make our community a living cell of the Congregation?*

**A time for prayer and thanksgiving**

The animator invites each person present to pray, to thank God for something, or someone, and to ask for whatever might be needed.

**Commitment**

****The animator reminds everyone that we are preparing for the Triennium by seeing how we can grow, change, be transformed. We are asked to consider a concrete gesture in the life of our community as a sign of conversion to a life of poverty. Let us ask God to inspire us, help us be bold and courageous so that during these weeks and months of preparation we will commit ourselves to some real sign of new life among us.

**Blessing and song**

The animator asks an Oblate present to pray a blessing over the group and then all sing the final song.