**20.**

## **Apostolic Communityhas a vital relationship with the laity**

For this encounter, the community may choose to invite some lay collaborators or others. 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, and an Oblate Cross may be placed in the center of the community.

**Song:** The animator may choose an appropriate song in relation to the theme.

**Motivation**

In this encounter we gather to prepare for the two hundredth anniversary of the foundation of our Oblate way of life. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us share our faith, draw more closely together and to renew us in our charism.

**The Word of God**

So let’s not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith. (***Gal* 6:9-10**)

If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care – then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. (***Phil* 2:1-4**)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. … For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Phil 1:1-7. 29-30)

(*Time for silent reflection*)

**Response to God’s Word:** Psalm 104:22-33.

**Constitution and Rules**

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… (R 37a)

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. (R 37b)

**Going deeper into the Theme**

The association of lay people is a new form of belonging to the Congregation. Not only do some of them want to collaborate in the ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate or support their missions, but they also want to share their charism.

Cooperation with the Oblates can take the form of working with them in a specific ministry as is the case for any other cooperator in the Church’s pastoral work, for example, in a parish, a school, or a mission. In these ministries, the Oblates generally have a special style and they stress the values that express their charism. In this way, they pass something on to their co-workers. But above all, the Oblates are an expression of the Church, and the laity who commit themselves to working with them do so in virtue of their status as members of the local church community.

The laity can support the work and the life of the Oblates and cooperate with them by being one with the Oblates and sharing in their particular charism. The extent of this sharing can vary considerably and can even take the form of a commitment based on the Oblate spirituality and mission in the world.

In the document, *Witnessing in Apostolic Community,*the 1992 Chapter stated that the “sharing of our life and mission is a source of life, dynamism, and fecundity for both Oblates and lay persons alike” (no. 41).

The “common missionary outlook” can, in certain cases, lead to common forms of mission, but in most cases it is limited to a common witness which finds its very origins in different activities.

A common spirituality must be fostered, which is the inspiration for a missionary Oblate commitment, flowing from the same charism. The essential elements of this spirituality are: to be centered on Christ the Savior (*see C 2 and 4*), to practice fraternal charity and zeal (see C 37) and, to follow the example of Mary (*see C 10*).

There are two forms of communion to be promoted: regular meetings of Oblates and lay associates and regular meetings of the lay associates themselves in order that they form living groups similar in character to base communities. These forms of communion will bear the kind of testimony that will evangelize.

Lay people request something visible, organized, and capable of giving them support and inspiration. Oblates should see that this formation is received, so that they can become involved in the charism in all its aspects.

We must be attentive to the aspirations of lay persons; these aspirations are often more comprehensive than our response. Let us call, invite, and challenge laity to share the Oblate charism and welcome those who express the desire to do so.

(M. Zago, *Laity,* in “Dictionary of Oblate Values”, p. 504-512)

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 need 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. (Congress of Lay Associates, *The Lay Associate’s Identity and Orientations,* Aix-en-Provence, May 18-21 1996, in “Vie Oblate Life” 55 (1996), p. 308)

**Sharing our Faith**

*The animator invites each participant to share what has inspired him/her in the reflection and around the questions*:

– Is our community open to lay people, to share a fraternal welcome? How can we improve our welcome in their regard?

– What means can we use to let the lay people know about our apostolic projects and our spirituality, and get them involved?

– How can we best listen to the laity to know about their needs? Are we able to let ourselves be challenged in our life and our ministry?

**A time for prayer and thanksgiving**

*The animator invites each one to pray, to thank God for something/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. 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.

This may be a good time to inform the people we work with that we are preparing to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Congregation (January 25th 2016) and consider how this celebration might bring new energy and life to our mission to the poor.

**Blessing and Song**

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