



The Oblate Associate

A Newsletter for Oblate Associates in the United States

Number 5, Volume 1

September 2008



from the Provincial, Fr. Louis Lougen, O.M.I.

National Gathering of Oblate Associates II -

Recently the Provincial Council and I approved a request by the National Director to hold a second gathering of Oblate Associates. **This National Gathering will take place in Belleville, Illinois from August 6-9, 2009.** Two possible locations and dates were considered: San Antonio, TX and Belleville, IL. The Belleville location was chosen because it allows me to attend (since I am in the St. Louis area during that time).

The details of number of participants and the program will be forthcoming from Geri Furmanek in the next months. The last gathering was a wonderful success and we have great hopes that this one in 2009 will afford the opportunity for other Associates to experience this gathering.

CONVOCATION 2007

(Marilyn Lawrence, Riviera Beach, Florida)

The week of November 5-9, 2007, was a special time for both Oblates and Oblate Associates. For the Oblates of the U.S. Province, it was Convocation Week, their third such gathering since the formation of the combined U.S. Province in 1999. For the Associates, it was the first time EVER that they had been included in the proceedings! And 'inclusion' meant TOTAL inclusion: in all proceedings, discussions, liturgies and celebrations. For the 15 Associates who participated in the gathering, it was an honor, a privilege, and a measure of how central we have become to the Oblate mission.

Each day of the Convocation followed a distinct format: there was a liturgy and a prayer service, live and video presentations, wonderful meals, and plenty of time for discussion. All the sessions found Oblates and Associates gathered together at round tables in the meeting room, where each presentation was followed by discussion and sharing.

The first full day of the Convocation, the Superior General of the Oblates, Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, OMI, spoke to us on Community. The second day, we heard from Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP, the former Master

General of the Dominicans, who spoke on Mission. And on the third day, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, President of Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, spoke on the subject of Availability. Each of these presenters was followed by three Responders: a young Oblate, an Oblate seminarian, and an Oblate Associate!! What an exciting, and edifying experience to hear different views on these topics from people of different generations and different backgrounds!

Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP, with his British accent, casual attire, and great sense of humor, spoke of Mission as being called out of our own comfort zone and responding with joy; and Oblates truly are filled with joy. We Associates watched in wonder as Oblates greeted fellow Oblates/friends gathered from distant climes. We savored the stories of shared experiences, in Novitiate, in Seminary, and in shared assignments. Meals and social hours were both rich and relaxed. Liturgies were powerful and moving. And out of it all, Associates and Oblates came to realize how much we mean to each other; how much we have transformed each other; and how much we are loved.

The following Associates were privileged to participate in the Convocation: Geri Furmanek, National Director of the Oblate Associates; Lucy Fernandez from Chula Vista, California; Eugenia Vallarta from Oakland, California; Sue and Kevin Collins from the Victorious Missionaries in Belleville, Illinois; Jack Weck from MAMI in Belleville; Anna Compass from New Orleans, Louisiana; Carmela Coughlan and Sue Noel from Lowell, Mass.; Bob Marsh (also a responder) from Bristow, Virginia; Ken Amerson from Oblate Missions in San Antonio, Texas; Mary Jo Quinn from San Antonio, Texas; Alva Peña and Janie Sanchez (also a responder) from San Juan, Texas; and Marilyn Lawrence (also a responder) from Riviera Beach, Florida. Following are some of their reflections:

Eugenia Vallarta, Oakland, California:



The most important impression I had was the feeling of being totally welcomed by everyone. Hospitality really is a basic Oblate value! Although I have worked with Oblates for several years, I did not fully understand their basic values until the Convocation. I enjoyed the opportunity to deepen bonds with other Oblate Associates and to meet new ones; because of our common commitment, it felt as if we had known each other for a long time!! And I was inspired to see young Oblates presiding at Mass and preaching to seasoned Oblates, who seemed enthralled by them. I enjoyed listening to the liturgical music, especially “*Evangelizare: Pauperibus Missit Me*”, the Oblate motto set to music for this occasion by Fr. Jim Brobst, OMI. Often enough in our parish, we hear mainly female voices; here I was pleasantly surprised to hear an all-male choir sing very well!

On the bus to the airport after the Convocation, I sat with Fr. David Kalert, OMI. I was a bit uneasy at first because I had known about him as the previous Provincial Superior. But he put me right at ease, and I will always remember one of the things he said: “There was a lot of talk about how Oblate Associates affirm vowed Oblates in their ministry. What was not stressed enough was that you have to work hard and continue working hard on your own ministries!” *Pauperibus Missit Me*.....



Provincial, Fr. Lougen, blessing attendees and giving them a copy of the Oblate reflection videos, Eugenia Vallarta in striped sweater.

Lucy Fernandez, Chula Vista, California:

The key word for me was COMMUNITY. I have lived in community, and I know how difficult it can be to put up with the differences that people bring with them; it requires a great deal of love and forgiveness. I was impressed with the congeniality and hospitality of the Oblates, and with the way that most of them make themselves available to others. I have known some priests who seem to put up a barrier and set themselves apart from the people. I come out of a Cursillo background, and we share a great deal among ourselves, but we all - Oblates and Associates alike - need to make ourselves available to all. Community and Availability have to go hand-in-hand!



**Anna Compass,
New Orleans, Louisiana:**

“Available!” One word stayed with me all the way home, and is with me even now: Available. What a gift from God! I found myself wanting to be Available, to go where I was sent, to do whatever was asked of me; I wanted to say YES. I wonder if anyone really realized the emotion that I felt, that was so overwhelming to me, to be among so many great people, all ready and willing to say YES to God. I never in my wildest dreams ever expected to be part of such a gathering, to be so close to so many holy men and women. God has blessed me. I want to sing out, to pray, to express, to be with everyone. I pray that I will be available when asked; I’ll go, I’ll do it. The Word, to me, is AVAILABLE.



**Jack Weck,
Missionary Association,
Belleville, Illinois:**

The Convocation was the culmination of my 47 years of working with and for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate! The way the Oblates made us lay people feel a part of the gathering was heartwarming. I enjoyed seeing many of the Oblate Brothers and Priests whom I have worked with in the past, and enjoyed making new friends with Oblates from all over the country. From the humanness of the elder Oblates who could not be present, but spoke to us each night via video, to the sincerity and confidence of the newly ordained (young) Oblates, I was truly proud and honored to be a part of the Oblate Community. The presenters were excellent, and I especially enjoyed the round table discussions and comments. It was a GREAT experience!!



Bob Marsh, Bristow, Virginia:

As Marilyn Lawrence and I drove back to Virginia after 5 unforgettable days in Pittsburgh, I couldn’t stop thinking of the scripture passage from Luke, about the apostles on the road to Emmaus: “Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” In four hours in the car together, we could not stop talking about what we had heard and seen in the last five days. And

like the apostles, we could not wait to get back to share the experience with other Oblate Associates. I cannot describe how it felt to be part of such a holy time. Like the apostles, I felt like my eyes were opened as the week unfolded.

I was honored to be one of the lay Associates chosen to give a short reflection after one of the speakers. I spoke on day two following Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, former head of the Dominican Order, who spoke on Mission. He told the Oblates: “The most profoundly missionary thing you ever do is to take vows.” If I were wiser when it came time to reflect on his presentation, I would have stood up and just said “Amen.” Rather, I tried to share some humor, some personal experiences, and my belief that lay people because of our baptism share in that same mission with those who take vows. Like the Oblates who bring the good news to the poorest of the poor, we are all called to do the same. It is easy sometimes to look at our priests and religious and think: it is you who must share the Gospel; I will help with my financial support and will pray for you each day. But of course, that is not all there is to it! The Oblates model the mission for us, and we reflect back to them the gift of bringing the good news to those around us, wherever that may be.

More than ever, I felt proud to be an Oblate Associate, to be part of this beautiful story of God reaching out to the poor through all of us. The five days were filled with many opportunities to hear the stories of the Oblate elders - and the newest Oblates! What hope and joy flowed through the gathering as we ate, drank, sang, listened and prayed together. One of the Oblates told me how affirming it was for him to listen to us Associates share how much we love the Oblates; I told him it was equally affirming to US to see how much that love is returned!



From the National Director



Geri Furmanek,
National Director,
Mission Enrichment
& Oblate Associates

CONVOCATION VIDEO - Unfortunately places were limited at the Convocation, however, the Province had the foresight to ask Oblate Media to video tape the Convocation. Through the Council's generosity, **each associate group is receiving a copy of the two-disc DVD of the Convocation 2007 talks and responses.**



RESOURCES AVAILABLE - Recently the Spanish language version of the updated Guide for Oblate Associates was mailed out to Associate Groups. If you would like to receive additional copies, please contact the National Office.

ASSOCIATES MEETING NEEDS:

Thank You, Associate Denny Baumann, and the Virginia Associates - recently I asked Denny's expertise and assistance in getting computers to Sri Lanka in coordination with General Councilor, Fr. Oswald Firth. Although it was not financially feasible to send the shipment of free computers, Denny did a great job of trying. In addition, he kept all of us in the communication loop, which was much appreciated.

California Associate Rose Jardin writes: As an Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMIA) I am doing volunteer work for the Sudan Catholic Bishops Regional Secretariat (SCBRS) here at Nairobi, Kenya since October 11, 2007. This is at the request of Fr. Jun Mercado, OMI with the concurrence of Fr. José Arong, OMI. I am using my skills in helping the Finance Department of the SCBRS to set up an Accounting System.

The Oblate Associates of Mary Immaculate in the Oakland-San Francisco area started financial assistance for the SCBRS Scholarship Educational program for the Senior Secondary Student Scholars who cannot continue their studies. We gave \$1000 for 2007, which covers the tuition fees for two (2) students per calendar year.

I pray and hope we could continue this program under the National Oblates Associates with you and start OMIA with the SCBRS. SCBRS will be relocated in Juba, South Sudan this February 2008, in conjunction with SCBRS' rebuilding of South Sudan.

I will be missing the Feb. 2008 renewal of commitment of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Associates, the monthly meetings, fun and camaraderie.

I know I am always in their prayers - that's what keeps me going here - in a place so far away from home. Please pray for us, take care, God Bless!

- Rosa Jardin, a Philippian in Africa



Rose Jardin,
Oblate Associate,
Oakland, California

Thanks to Marilyn Lawrence MariLaw@msn.com for her assistance in getting input for this newsletter. Send information to Marilyn at the above e-mail address or to Geri Furmanek, National Office, 224 So. De Mazenod Dr., Belleville, IL 62223; Gfurm224@aol.com or associates@omiusa.org.

RETREATS - Throughout the year, Associate groups contact the National Office for Retreats. If interested, please contact Geri Furmanek, National Director. Recent retreat collaboration efforts included:

RETREAT in San Fernando, California:

As a preparation for Lent, Fr. Ray Lacasse, Fr. José Arong and I gave a retreat for Pacific Area Associates entitled: *The Cross of Christ*, using Fr. Ron Rolheiser's video (produced by Oblate Media) and reflection by St. Eugene (aka Will Shaw). Participants gathered from February 1-3, 2008 at the Mercy Retreat Center in Burlingame, CA. Oakland Associate Nemia Nicer was a long time employee of the Mercy Sisters and her influence has made it possible to get reasonable rates at this beautiful retreat facility. Those who attended came from Washington (Seattle) and California (Chula Vista, Oakland and San Fernando) to share this time of prayer and ritual, reflection, sharing and community.



Attendees, (from left to right): Graciela Etchart; Carol Bautista; Will Shaw; Eugenia Vallarta; Nemia Nicer; Virginia Daniels; Cecelia Barragan; Fr. José Arong, OMI; Fr. Ray Lacasse, OMI; Lisa Roxas; Violeta Carabeo; Geri Furmanek; Lillie Villaluna; Flor & Bill Lacson; Ellen Peralta.



St. Eugene encouraging Oblate Associates



Participants presenting their commitments at California retreat.

June Retreat of Former Oblates and Seminarians

by Patrick Miner

The retreat began Friday with some words of welcome from Geri Furmanek. Geri coordinates all of the Lay Associate groups out of her office on the Shrine grounds. This is where we met for our sessions.

Fr. Kraus facilitated the OBLATE HERITAGE RETREAT. We met for a total of five sessions. Additionally, we enjoyed our meals together. Our Eucharistic Liturgy encouraged some additional reflections on the sessions. The retreat ended with a lunch and group photograph at about 1:30 PM Sunday.

Participants: John Frischmon, Boulder City, Nevada; Cindy and Joe Hall, Omaha, Nebraska; Roxanne and Patrick Miner, Davenport, Iowa; Jim Sharpsteen, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Mary and Gene Wescovich, Swansea, Illinois; Phyllis and Steve Wick, Belton, Texas.

A retreat for next year has been tentatively scheduled for the last weekend in June in San Antonio, Texas. Of course, many details and adjustments are likely. This year, we had many individuals that were unable to attend. I hope that next year's retreat will include many, many more of our brothers and sisters.



Oblate Associate Group (from left to right) Pat Miner, Cindy and Joe Hall, Gene Wescovich, John Frischmon, Roxanne Miner, Phyllis and Steve Wick, Mary Wescovich, Jim Sharpsteen and Dave Kraus.

Writings of the Founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod



Letter of August 17, 1848 to Fr. Étienne Semeria, at Jaffna, Ceylon

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate

My dear Fr. Semeria,... What can I say of our men in Oregon and on the shores of the Red River? For food they have a little bacon, they have no bed but the bare ground, and with that they are content and happy as men who are doing the will of God. Fr. Ricard who was dying when he left has regained his health and the last time he wrote to me he said that he had not even had a day's cold although he was sleeping at night under the stars and often lying in mud. Those who are moving towards Hudson Bay, with cold weather registering 30 degrees, dragged by dogs across the ice, forced to make a hole in the snow in order to pass the night with the snow as their bed, delight one with

the story of their adventures. May it be so with you, who have a mission that is less hard than that of your Brothers, in spite of the heat which exhausts you. Live in perfect unity, and may the bonds of charity and obedience soften the hardships that are inseparable from your difficult ministry.... It is not the missionaries that I am lacking, but the money to pay for their travel, and also the money you need to feed them. We have more than forty Oblates, and even more novices ... and we are so in debt that we have no more securities to offer in order to be able to take out new loans. Also, Fr. Tempier is totally discouraged, repeating from morning till night that we have nothing left, that we must send the novices away, and then when the time comes to do the deed I lack the courage even more than he does.... You see, there is much to be sad about, but we must not lose confidence. God knows that all we want is his greater glory and the salvation of the souls whom he has redeemed.

I bless you all and embrace you lovingly,

- C. J. Eugene, Bishop of Marseilles