



The Oblate Associate

A Newsletter for Oblate Associates in the United States

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WHAT DO WE DO FOR A MEETING????

by Marilyn Lawrence

How often does THAT question come up? We want to get together, we want to do something to support the Oblate mission - but how do we go about it? How do we organize our get-togethers - and how do we hold the Members' interest, and keep them coming back? There are many different answers; each group of Oblate Associates has developed a slightly different approach which seeks to meet the needs and interests of its members. We hope the ideas presented in this issue will offer some solutions.

St. Eugene de Mazenod taught that MISSION grows out of COMMUNITY. You can't have one without the other. Therefore, it is essential that Oblate Associates, who would live the Oblate charism in their own lives, be rooted in an Oblate community. Community requires regular communication and sharing, and one thing which EVERY Oblate Associate group has in common is a regular time for meetings. Some groups meet on weeknights, others on weekends, but all meet at least once a month.

There is another thing which all Associate meetings have in common: They are grounded in prayer and open to sharing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Whether the meetings begin with Mass or prayer, it is essential that they start with a SERVICE that calls all members into the presence of God and one another.

Community is developed through sharing, through learning each other's stories. This can be done through faith-sharing exchanges and general group discussions; it can also be done informally over the sacramental sharing of a meal or refreshments.

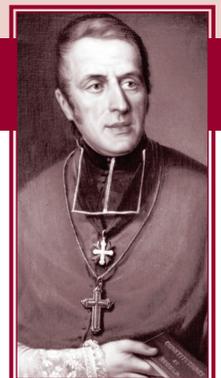
Associate meetings must also include an opportunity to learn, to stretch our horizons, to reach beyond our daily concerns. Whether the program format is a speaker, a film, a book review, or a general discussion of a pre-selected topic, it must somehow focus the membership on the Oblate call to meet the needs of others - the poorest of the poor. As we said in the Methodist church of my childhood: "Enter to worship, depart to serve."

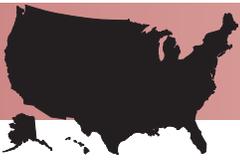
Which leads us to the final purpose of our coming together: we meet as Oblate Associates not just for our own spiritual growth and comfort: but also to strengthen us, as a community and as individuals, to reach out to those most in need. Outreach opportunities, projects, financial contributions, are all appropriate topics for the business-meeting part of the gathering.

All of the groups described in this newsletter combine these elements in their monthly gatherings. We hope that their reports provide both inspiration and guidance, and that by sharing, we may all grow.

A WORD FROM THE FOUNDER...

"Work seriously at becoming saints, ready to sacrifice our possessions, our talents, our sleep, our very selves, our lives for the love of Jesus Christ (and) for the service of the Church. This spirit of total dedication to the glory of God, and the service of the Church and the salvation of souls is characteristic of our community. Small though it is, it will always remain strong as long as it will strive to be holy." - St. Eugene de Mazenod





NEWS FROM THE FIELD

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

(Eugenia Vallarta):

Oblate Associates in the Oakland-San Francisco area meet every month on Sunday at 2 p.m. with Fr. Jose Arong, OMI, at the Oblate's Regional House in Oakland. The meeting always begins with praying the Liturgy of the Hour, followed by a 20-minute "oration." There follows a period for study and discussion of the life and mission of St. Eugene de Mazenod; the group is currently using "Living in the Spirit's Fire" by Alfred Hubenig, OMI. A business meeting, where plans and projects are discussed, is always followed by a community dinner, to which all Oblate residents of the House are invited. The group also holds at least two overnight retreats each year.



SAN FERNANDO, CALIFORNIA

(Cecelia Barragan): The San Fernando community comes together monthly to share stories and to support outreach activities. At a recent meeting, several members of the group spoke of how they first experienced the Oblates, and what that experience meant in their lives: "Margaret shared how as a child moving into the (San Fernando) Valley, her family was here when the first Oblates began their mission in 1924; she and her family have welcomed the Oblates into their lives since that first encounter." "Mary shared that the Oblates have been her ONLY encounter with priests, and their mission has become hers." "Cecilia shared her encounter with the Oblates beginning with Fr. Paul Waldie's sermons and his vision of what church should be, embracing all those with whom we live. For a priest to be saying from the pulpit what I felt in the innermost part of my being was an explosion of celebration in sharing the Good News." Out of this faith sharing has grown a sense of community, and a commitment to reach out to the poor. The San Fernando group recently raised \$3,250 to support the Oblate mission work in Haiti.

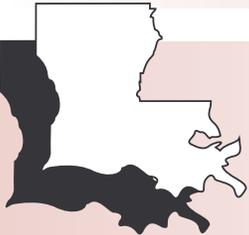


NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

(Anna Compass):

Oblate Associates in New Orleans meet on the first

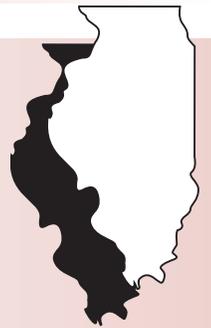
Saturday of every month, from 12-1:30 p.m., at the Parish Center of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Following a short business meeting, the group participates in prayer and reflection on the teachings and spirituality of St. Eugene de Mazenod, led by Fr. Mike Amesse, OMI, or Fr. Tony Rigoli, OMI. Meetings always conclude with "fellowship and enjoyment of good food!", and frequently include an Open House, to welcome new members into the group. The group is currently engaged in an effort to re-institute First Friday prayer vigils, aimed at reducing the level of violence in the city. In November, the group held a recommitment ceremony in which 21 members - including 7 new members! - committed themselves as Oblate Associates.



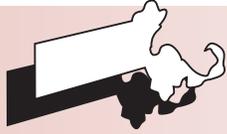
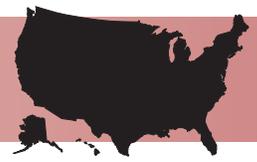
BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS

(Bro. Andy Lawlor, OMI):

The Belleville group meets on the third Tuesday of every month, at 7 p.m. The format of their meetings varies: sometimes they begin with Mass at the Shrine of our Lady of the Snows; or they meet in a conference room for a prayer service, a pot luck meal, and a time of sharing. The group is currently focused on learning more about Oblate history, and they are inviting older Oblates in the area to come and share their knowledge. They also enjoy viewing a movie together and discussing its implications afterwards. The group holds regular retreats for its members, and its monthly committee meetings are open to all the membership.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD



LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

(Sue Noel/Carmela Coughlan): The Lowell Associates Group meets on the second Thursday of every month, from 7-9 p.m. A typical meeting involves: Prayer, a Speaker, Mission Announcements, and Faith Sharing. Everyone participates!! Each month, a different member signs up to do the prayer service, and all different forms of prayer are used: evening prayer, liturgical prayer, centering prayer, Lectio Divina, prayer with movement, and a variety of cultural prayer forms. The group has a Board which meets 5-6 times a year, and selects a focus for upcoming meetings: sometimes visiting Oblates are asked to speak; sometimes there is a group discussion of a new book or publication from Rome; sometimes "we need to have more faith sharing time or community time for balance." "ALWAYS we ask the question of who in the group has a story or gifts we should hear about and then they are asked to speak as the Spirit guides them." The Lowell group is parish-based, and has an extensive outreach program involving everything from soup kitchens, to evangelical witness, to summer camps!

FORMER SEMINARIAN OBLATE ASSOCIATE CHAPTER FORMS

(Steven C. Wick): Like fine wines, the concept of forming a Former Seminarian Oblate Associate Chapter took time to reach fruition. Patrick Miner (class of '69) in Iowa and Steve Wick (class of '65) in Texas, both former Oblate seminarians at Our Lady of the Ozarks in Carthage, Missouri shared essentially the same chapter vision: joining men who had been formed in the Oblate discipline to again associate themselves with the Congregation for service and spiritual growth. The concept became reality when Patrick and Steve shared ideas at the OLO Reunion at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, June 26, 2004. An interest list was distributed and eventually some 300 former seminarians were subsequently contacted. This new Associate Chapter is open to former seminarians, former Oblates, their spouses and adult children who wish to re-commit themselves to practicing key elements of the Oblate spiritual life as taught by St. Eugene, particularly, ministry to the poor. Fr. David Kraus, OMI, who once taught at OLO, has agreed to serve as Chaplain for this fledgling group and Sr. Geri Furmanek, ASC, has offered the support of the National Office. An installation ceremony is planned for Founder's Day, February, 2005 at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville, Illinois. "We already have nine committed enrollees to date and I know of at least three others who plan to participate - this is exciting", said Patrick Miner. Anyone interested in joining this chapter can contact Patrick at 563-323-7971 or Steve at 254-217-2002.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA

(Marilyn Lawrence): The Oblate Partners of Virginia meet on the third Sunday of every month at a Benedictine Monastery. Mass at 10:30 a.m. is followed by a potluck meal, a program and a business meeting. Programs vary widely: three-four times a year, we have a speaker who may be a visiting Oblate; a representative of one of the charitable organizations we support, such as Catholic Worker House or Habitat for Humanity; or even an ecumenical representative from another denomination. Three-four meetings a year are devoted to group sharing: one of our members will lead us in a discussion of scripture and what it means to us. At least twice a year, we use the film resources available from Oblate Media as an opportunity to learn more about the life and spirituality of St. Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates. And twice a year - we have a party: a summer picnic on the Monastery grounds, and a Christmas party to which members bring their nativity sets from home and share their histories. Programs usually are focused around an annual theme, determined by a Board which meets 4-5 times a year; past topics have included Oblate charism, spiritual growth, and peace and justice issues. We also leave room for spontaneous suggestions, such as a recent idea to devote our November - Thanksgiving! - meeting to sharing our bounty with the poor. We will spend that meeting putting together and wrapping Christmas boxes that S.O.M.E. (So Others Might Eat) will distribute to the homeless in Washington, D.C.



SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

(Graciela Etchart): It is with great joy that Graciela reports she is a "lone Oblate (Associate) no more!" Jean Clancy has joined her as an Oblate Associate in Seattle. Jean is a parishioner at St. Benedict Church, a former Oblate parish. As a member of the church's Social Justice Commission, Jean traveled to Zambia in June to visit St. Benedict's companion parish, St. Lawrence Brindisi in Limulunga. "In Zambia, Jean witnessed the Oblate charism first hand, and shared remarkable experiences with the parishioners. As in most areas of Africa, the people of Limulunga are affected by extreme material poverty and the AIDS pandemic, as well as malaria and poor nutrition, but they are wealthy in faith and spirituality." Jean lives the Oblate charism daily in her work as a drug and alcohol counselor for Catholic Relief Services. Jean and Graciela hold periodic meetings where they share their experiences and reflect on St. Eugene and the Oblate charism. Welcome, Jean!!!!



A WORD FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

(Sr. Geri Furmanek, ASC)

Missionary Oblate, Fr. Robert (Bob)

Moosbrugger, died after a massive stroke suffered on Christmas 2004. May he rest in God's loving peace. Our prayers and thoughts of sympathy go out to his family and brother Oblates. Fr. Bob ministered most recently as the Treasurer for the US Province, and was very supportive of this work with Associates and lay leadership in the Church.



Several years ago, during a conversation with Fr. Bob on the subject of balancing ministry and making money, I learned that his doctoral dissertation was on the spirituality of Blessed Eugene De Mazenod. He graciously saw that I got a copy of it, and I've used various passages in my work of Mission Enrichment. Interestingly, the preface is dated December 24, 1980; as a tribute to him, I quote the following words:

"One's spirituality develops as one responds to experiences and events over which one very often has little or no control. The Christian emerges as selfishness and egoism are abandoned. Spiritual depth and maturity involve a process through which a person is gradually brought to the experienced realization of a total dependence on God."

On the last pages, Fr. Bob sums up his work regarding the Founder's spirituality, his insights and perhaps a piece of the ultimate truth for us:

"At the conclusion of the Gospel of John, Peter affirms his love for the risen Lord three times and three times Jesus commissions the Prince of the Apostles to a ministry of service. This is followed by the haunting allegory, I tell you solemnly: as a young man you fastened your belt and went about as you pleased; but when you are older you will stretch out your hands and another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will." (John 21:18)

"For Eugene de Mazenod, spiritual maturity became a reality with that trusting response, that 'yes' to the plan of God, that figurative stretching out of his hands. He had progressed from an independent stance to the recognition of the indispensability of trusting collaboration and cooperation with others."

ASSOCIATES FORMALLY ACKNOWLEDGED

Fr. David Kalert, Provincial, recently sent a letter of thanks and a formal acknowledgment of their support and ministry with the Oblates to the 355 Oblate Associates. In addition, he sent a letter of gratitude to the 24 Oblates actively engaged in working with these Associates.

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A PERSONAL NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

Marilyn Lawrence has recently moved from Bristow, Virginia, to Florida, where she hopes to continue working with the Oblates in that area. Her new mailing address is: 4 Via Aurelia, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418; phone (561)691-8977.