



# *The Oblate Associate*

A Newsletter for Oblate Associates in the United States

Volume 2, Number 2

September 2005

## *TRANSITIONS*

*“The world’s a scene of changes, and to be Constant, in Nature, were inconstancy.” - John Milton*

Change is always difficult. Whether for individuals or for groups, change means a disruption in routine, it means getting used to new patterns of behavior, it means having to think about how things have been done, and how they are being done - and how they can be done better! Most of us don't like change. We get comfortable with something that works for us, and we want it to last forever.

Life is about change, and how we adapt to it is a measure of our strength - as individuals, or as a group. In the best of all circumstances, we plan for change: a group writes into its constitution or bylaws a process for selecting officers; leadership roles are rotated on a regular basis; functions are assigned so that all can share. But in real life, planning for change is not always an option: people get sick and die, they move away, they are affected by family crises or natural disasters. Change can come very suddenly; and without an adequate “back-up plan”, groups, and individuals, can flounder.

The U.S. Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate has undergone its own transitions in leadership. In February 1999 the five Provinces in the USA became one-the U.S. Province. The process took detailed steps that involved every U.S. Oblate. The planning and the agreed-upon nature of the process relieved some of the stress of change. As they have moved forward with the most recent change in leadership they are ready to continue working for the mission.

Oblate Associate groups in this country are, for the most part, no more than ten years old. Organizational structures vary widely; some groups are too new to have faced a transition in leadership. Even some of the older groups are still functioning with the original leadership team. But sooner or later, EVERY group will have to deal with transition. How well it is done will depend on how well the group has prepared for it. In this issue, as we continue the process of learning from each other, Associate groups have been invited to share their own “transition stories”. If some groups have made mistakes in the past, there is a lesson to be learned for the future. We hope the stories that follow will be helpful.

## *A WORD FROM THE FOUNDER...*



*“Hold your meetings regularly and transact matters at them consultatively, without ever wishing to gain your objective by authority. You shall see what strength will accrue to you from this way of proceeding.” (Letter to Fr. Honorat, Canada, 1843).*

*“Nobody in the Congregation has the power to act on his own ideas, without taking the advice of those who form his Council. It is not always necessary to follow the advice of others, but they must always be consulted....” (Letter to Fr. Verdet, Brownsville Texas, 1854).*



## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

### OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

(Eugenia Vallarta):  
Changes are difficult, especially if we are not ready or are caught unawares. We need to be clear about the nature of our group, understand why we became



Associates and define our goals and objectives. Formation is essential: our group went on a year formation before we made our first annual commitment. We learned about the charism of St. Eugene, and visited Oblate missions to better experience the mission of the Oblates. We were taught to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and oraison, because St. Eugene taught that through these prayers we remain united although we are far from each other. These prayers are an essential part of our regular meetings, and form a special bond that unites us with the Oblate Congregation.

Two years ago, we experienced the death of Bebs Delos Santos, who was our leader from the start. When she died, we were able to move on because we are comfortable with our identity as Oblate Associates. We believe that if Associates are sufficiently formed and committed, transitions - though never easy - will be smoother.

### SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

(Mary Jo Quinn):

Located in the heart of "Oblate territory," this is the oldest Oblate Associate group in the country. And last year it underwent the most dramatic change: a group that began as a men's organization praying for vocations, elected its first female President! It was only in the last 10-15 years that women even began attending the group's meetings, and most of those were wives of the members. About 3 years ago, then-President, L.W. Shoepe, began asking Mary Jo Quinn to help him with his responsibilities; he was quietly grooming her for leadership. In early 2004, he established a nominating committee, which proposed her name for President, along with a male Vice President and a female Treasurer. The recommendations were accepted - though not without a few reservations on the part of some members!



Today, all three officers are in their second term. Another woman in the group has come forward to serve as organist for the Masses, accompanied by the past President on the guitar; having music at the Mass for the first time has brought new life, and some new members. Mary Jo has taken the initiative to bring in top-level Oblate speakers for the monthly meetings, and they are now planning a recruitment initiative. We look forward to hearing more from this dynamic group!

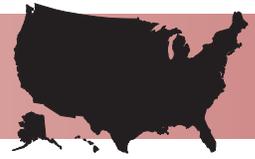


### NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

(Cecil Wheeler): This group is still fairly new, and the group's founder, Fr. Mike Amesse, OMI, simply designates a member to serve as President. The first to serve was Anna Compass. Under the current presidency of Cecil Wheeler, other officers have been named, including a person to function as Vice President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer to handle dues and other income. Committees have also been established,

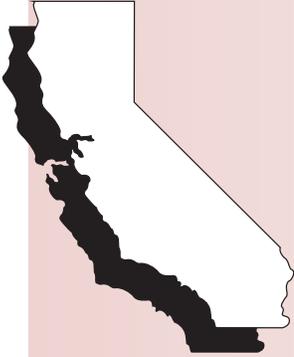
to work with members who are sick or in need; to provide refreshments for meetings, to help plan functions. Organizational changes are proposed to the full membership, and have met with their acceptance.

# REPORTS FROM THE FIELD



## SAN FERNANDO, CALIFORNIA

(Cecelia Barragan): When the group's founder, Andy Weir, left with his family to return to Texas, the remaining members simply continued on. Fr. Ray Lacasse, OMI, meets regularly with the group; there are no officers; Cecilia Barragan handles the necessary coordination and meeting notification. Ours is a small, cohesive group, and we know each other well. Our members are not shy, and will definitely speak up and voice their concerns and suggestions! Everyone shares responsibility for our meetings: members take turns in leading prayer and in developing a program for the meetings. Our biggest problem is "over commitment," the competing priorities in our lives. We need new members to keep up the energy of the group.



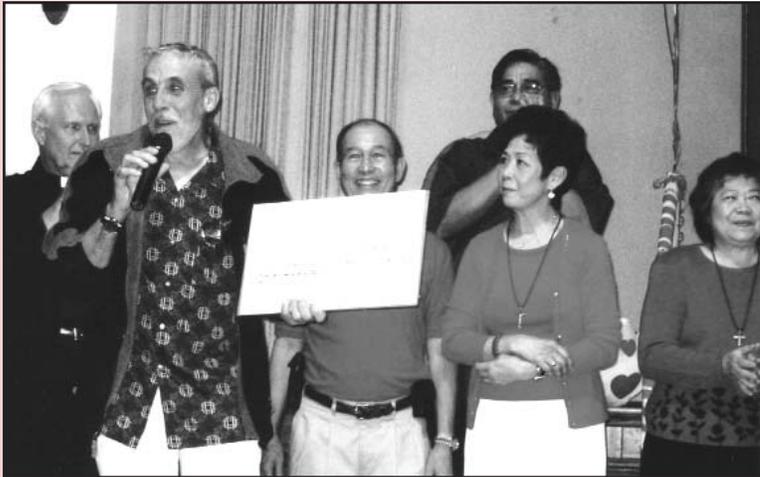
## IN OTHER NEWS...

## CHULA VISTA, CALIFORNIA

(Herminio Alignay):

After a year of formation under the direction of Fr. Jose Arong, OMI, a new Oblate Associate group has come into being.

Currently composed of three couples, they are taking to heart the teaching of the Founder to minister to the poorest of the poor.



A Tsunami Relief Campaign raised \$2,320.00 for tsunami relief; and a Valentine Jam Session raised an impressive \$14,000.00 for the Oblates San Eugenio Mission in La Morita, Mexico. We welcome this group, and look forward to hearing more from them!





# REPORTS FROM THE FIELD



## OBLATE PARTNERS OF VIRGINIA

(Marilyn Lawrence and Patty Lapihuska): In the beginning, leadership “transition” was one of the furthest things from our minds. The entire organization was intended to serve as a transition, from the closing of our beloved Army post in June of 1997, until we all found homes in our local parishes. Temporary leadership of the group was placed in the hands of four couples, chosen by the Oblates to serve as Members of the Board. One member of the Board emerged as de facto Chairman of the organization.

Two years later, when we were still going strong, we became Oblate Partners, and it became important to bring others into leadership positions. But none of the original Board members wanted to step down! Elections were held, three new members were elected to serve, and they were simply added - with their spouses - to the original Board.

It was clear that we could not just keep adding Board members, however, so we came up with a new proposal: Board members would serve a fixed term, with one-third of the Board “rotating off,” each year, with the option of returning at a later date. We also did away with the “election” concept - somebody always loses! Instead we devised a process whereby ALL of the Partners were invited to consider whether they felt called to serve on the Board. It was then left to the Board itself to determine who would step down, and who would be chosen to replace them.

Then came the autumn of 2004: within the course of one month, two of the original Board members “rotated off” the Board; two other Board members moved away; and it was announced that the Chairman was leaving! It was disruptive; but the Board system came through, responsibilities were divided up, and new officers were chosen.

July 2005 finds our Oblate Partners group in further transition as two more Board members moved away from northern Virginia. It was decided that future Board members would serve for one year, at the invitation of the Board, with an option to renew. We believe this is in line with our founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod who said “charity embraces everything and, when necessary for new needs it invents new means; whether they be spiritual aids or temporal helps, they are all given generously in the name of Jesus Christ”.



## RIVIERA BEACH, FLORIDA

(Marilyn Lawrence): A new Oblate Associate group is in formation at St. Francis of Assisi parish, where Fr. Art Obin, OMI, and Marilyn Lawrence are sharing the charism of the Founder with a group of parishioners. It is hoped that this will translate into support for the parish’s planned Outreach Center.

## SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

(Geri Furmanek): Alva Peña, from the San Juan, Texas, Oblate Associates, and a member of the National Committee, joined with Fr. Warren Brown, OMI, to conduct the first ever Mission Enrichment program for Oblate employees in San Antonio.



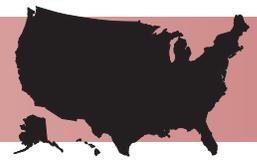
Fr. Warren Brown, OMI and Oblate Associate Alva Peña

## LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

(Alice Harrington): How wonderful it is to spend a weekend with the Oblates and Lay Associates! We began, continued and ended our Retreat singing “Send Us Your Spirit, O Lord,” and He did. Sunday morning we held a Pilgrimage, walking through the streets of Lowell singing and praying as we visited all the places where the Oblates and Associates brought Christ to the people.



# REPORTS FROM THE FIELD



## YORK, PENNSYLVANIA

(Geri Furmanek, National Director for Oblate Associates)  
Among the many telephone calls I received in the Spring of 2005, one stands out. It was from a woman who had

heard about the Associates from a former Oblate who had once been her pastor at St. Joseph's Parish in Dallastown, PA. She really wanted to be an Oblate Associate. "The day my mother had her voice box removed, due to cancer, her first visitor was an Oblate. He was newly assigned to our parish. When he learned about her lung cancer 28 years later he came to visit her at Normandie Ridge where she was a resident in the Nursing Center even though he was no longer a priest."

In the following weeks I received phone calls and letters from people she knew, supporting her desire. They were impressive letters and telephone conversations. But this was unusual-it's not the way Associates come into being? Or is it? There was something in the Oblate witness that attracted her to the charism and she had a strong desire to be formed as an Oblate Associate. She in turn reaches out to those in most need.

So, in May of 2005 I began sending Veronica, or "Ronnie", as she is affectionately known, the guidebook and biography of St. Eugene. She began watching the videos on his life and sending back her written responses to the reflection questions. She continues her formation year and going deeper into her journey of living God's will for her. She finds inspiration from St. Eugene in how he learned to "let go" in life's circumstances.

She has had her share of letting go. Her father died at Easter of 1986. Some years ago her mother, knowing she would not always be there for her daughter, began to prepare Ronnie for an assisted living environment by having her volunteer at a nursing home so she could "get a flavor of what it would be like". She could see what type of room she would have, perhaps a roommate, etc. To those who ask how she can be so hopeful she replies "What is there to be bitter about? I can serve in a wheelchair!"

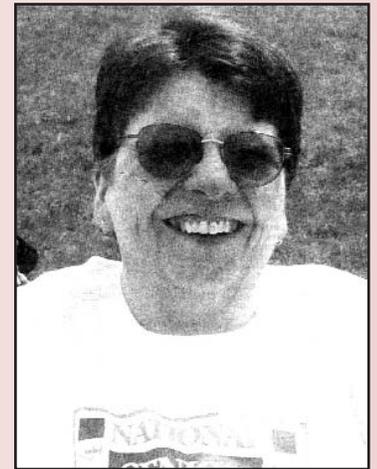
I asked Veronica to share with us the type of outreach she does and she quickly sent this reply:

My name is Veronica R. Ehrhart-a resident of an assisted living facility in the Normandie Ridge community, York, PA since 2002. Born with Cerebral Palsy, for years I walked with crutches; then, after a fall, I now use a wheelchair for mobility.

I participate in many activities-as a member of the chorus which performs several times a year; a member of the Book Club; Co-chair of the Crafters Annual Celebration, where a variety of crafted items are sold; a member of the Ethics Committee which makes policies that affects the various levels of care at Normandie Ridge (Apartments and Cottages, Assisted Living and the Nursing Center); taking part in Bible Study Groups conducted by our Chaplain or a retired United Methodist pastor.

I care for the Memorial table when there are resident deaths, and supply the chaplain with the obituary notice. In the Nursing Center I volunteer by delivering mail and sometimes reading for those with impaired vision. Also by being a "Friendly Visitor" for those who get little or no company.

My desire was always to serve the Lord in some way, and I feel that I can do that by becoming an Oblate Associate.



Veronica Erhardt,  
York, PA

# NEW ORLEANS OBLATE ASSOCIATES

The Oblate Associates of St. Jude Shrine/Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel, in New Orleans, Louisiana, have suffered a devastating blow. Oblate Associates throughout the country are asked to continue to keep them in special prayer. Following is a list of the names of the members of this Association. As we receive news of their whereabouts and welfare, we will share it, either through the Newsletter or via email. Prayer uplifts and supports those in need, and reassures them that they are not alone. Let us keep them all in our hearts:



Oblate Associates of New Orleans -  
Commitment Day, November 2004

Adalin Ardoin, Jr.  
Richard G. Barber  
Elizabeth Brock  
Ann Carter  
Joseph Casanova  
Anna B. Compass (Past  
Chairperson)  
Dolores S. Frank

Karen M. Grimes  
Patricia Higgenbotham  
Geraldine Hurel  
Carol Jackson  
Ava Kay Taylor Jones  
Maria E. Labry  
Juan Ramon Lainez  
Ruby Lancelin  
Lois C. Lawrence

Patricia Lute  
Ethel B. Morgan  
Eileen Pequeno  
Christine Romalewski  
Cecil Jean Wheeler, Chairperson  
Jo Ann Woods  
Fr. Mike Amesse, OMI  
Fr. Tony Rigoli, OMI

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Herminio Alignay (Chula Vista, California): [Hermienena.alignay@cox.net](mailto:Hermienena.alignay@cox.net)

Cecil Wheeler (New Orleans, Louisiana)

Alice Harrington (Lowell, Massachusetts)

Mary Jo Quinn (San Antonio, Texas)

Patty Lapihuska (Northern Virginia): [Plapihus@gmu.edu](mailto:Plapihus@gmu.edu)

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