



**Third Year of the Oblate Triennium:
Mission, Vow of Obedience and *Evangelii Gaudium***

15. THE LAITY, PEOPLE OF GOD AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES.

SETTING:

For this meeting, the community may choose to invite lay people or other collaborators. The animator of the meeting arranges the place so that everyone is comfortably seated in a circle to facilitate prayer and sharing. A candle, Bible, Oblate cross can be placed at the center of the group.

MOTIVATION:

From the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the commitment in the Church is a matter of all the baptized. It is necessary that every baptized person has a place in the Church. We need every son of God to feel comfortable in ecclesial communion as old, young, women, rich and poor.

SONG:

The animator can choose an appropriate song in relation to the theme of the meeting.

PRAYER:

THE WORD OF GOD: *Acts of the Apostles 2: 43-47*

RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD: *Psalm 62*

The first Christian fellowship begins with listening to the Apostles who were witnesses of Christ. This primitive community was convinced that Christ is their Savior. This conviction leads to the communion of prayer and sharing of bread, and the common good. It does not limit itself only to sharing of common goods but strengthening the unity of heart. The meaning is not limited to social assistance, nor a common ideology or a feeling of solidarity, but sharing the Gospel and of all the goods they have received from God through Christ Jesus in the apostolic community.

OBLATE TEXT:

Constitution 3

The community of the Apostles with Jesus is the model of their lives; he had united the Twelve around him in order to make them his companions and to send them (cf. Mk 3: 14). The call and the presence of the Lord among the Oblates today unite them in charity and obedience in order to relive the Apostles' unity with him and their common mission in his Spirit.

Constitution 48

An apostolic community, whose members are engaged in a process of mutual evangelization is the normal place of Oblate formation. They support and encourage each other, creating an atmosphere of trust and freedom, they invite each other to a commitment of more and more deeper.

OBLATE COMMUNITY

Co-operator of the Saviour: "What more sublime than that of their Institute! Their founder is Christ, the Son of God himself; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be co-operators of the Saviour, the co- redeemers of mankind; and although, given their small current number and the most pressing needs of the peoples around them, they must currently confine their zeal to the poor of our countryside and ambition must embrace in their desires, the vast expanse of the earth." 1818

GOING DEEPER INTO THE THEME: Inspired by EG No. 102-104, 119-121

The Laity, People of God: as Missionary Disciples.

"The Church who evangelizes is the people of God including all its members – laity, priests and religious. It is urgent that we accord the laity their full responsibilities. It is equally urgent that we help form them for mission. This must be a priority. Everyone who is baptized is called to be an evangelizer." Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the New Millennium, #13.

In 1998, when the delegates to the 33rd General Chapter wrote those words, they obviously did not have *'Evangelii Gaudium'* in hand. Nor, most likely, fifteen years later in 2013, did Pope Francis have *'Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the New Millennium'* by his side as he was penning his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. Yet the sentiments expressed therein are remarkably similar. *"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples,"* writes Pope Francis. *"All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples" [EG 120].*

That the church is the entire People of God; that there is a co-responsibility for mission and ministry within the Church, shared among laity, priests and religious: that all the baptized are

called to be evangelizers; these are insights that are embedded in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, upheld by Pope Francis and embraced by the Oblates. One can argue, however, that these are insights still not sufficiently realized in the 21st century Church. *“At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places,”* [EG 102], Pope Francis notes. He cites many reasons: lack of formation for the laity; an excessive clericalism that limits the possibilities for the laity and excludes them from decision-making; a view of ministry for the laity that sees it limited to church activities and not connected to transformation in the world; the failure in Church circles to create broader opportunities for an more incisive female presence [EG 102, 103]. It is, Pope Francis declares, a situation that needs changing: *“It is insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for the personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized”* [EG 120].



The call is crystal clear. The question is, “Who has ears to hear?” Oblates have always worked closely with the people, calling forth their gifts and empowering them for mission. As early as 1986, they were reflecting the insights of Vatican II: *“Oblates are called to involve themselves more fully in promoting the mission of the laity, especially in the issues of the meaning of baptism and the royal priesthood of the faithful”* [Missionaries in Today’s World (MTW), # 73]. It included sensitivity to the situation of women: *“We shall be attentive to the aspirations of women and the demands they are making in respect to their place in the world and in the Church. We shall support their participation in decision-making in the areas of pastoral ministry and mission”* [MTW # 79]. Responding to an expressed need from the laity for a closer connection to the Oblates and their charism [Witnessing as Apostolic Community (WAC) # 40], subsequent Chapters encouraged Oblate units to deepen such relationships by developing Lay Associations. These Associations, Rule 37a makes clear, were for the purpose of mission: *“In order to live more intensely the mission of evangelization according to the Oblate charism, some lay people gather in associations.”*

Men and women, the baptized, taking up their role as evangelizers, in service to Christ, the Church and the world: is this not what Pope Francis is calling us to? Around the world, men and women, moved by the Oblate charism, are responding as Associates to that call and their request to the Oblates is specific: “. . . a request from the laity for a closer communion with the Oblates, a communion characterized by a co-responsible sharing in the mission of evangelization of the most abandoned..¹” Delegates of the 35th Chapter heard Associates ask them: “Can you see the laity as partners with whom together you face the challenges of evangelization in different cultures, and with whom you find the most effective solutions?”

What might it take to truly see the laity as partners? New needs require new means, Eugene wrote. Could such new means include a willingness to invite laity to come closer to us in community as well as a commitment to provide formation for them? Might we be asked to relinquish clerical authority and power in a spirit of service? Are we being asked to provide genuine support for the legitimate demands of women?

Eyes to see and ears to hear. As we engage the third year of the Triennium Reflection process, we consider the virtue of Obedience in service of Mission. Obedience implies a deep listening and we might ask, “How well we are listening?” Concretely, how do we support the insights of Vatican II, Pope Francis, and our own documents when we hear a request from the baptized for a co-responsible sharing in the mission of evangelization? How willing are we to acknowledge that the Oblate charism belongs to the church and we are happy that lay people feel called to share it [WAC 40]? How prepared are we to carry out the promise of Witnessing as Apostolic Community: “In a spirit of creativity and concerted action, we will continue to explore structures for communion that are at the service of mission [WAC 41]. What conversion of heart is needed?

“Everyone who is baptized is called to be an evangelizer,” EPM notes [# 13] and Oblates, with evangelization at the heart of the charism, take up the challenge of helping that to happen. (Sandra Prather HOMI)

TIME FOR SILENT REFLECTION:

SHARING OUR FAITH:

From the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope thinks of the primitive community. The Church progresses in unity and communion of its members and everyone finds his place. In the communion of the Church, there are no excluded and each one is at the service of his brothers. The Oblates must share their lives to the service of the members. Their charisms must not be limited in the closed circle of their units but in sanctification of the peoples, children, young, old, sick, prisoners, immigrants. At the service of humanity

COMMITMENT: « Cor unum et anima una »(1850)

¹ Mr. Vincenzo Teodori, 35th Chapter, Oblates and Associates Commission Address to the Chapter.

We strongly urge in the Lord each and every member of our congregation as very dear son in Christ: that by the grace of God they renew themselves in the spirit of their vocation, that without the protection of our very loving Immaculate Mother, they undertake work ever more important and more effective for the greater glory of God and the salvation of the most abandoned souls. Keeping in mind these words (beautiful summary of all our rules). “All united by the bonds of the most intimate charity under the direction of superiors, they form one heart and one soul.”

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTENTIONS:

Together God makes us find the path of unity,
Together God saw us walk all eternity,
Thank you for all your gifts, Lord, thank you for this beautiful day.
Endless we will tell you, Lord, thank you for so much love.
-Together we'll all go tied to the same yoke,
Together help us every day to be just in you.
Here to unite our hearts without any return,
And ready to serve you, Lord, behold all our love.

FINAL PRAYER: Our Father....

BLESSING AND SONG:

The Animator asks someone to invoke a blessing and then intones an appropriate song.