

Oblate Lay Associates Team 37th Chapter 2022

Pilgrims of Hope in Communion



The Lay Team invited to the OMI 37th General Chapter represented the 5 Regions: Asia Oceania, Africa Madagascar, Latin America, Canada - United States and Europe. They arrived in Nemi, Rome 13th September and worked together until 17th September. Their task was to reflect on the key points arising from the 5 Regional Reports which were presented on the third day of the 2nd Oblate Lay Associations Congress 27th – 29th May 2022 (2nd OLAC). The Lay Team then prepared their Presentation, which spoke of the experience of the Congress and concluded with proposed Recommendations to the General Chapter. The presentation delivered on Saturday 17th September 2022 was received with a standing ovation by the Chapter.

The week spent together was a blessed and profound experience of communion where the Lay Team were received as part of the Oblate family; accepted, called and sent forth. We said our goodbyes and left Nemi on Sunday 18th September carrying with us a sense of wonderment at what we had been privileged to have experienced together.

The following is a summary of the presentation given by The Lay Team, the full 9 page presentation is available on request. It speaks of the experience of the 2nd OLAC and presents the recommendations proposed by the Lay Team at the 37th General Chapter. These recommendations resulted from the key points arising from the 5 Regional Reports on the three themes: Communion, Formation and Mission.

Summary of the Presentation of Oblate Lay Associates Team at 37th Chapter 17.09.22

We personally experienced the great blessings of 2nd OLAC that we are sure will endure: the building of a network of relationships among us, vowed and lay Oblates from around the Oblate world – across Regions, Units and Missions.

Mandated by the last chapter, postponed because of the pandemic, and given a very different shape because of on-going Covid restrictions; this 2nd OLAC Congress was a moment of grace. It was truly an experience of the Spirit! Despite the challenges, communication technology enabled vowed and lay Oblates from across the globe to work together to prepare and facilitate the Congress. They were united through the charism of St Eugene and embraced the ambitious Oblate initiative they were tasked with.

We are thankful for the presence through the three days of Congress of Fr Louis, Superior General and Father Peter Stoll who shepherded us through the preparations, the Congress itself, and who has continued to accompany us through the General Chapter. We also want to mention our gratitude to Father David Lopez Moreno, our faithful guide and translator over months of meetings.

Over the three days of Congress, virtually and in the 5 Regions, participants gathered to Celebrate, Connect and be Commissioned afresh for Mission. Even within our unique contexts, we discovered anew that we are one Oblate family. Throughout the three days, we listened to inspired presentations on the history and spirituality of Oblate Lay Associations. We heard personal testimonies by diverse members of both Lay Associates and vowed Oblates.

The participants took up the major task of articulating hopes for the future, focusing on the three themes *Communion, Formation and Mission*. Consultative work had already been done in the months preceding Congress. Over 3,000 laity, from all the regions, participated in reflection on these themes. Delegates from each of the 5 Regions had the opportunity to present their hopes to the entire Congress on the final day.

The Congress ended on a high note with our Superior General blessing us all and sending us forth as Oblate People, to carry the Good News. The collective feeling of the participants, expressed over and over, was gratitude for the event, and the profound hope that we don't wait 25 years until the next one!

Recommendations proposed by the Lay Team to the 37th General Chapter

When we listen to the ideas and hopes of the members of Oblate Lay Associations from around the world regarding Communion, Formation and Mission we see there is so much life to celebrate. We also hear so many wonderful ideas and recommendations to help the Oblate family grow and be stronger.

The Congress delegates, however, see the need for structures of support to bring these to fruition. In the light of that, we present to the Chapter some specific recommendations:

1. We recommend a **permanent** General Commission made up of Oblates and members of Oblate Lay Associations be established.
2. We think a new General Service or an Office for Oblate Laity linked with the General Commission would be useful. We wonder if this would be possible.
3. The General Commission and the General Service, if approved, would have the task of analysing and carry forward the Congress recommendations regarding Communion, Formation and Mission.
4. We recommend that Commissions be established in each Region, composed of members of Lay Associations and Vowed Oblates. The experience of networking established through the 2OLAC with the Preparatory Teams and delegates at Unit level are a wonderful foundation to build upon. Regional Commissions should be connected to the General Commission.
5. It is recommended that every Unit have a coordinating group to foster relationships within the various members of the Oblate Lay Associations within their Unit. These coordinating groups should be linked to the Regional Commissions.

6. Sensitive to the concerns around the identity of members of Lay Associations, we recommend that the General Commission study and ‘promote a common vision in the Congregation’ as established in Rule 37a.

Summary of the Conclusion of the Presentation

PILGRIMS WITH YOU

As we worked as a team on this report and considered the recommendations to be made, we could not help but feel that this is a *Kairos* moment for us all. Consider our beloved Church, Pope Francis has called us to be synodal - to know our deepest identity as Church is to always be ‘on the way’ walking together as the entire people of God **together**.

Consider how the Chapter theme: ‘*Pilgrims of hope in Communion*’ so beautifully echoes this call of Pope Francis. The logo captures it in an image: we see a company of pilgrims, travelling the road together. Different walks of life, under the power of the Holy Spirit, on the move.

And finally, we consider the 2nd **OLAC** held just 4 months ago. What was it about EXCEPT the way we walk together as an Oblate family?

If ever there was a time to listen deeply to where the Spirit might be leading us, the time is NOW! Because at the Congress, the Oblate laity were SEEN in ways not possible before their voices were HEARD in ways not possible before. What we saw and heard was that the Spirit has been diligently at work across the years around the world forming a vibrant Oblate family. It already exists! And the question that is before us now is “What are we - what are you, the Chapter - going to do with that?” Nurture it? Support it? How?

Can you respond with the daring that St Eugene de Mazenod calls us to, where he says, “*Where there are new needs, we create new means.*” How to hear the voices of the many men, women and youth who, deeply in love with Jesus Christ and desiring to follow him more closely, find themselves doing so on an Oblate path.

How to offer the strong arm and solid food for the journey, that will set the Oblate charism free in the church and the world? We simply need to keep moving forward together. It helps us to remember the quote from famous poem by Spanish author Antonio Machado “*Walker there is no path, the path is made by walking*”.

We take the next right step and then the next ... and this is the way we walk together... with the cross, carrying the cross. All of us following Jesus who is the WAY... As we navigate this unknown path, we also remember, the future has a name and its name is HOPE.

Today we are placing our hope in you!

Praise be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

Pauline Thomas 9.11.22
Member of the Lay Team from the European Region