

# New leadership team will guide Oblates

The year 2009 represents 180 years of love, service and dedication to the church community by the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The Africentric column of The Catholic Review highlighted the event with five articles on the historical happenings within the congregation.

In 2009, the congregation, the oldest of women of African descent in the world, ushered a new leadership team. Having been guided by 18 superior generals since 1829, the new group consists of, as in the past; a superior general, her assistant, called the vicar, and three councilors. Their primary duty is to oversee and support the sisters in the present-day ministries of the order.

The primary focus of the Oblate Sisters of Providence is the education of children of color, but no other race or culture is to be excluded. Carved on the back wall of the chapel at the motherhouse in Catonsville are the words, "Go therefore and teach all nations." The Oblates have been faithful to that mandate for generations. Teaching is not only educational, but social, cultural and especially spiritual, thus giving birth to a multiplicity of other ministries.

Oblate Sister Mary Alice Chineworth is the oldest living superior general. Today she operates the switchboard every morning until lay employees arrive. Then off to her office where Sister Alice completes a variety of clerical tasks. Oblate Sister Mary Charlotte Marshall, another former superior general, is director of evangelization at St. Gregory the Great parish. Oblate Sister Claudina Sanz is founder and director of Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange Center for girls, a successor of our 1828 project, "Children of the House." Sister Claudina also served as superior general. Our most recent former superior general, Oblate Sister Annette Beecham, is director of the Oblate Associates program and is awaiting the announcement of two other ministries.

The 2009 leadership team well represents the cultural diversity of the community. Oblate Sister Mary Alexis Fisher, superior general and sister of the late Josephite

Bishop Carl Fisher, former pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish and later auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, is from Pascagoula, Miss. Serving as vicar is Oblate Sister M. Clarice Proctor, a former teacher and catechist from southern Maryland. Councilors include Oblate Sister M. Constance Fenwick, also from southern Maryland, Sister Dora Fernández from Costa Rica and Sister Trinita Baeza from Cuba.

Sister Mary Annette, as she departed from leadership, shared these words: “We are still noticeably participating in the church on different levels, while still challenging the disease of racism by word, deed and presence. We are still present to the people of God and especially to those who have always looked to us for guidance, advice, spiritual help and overall support. Still, the Oblates teach as Mother Lange did, holistically. We have always demonstrated interest in the whole child intellectually, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Tender is the call ... Awesome indeed is the entrustment.”

As Sister Mary Alexis Fisher leads the administration into a new era, she offers the following comment: “We, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, will continue to respond to the needs of the time with complete dependence on God. We have come a mighty long way and we have a mighty long way to go. We are not afraid to venture forth, to begin anew and to courageously embark upon the future. Our foundress, Mother Mary Lange, in one of her very few documented statements, ‘Hasten to the Blessed Sacrament,’ says it all. In the 180 years, through trials and tribulations, Oblate Sisters have hastened to the Blessed Sacrament and have hastened to do God’s will. We will continue to do likewise.”

Quoting a message received: “The staff and board of the Archdiocesan Office of African American Catholic Ministries congratulates the new leadership team and offers a multitude of thanks and a mountain of gratitude to the former superiors for their years of service to God’s people and the Church of Baltimore for the past 180 years.” Deo Gratias!

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