

CONSTITUTIONS.<sup>10</sup>

J.M.J.

The Oblates Sisters of Providence are a religious society of coloured women, established in Baltimore with the approbation of the most reverend Archbishop. The Oblates renounce the world to consecrate themselves to God and to the Christian education of young girls of colour. They make no vows, but merely a promise of obedience to the Reverend Director to be appointed by the Most Revd. Archbishop, and to the Superior whom they shall choose from among themselves, hence their annual engagement, instead of profession, is called Oblation.

Though all the Sisters of Providence are on terms of equality, though all have in view the same object, viz: the glory of God, their own sanctification and that of the children entrusted to their care; yet, the good order of the house necessarily requires that a Superior be appointed and as in all well regulated communities the Superior is regarded as holding the place of God himself, the Sisters of Providence must entertain for her whom they shall choose the most profound respect; they will receive her orders with submission and on all occasions have /21/ recourse in her with an entire confidence. She will be named by the Director and will continue in office for three years.

The feast of St. John the Baptist (the 24th of June) is the day appointed for the nomination of the Superior at the expiration of the three years. The Director will assemble the Sisters, the votes will be taken and if he thinks proper to confirm their choice, she who shall have received the majority of votes will be instituted superior for the three following years.<sup>11</sup>

In case of the death of the Superior the same thing will take place.

## DUTIES OF THE SUPERIOR

All permissions are granted by the Superior; in a word, the government of the house is entrusted to her; yet she will undertake nothing of importance without the approbation of the Director and without having notified the ~~other~~ sisters [assistant and counsellor] of her intentions. She will consider it a duty to consult them on all occasions but they regarding her as a mother, will esteem it a happiness to have it in their power, by their obedience, to practice a virtue so dear to Our Lord. The Superior will entertain for ~~them~~ [all the sisters] a sincere charity. She will receive, with pleasure whatever advice they may have to offer; she will even yield, with meakness and humility to their sentiments in as much as is consistent, with the good order of the /22/ house. It will be her duty to see that the sisters be not overburdened with occupations, that they take sufficient repose when necessary; that in health or in sickness they never be left destitute of those little comforts which may be necessary; in a word, she will conceive for them all the tenderness of a mother; she will never speak to them, but with mildnest and affection and even should they be guilty of some faults, she will never reprimand them in public, but seek some private opportunity of making the necessary observations.

## DUTIES OF THE SISTERS

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<sup>10</sup> Version anglaise.

<sup>11</sup> [ now the feast of St. Benedict, 2d sunday in October.]

The sisters will strive of the utmost of their power to observe the rule of the house; in this each one will endeavour to give an example of the most perfect obedience. Their sanctification depends on the fidelity with which they observe their rules. Their great object shall be to entertain amongst themselves a perfect union and for this end they will act with unanimity, with simplicity and openness of heart. They will be careful however, lest this freedom and candour proceed to an excess of familiarity which would cause them to fail in the expressions of mutual esteem which they owe to each other. They will all act with the same spirit observing the same rules of conduct. They will never contradict /23/ each other in presence of the children, but will reserve for a private opportunity any observations they may think necessary.

They will endeavour to act with strict impartiality towards all the children entrusted to their care, carefully avoiding those little preferences which they might be naturally enclined to feel for their relations, or the children of their friends. They will bear in mind that they are bound by an obligation of justice and charity to every one of the children of the school.

2° To preserve the good order of the house, the sisters will take all their meals in common, and will never presume to invite or detain any one to eat without the permission of the superior. They will never go out without her permission and must always be accompanied by another sister or by one of the boarders, to be chosen by the superior. They will make no useless visits. The Superior herself will be subject to the last two regulations.

3° The Director and the superior alone being charged with the temporal concerns of the house, the sisters will undertake nothing, will borrow nothing under any pretext whatsoever, without the express permission of the Director. They will dispose of nothing and will receive no presents without obtaining permission and as there is no private property in the house, whatever /24/ they may receive will be for the common use of the sisters.

4° They will never change their confessor or take a new one without the express permission of the director who, alone, is charged to appoint or chose the confessor whom he will suppose the best talented to direct the consciences of the Oblates.

## OF POSTULANTS

1° As the institution of the Oblates Sisters of Providence depends, for support only on the public charity and the little income arising from the boarders and a few day-scholars who pay; it would be impossible to continue this good work, for want of funds, if a certain sum of money were not required from all, who for the future, shall desire to be admitted into the society. This sum fixed, in the beginning, at four hundred dollars, may at the desire of the whole community and with the consent of the Director, be increased or diminished, according to the capacity and means of the candidate, or the services she may be able to render to the institution.

2° To be admitted on trial, unless the candidate be perfectly known by the Director or the Superior, she must produce a well authenticated certificate from the most Revd. Archbishop or from some of the priests of the diocese, proving that she has lived for a considerable time, in a Christian and edifying manner, that she is /25/ free from debts and detained in the world by no hindrance whatsoever.

3° The trials consists in spending one year in the institution; if, at the end of that time, the candidate still persists in her vocation, and has deserved the approbation of the sisters both

with respect to her good conduct and the services which she may be able to render the institution and obtains their unanimous vote, she will be admitted to make her oblation or annual promise.

4° When a candidate has been admitted into the number of sisters, whatever she may have brought with her into the society, ceases to belong to her. She will make a donation of it, in writing to the community. But if, afterwards, she receives any thing from her relations or friends by succession or donation she will have the right of disposing of it as she thinks proper, in favour of her other relations or friends. If she disposes of it in behalf of the society it will become common property and cease to belong to her.

5° However, as the promises made by the Oblates are obligatory for one year only, and in case any one become disgusted with the holy state she has embraced, she is at liberty to return into the world; should this misfortune happen to any of them /26/ at the end of the first year of her oblation, the society will be bound to restore whatever articles she may have brought with her or their value according to the estimation made at her admittance into the society. After the second year she can claim nothing.

6° The same rule will hold, should the community be compelled to dismiss one of the sisters either for want of vocation, or for any other cause whatsoever. That is, after the first year, she will have a right to take whatever she may have brought with her or the value thereof. After two years she will no longer have a right to any thing.<sup>12</sup>

## OF EMPLOYMENTS

The employments will be divided amongst the sisters, by the director and the superior, in such a manner that each one may have sufficient occupations and yet no one be overburdened. The sisters will apply themselves with love and fidelity to the employments assigned to them, without desiring those of others: but on the contrary, esteeming themselves happy and highly honoured by the lowest offices of the house, they must be fully persuaded that in a community all employments tend to the same object, the glory of God, their sanctification, and the honour of the community. To encourage themselves, they will call to mind the lesson given by our Divine Saviour /27/ to the blessed Martha whose employment was very different from that of her sister Mary, although both were most dear to him, that is to say, there is but one thing necessary and which alone should occupy them, to do the will of God, which is manifested to them by that of their superiors.

In case of sickness or absence of the sister Superior, one of the sisters, appointed by the Director, will hold her place.

## ORDER OF THE DAY

at 4 1/2 Rising, during the whole year  
50 minutes after 4, prayer and meditation.  
5 1/2 mass

On account of the distance of the house from the church, on week days during winter, only half of the sisters will assist at mass. In the fine season (that is from the month of April until October) all will assist every day, in such a manner, however, that some of the sisters may always remain in the house, to preserve good order, to assist at the rising of the boarders and at prayer.

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<sup>12</sup> Cet article ne se trouve pas dans le texte français.

at 6 o'clock during the whole year, rising of the boarders. /28/ Unless they have a particular permission to rise with the sisters, to assist at their prayers and meditation. This permission, however, will never be granted but to the largest and most pious among them.

The study room, the passages and the stairs will be swept every day before breakfast.

at 7 1/2 Breakfast.

1° As all the meals are taken in common, the tables will be equally divided. At each table there will be one sister or two, to maintain order and preside over the children.

2° As all partiality or distinctions of persons is odious in a community, the superior will dispose the tables with the most strict impartiality both in regard of the sisters and of the scholars.

at 9 Classes until half after twelve.

They will be commenced by the invocation of the Holy Ghost and the Ave Maria and concluded by the Sub tuum.

at 1/4 before 1. Beads and the reading of a chapter of the New Testament. The exercise will be concluded by the Angelus.

at 1 1/4 Dinner, followed by recreation

at 2 1/2 Class until 4 1/2.

at 4 1/1 recreation until 5.

at 5. Study or needle work. /29/

at 6. The visit of the blessed Sacrement.

From the month of March until the month of Octob. if the weather permit, half of the sisters and boarders will go alternatly, every other day, to visit the B. Sacrament either to the chapel of the Semi. or to one of the other churches of the city.

Those who remain at home will occupy themselves, during this hour, either in serving or in some other useful employment.

at 7. Spiritual Reading

at 7 1/2. Supper followed by half an hour of recreation

at 8 1/2. Night prayers.

They will be concluded by reading a chapter, or if it is long, half a chapter of the following of Christ or the imitation of the Blessed Virgin.

After night prayers until seven o'clock the next morning, silence will be observed.

at 9. The doors of the house will be locked, and the keys deposited in the room of the Superior.

N. B. Persons who may occupy apartments in the house will be bound to a strict conformity to this rule, which the good order of the community requires.

## SUNDAYS AND FESTIVALS

The exercises will be the same as during the week /30/ except that the time of class morning and evening will be employed partly in assisting at the offices of the church which all the boarders will attend with the sisters, so that, however, some one may always remain at home. After returning from church, until half after twelve o'clock, there will be recreation.

at 12 1/2. The usual exercises until dinner.

In the afternoon also, after returning from church until the Spiritual Reading at 7 there will be recreation.

The rest of the evening, as usual.

## DAYS OF RECREATION

1° The 2d of July, the feast of the Visitation of the blessed Virgin, this will be the principal feast of the institution, which is placed, in a special manner, under the protection of the blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. As the Patronage of St. Joseph falls always on the third Sunday after Easter: there will be no extraordinary recreation.

2° The ninth of March, the feast of St. Frances, Foundress of the Oblates at Rome, under whose protection the school is established.

3° All the feasts of obligation.

4° From the ~~Wednesday in holy week~~ [from Easter] until the Tuesday after Easter, inclusively /30/ 5° The two days after Christmas.

6° All the Saturdays of the year.

7° the vacation will commence ~~at the eve of the Assumption~~ [at the end of July] and continue until the 1st of September unless it falls on Sunday. [During this time they are to make 5 days retreat.]

1° As time is precious, and according to the order of their exercises, the Oblates have none to spare, they will receive no useless visits. Only those of the parents of the children, who may desire to communicate something with respect to them or to inquire concerning their progress or well-meaning persons who take an interest in the prosperity of the institution. The sisters will consider it a duty to act toward every one with affability, politeness and respect. They will be careful, above all things never to give offence to any one.

2° As the spirit of poverty and disengagement should be the foundation of their institution, the sisters will consider themselves happy to possess only what is absolutely necessary, to wear the most common clothing and the most ordinary materials the strictest economy is particularly recommended to them.

As soon as they will be admitted in the house /31/ and before they have made their promises and be admitted among the number of sisters, they will wear the dress of the society which will be of black woolen stuff for winter and summer (to the exception of the black band of the cap and the cross the admitted Oblate wear).

They will observe an exact uniformity in their manner of dressing, so that there may be no distinction among them.

3° The door and windows of the first story which open on the street will be constantly closed neither the sisters, nor the scholars will ever remain at the door or windows in front of the house.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1° As the existence of their society depends on the approbation of the most revd. Archbishop, the Oblates will entertain for him the most profound respect, and when he will honour them with his presence, if he seems to desire it, they will enter into the most minute details of whatever concerns their institution, with frankness and openness of heart. They will receive his counsels with humility and will follow them as far as is in their power. The discipline of the small schools in the different dioceses /32/ is an object of solicitude to the Bishops, since it is in them, that the souls with whose salvation they are charged, imbibe the first principle of religion.

2° Those sisters who will be appointed to teach, must possess a sufficient knowledge of the different branches of education over which they preside: for how could they possibly instruct the children intrusted to their care, in the things of which they themselves would be ignorant? They will spare no pains to render themselves capable of fulfilling their duty in this respect. This is a truth which needs no proof nor explanation and to which they will all assent without difficulty.

3° An extensive knowledge, it is true, is not necessary for the school of the Oblates; reading, writing, and the first rules of Arithmetic are sufficient; but at least these must be well known that the teacher may be able to impart them to others. In case of necessity, a stonder capacity will not be a cause of exclusion from the society, as it is hoped that exercise will render the employment more easy: and in this case the sisters must spare no pains to render themselves perfect in all that relates to their charge.

The same thing must be said of those who will be charged with instructing the children in sewing, embroidery and washing and with much /34/ greater reason, of those whose duty will be to instruct them in the first principles of religion. Negligence in any of this points might become a considerable fault, render their labours fruitless, retain children badly instructed too long at school, to the prejudice of their family which has need of their services and dismiss them, in the end, knowing almost nothing after several years and considerable expenses always very burdensome to persons of the lower order.

4° The sisters will be careful to require from the children all the respect due to their situation: their endeavours to do good, will be fruitless unless they acquire this respect, not by a ridiculous excess of gravity, not by a forbidding air of authority and hanglosiness, but by a grave and modest deportment which is equally opposed to the sallies of humors and passion and to those little fondnesses and familiarities which serve only to create contempt. Whatever relates to the accomplishment of ones duty is a matter of conscience it is a subject of more importance than is sometime imagined. The sisters will frequently examine themselves on these different points.

5° The same thing may be observed of patience of which teachers stand in need to support the dulness and defects of their pupils, it will be the duty of the Oblates to correct these failings in the children entrusted to their /35/ care, an end which they can never accomplish by any other means than by a spirit of patience and mildness will they pretend that this is only a perfection which does not bind in conscience? they must remember that whatever conduces to the end of such vocation or state is more than a simple perfection and that defects which oppose that end are real sins.

6° The surest means of succeeding in this, as well as in all other respects, is to gain the affections of the children, this, the sisters must endeavour to accomplish, not by a weak

condescension or by an excessive indulgence which suffers every things but by mildness and affability endeavouring to gain the hearts of the children.

7° The Oblates must not fail to excite the interest of parents for the education of their children frequently they excuse themselves from sending their children to school, under the false pretext of their poverty or the need they have of their services. The Oblates will effectually prevail on such parents by courteous and engaging manners, by taking a lively interest in their concerns, and even by paying them some visits. The attention which they will pay to those who entrust to them the care of their children, the correspondance which they entertain with them, to inquire concerning the /36/ character of their children, their inclinations, and the manner of correcting their defects, will naturally excite the emulation of others, in the hope of receiving the same attention and the same services. It may be objected that this is only to seek for new labors and fatigue; that they have already enough made for that, they are devoted to all those for whom the school is established. If they do not carry their zeal so far, at least they must carefully avoid any thing which might tend to discourage parents from sending their children to school or the children themselves from attending it.

8° The Oblates will remember that by the oblation which they have made to God of their time and their person they are devoted to every one; that they are continuously under the eyes of the public which consider them as more enlightened than others, and as true servant of God, their faults and defects, as soon as they become exterior and sensible cannot escape observation. Scandal is easily excited, and bad exemple in a state in which we are bound in a special manner to give good example, might be productive of the most evil consequences. They will not meddle [?] in the concerns of others, they will take no share in the disputes of their relations and friends, they will not take the liberty of contemning /37/ others, though these may be really wrong. They will endeavour as much as possible to live at peace with every one; they must strive to conciliate the good will of all, in order to acquire the confidence of the parents among whom they must make no distinction. They will never inquire of the children what passes in their families, or the concerns of their parents, this would only serve to acquire for themselves the reputation of spies. It would be, moreover a most culpable abuse of the confidence reposed in them by the children and of the authority of their situation.

9° The Oblates must be particularly careful to instil into their scholars certain principles of virtue becoming their situation. For example, the love of labour and of order which would induce them to leave no moment of *the day* unemployed; a careful attention to avoid the frequentation of persons of a different sex, that innocent bashfulness which is the principal ornament of their sex and that exterior modesty which is the surest preservation of virtue.

The object of their institute is one of great importance, greater, indeed, than might at first appear to those who would only glance at the advantages, which it is calculated to impart to a great portion of the human race, and through it, to society /38/ at large. In fact, these girls will either become mother of families, or be introduced, as servants, into decent houses.

In the first case, the solid virtue, the religious and moral principles, which they will have acquired, when in this school, will be carefully transmitted to their children, and become hereditary in their families. Installer of the happy influence, which the example of virtuous parents has on their remotest lineage, in this humble and naturally dutiful class of society, are numerous.

As to such as are to become servants, they will be intrusted with menial offices, and the care of young children in the most respectable families. How important will it not be, for those families, that these girls should then, have imbibed religious principles, and been trained up in habits of modesty, honesty and integrity? How valuable will such servants be to their masters.

10° As these regulations would be of no effect, were not those for whose sanctification they are formed, firmly convinced of their importance, every one of the sisters must consider them as the orders of the holy will of God, and endeavour, in this light to observe them with such exactitude and attention, that she may, by her fidelity, draw down on herself and on the community, all the graces and blessings which God promises to sincere obedience.

So great is the punctuality required /39/ in the observance of the rules, that no one will be dispensed without an express permission of the director.

In order that they may be well known and faithfully observed, they will be read twice every year, viz. at the commencement of the year in September and the week after Easter and likewise at the reception of any new sister moreover every month at the meeting of the sisters a part of the said rules will be read by the director or the superior.

A.M.D.G.