



PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION
37th General Chapter 2022

L.J.C. et M.I.

**The Letter of Superior General to the Congregation on the Anniversary of the Papal
Approval of the Constitutions and Rules**

Dear Brother Oblates, and all our Sisters and Brothers committed to living the Oblate Charism,

We celebrate with great joy and gratitude the 196th anniversary of the papal approbation of our Constitutions and Rules as the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate! May we share in the profound conviction of Eugene de Mazenod that this approval was the work of divine Providence. St. Eugene insisted on this in a letter to the Oblates in France on February 18, 1826. In the same letter, filled with the recognition of God's intervention on our behalf, he recognized: *"Somewhat puny as we are, being weak and few in number, we nonetheless have an existence in the Church no less than that of the most celebrated bodies, the most holy societies."*¹ It was with eyes of deep faith, that Eugene saw and believed the Gospel paradox: God chose what appeared to be weak and insignificant for the vast mission of evangelizing the poor.

We commemorate this anniversary in the context of the ongoing pandemic which afflicts the world, especially the poor, and which is causing much anxiety, frustration and marginalization. This situation demands flexibility to accept and adapt to changes in our lifestyle and ministries imposed by conditions beyond our control. We witness increasing division in many societies and in the Church. The abuse scandal in the Church continues to reverberate in the media. Massive migration, fed by religious persecution, war, economic injustice and climate change plague the world. In this context, we recognize the need to cultivate the capacity for patience, interiority, personal discipline, and creativity. The crisis calls us to conversion, and challenges us to be firmly rooted in God and in community.

In this uncertain scenario, we are preparing for our 37th General Chapter which will, hopefully, take place here in Italy, in September. The Chapter Commissioner, Fr. Tom Ovalle, arrived here in Rome at the end of January and is overseeing the preparations along with the Pre-capitular Commission. Materials for animation will soon be available for the Congregation. As you already know, the theme of the Chapter is: **PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION**. This is a bold statement, given the context in which we are living. Each noun in this phrase opens up many significant images, biblical and ecclesial, as well as stories and wisdom from folk culture. The theme will provide us with many points of departure for faith sharing and animation as we prepare for the Chapter.

My brothers and sisters, please make the preparation for the 37th General Chapter a significant dimension of your Unit's life in the coming months. The General Chapter is the highest authority in the Congregation and a privileged time of community reflection and conversion. Please use the Chapter Prayer, the logo and animation materials to stir up interest and commitment to accompany the preparations for the Chapter. In all your gatherings, be they at the local community level, the district or the Unit level, make time for prayer and reflection on the Chapter theme; tell stories of pilgrimages, of hope and of communion. Share about issues of mission and consecrated life.

Like the synodal process that Pope Francis is calling the Church to practice, the Chapter is a time of community discernment to hear the call of the Lord today, reading the signs of the times. Invite and listen to the input of lay collaborators, young Oblates in formation, and the Oblate Youth groups involved in the mission with youth. Take time to hear the wisdom and perspective of our elders. What are these various groups saying to us? Where are they pointing us to go as missionaries? With what challenges do they present us? In this climate of listening, the Chapter members will make missionary choices regarding evangelization with and of the poor today, for the future of the Congregation.

This year, we celebrate the 196th anniversary of the approval of the CCRR. We are just four years away from our 200th anniversary as a pontifical congregation in the Church. Let us begin to prepare ourselves for this anniversary by taking up our CCRR and confronting our lives with the commitment we have made to follow this rule of life. Our mission will only bear abundant good fruit for the Kingdom if we faithfully live out and deepen our commitment to the evangelical counsels, to living in faith, and to apostolic community. In the 1825 manuscript of his Preface, St. Eugene wrote:

"But it is not enough for them simply to be convinced of the sublime nature of the ministry to which they have been called. The example of the saints and reason itself make it amply clear that the success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body's strength, keeping up its fervour and insuring that it lasts.

Wherefore, while pledging themselves to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire - above all, to the work of the missions, which is the main reason for their union - these priests, joined together in a society, resolve to obey the following Constitutions and Rules; by living them they hope to obtain all the benefits they need for their own sanctification and for the salvation of souls."ⁱⁱⁱ

Our fidelity to the Constitutions and Rules guarantees the fruitfulness of our missionary lives. We pray for one another, that we will be faithful in living this precious charism, a gift from the heart of St. Eugene who passionately loved Christ Jesus, the Church, and the poor. I am sure the Blessed Virgin Mary smiles on us, assisting us in our conversion to live our missionary charism with greater integrity. Happy feast day to all of you.

Louis
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Fr. Louis Lougen, O.M.I.
Superior General



Rome, 11 February 2022

ⁱ *Letters-to-the-Oblates-of-France-1826-1830, February 18, 1826, Eugene de Mazenod to the Oblates in France, p. 40.*

ⁱⁱ *Preface to the Constitutions and Rules, 1825-1826, Eugene de Mazenod*