

Letter of the Superior General to the Congregation for February 17, 2016

Happy feast day! On this February 17th, we celebrate the 190th anniversary of the approbation of our Constitutions and Rules by Pope Leo XII in the context of our 200th anniversary of foundation. The Oblate Triennium this year focuses on the themes of mission and the vow of obedience. The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is guiding us as we listen anew to the awesome call to participate in the mission of the Holy Trinity.

In this special jubilee year I would like to invite us to ponder the Oblate charism which is a great gift and to be deeply grateful for the grace of our vocation as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The Oblate charism, a gift of the Spirit for the entire Church, handed on to us by Eugene de Mazenod, is of vital importance for the Church and for the poor. I am convinced of the significance of our charism today and as we look to the future. On this feast day I would like to share some of my many reasons for gratitude to God for the charism we live. These are also the motives of my immense hope for the future of the Congregation.

I am immensely proud of Oblate priests and Brothers who are very close to the poor all around the world. Oblates are simple, humble, available, and accessible and speak the language of the people. This is something special, entirely unique to us and binds us in a special way to the poor. We have inherited this from Eugene himself and from our first missionaries.

Because we are so close to the poor and most abandoned, we live on the peripheries and this can be dangerous. We live in areas where the poor are abandoned and their fundamental rights often neglected or violated. We are present in places of great tension and conflict and where human lives are constantly in danger. I wish to express our gratitude to all our brother Oblates who persevere in mission in spite of the threat of violence and death. The entire Congregation lives in union of prayer with you and your faithful people who carry out Christ's mission with fortitude and perseverance.

I give thanks for the vitality of our charism expressed in the way Oblates decry injustice, discrimination, violation of human rights, racism, tribalism, sexism and prejudice against the poor, tribal peoples, indigenous peoples, etc. Our Congregation is well known within the Church and outside it for our commitment to the priority of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

I invite us to contemplate anew our holy Oblates and to give thanks to God for these men who show us the path to holiness of life. Faithful to our charism, our Founder and Blessed Joseph Gerard show us the power of grace transforming them over a lifetime into saints who were strikingly human in their holiness. How grateful we are for our Oblate martyrs, Joseph Cebula, and the Oblate Martyrs of Pozuelo and of Laos who witness to radical oblation. It is marvelous to see how young people connect with our holy Oblates!

I am grateful to various Oblate Units and their Major Superiors who have heard the challenge of the Immense Hope Project and the "call to a deep personal and community conversion to Jesus Christ" as called for by the 2010 General Chapter. With great courage, these Units are renewing apostolic community life, mission to the poor and defining clear priorities in light of personnel, finances and the call of the Spirit!

A sign of our new life for which I am very grateful and is happening all over the world is in the new vocational outreach and awareness of our collective responsibility to invite young members to join

us. This is a striking turn around over the last twenty years! Provinces that no longer had a conviction about our future and had stopped inviting young men to join us have questioned this decision and with renewed faith and hope are now working to promote vocation ministry with vision and prophetic courage.

Many young Oblates, deeply convinced of the relevance of the Oblate charism, have pushed to reinvigorate vocations ministry and I am grateful to them for their stamina! We can express our gratitude for the grace of our vocation by supporting the efforts to invite new members to join us. We can stop the trend of diminishment we have experienced over the past years and begin to stabilize our numbers and even grow. This would enable us to respond more adequately to the missionary needs of the Church.

We must recognize and be grateful for the Spirit leading us to embrace the new development, "Mission with Youth," which has a specifically Oblate approach. The Oblate Youth Encounters in connection with World Youth Days have promoted and deepened this dynamic connection between young people and the Oblate charism. It is the Spirit's work!

We also give thanks for the strong attachment to the Oblate charism by many lay people around the globe in a variety of unique and creative ways. This is a vibrant sign of the vitality of the Oblate charism and its ability to attract others. There is a mutually enriching relationship between lay people who live the Oblate charism and vowed Oblates in terms of mission, spirituality and various forms of community relationships.

I give thanks for our older Oblates who continue to live the missionary spirit. Wherever I go, Oblates who have reached a certain age or who endure an illness continue to be interested in the Congregation, concerned with its mission and still involved as much as they can in outreach to the poor and to the Church in need. The fraternal spirit, the charity, the faith and joy with which our elders continue to live their oblation is outstanding. You continue to be Oblate missionaries and you are a real source of grace for the Congregation. Thank you for persevering in your witness of self-giving! I ask our superiors to continue to ensure loving care for our older men, and may all of us frequently visit them and pray for them.

I am proud of so many Oblates whose lives are of service, and who humbly and silently give themselves to God's poor, doing unimaginably good deeds for God's people. These are men of prayer, dedicated to apostolic community and living witnesses of the vows. These are the Oblates who make our Congregation such a wonderful family and who sanctify all of us by their holiness. Their names are not in the headlines or outstanding journals, but they are the faithful witnesses on the front lines of the mission.

In some Congregations there is a great difficulty to find members willing to accept the office of Major Superior. We are blessed with generous and willing men who rise up in complete availability to accept the call to leadership. What a wonderful family spirit we have!

I am grateful for the international Oblate community of Centre Eugene de Mazenod in Aix en Provence which has committed itself to a life of apostolic community and the ministry of charism animation. The Congregation is blessed with the General Service of Oblate Studies and a number of Oblates who work to animate the charism among us in other creative ways. As I recognize with gratitude their labors, I also am deeply grateful for each Oblate who serves the life and mission of the Congregation by their ministry in the General Administration in so many different ways, quietly and faithfully serving here at the General House and around the world. Thank you!

The renewed awareness of the importance to prepare Oblates for formation ministry and the willingness of Major Superiors to free men to be prepared is a great sign of the importance we are giving to formation. I am very grateful to all of our formators who accompany the young men who come to us.

A final thanksgiving I would like to mention is for our relationship to Mary Immaculate, Mother of Marcy. Her protection and guidance makes us the formidable missionaries we are. Her smile of blessing, given to Eugene de Mazenod on August 15, 1822, continues to favor us. We are blessed indeed!

There are many other reasons for rejoicing in the grace of our vocation. In our community celebrations for February 17th I would ask that we continue to name the blessings we have received as a Congregation and to express our thanks to God for our Oblate vocation. Whether this is at the dinner table, in the community room, or during prayer in the chapel, please create a favorable brotherly atmosphere in which everyone can express his gratitude for the grace of belonging to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Happy feast day!

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Father Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General
Rome, January 25, 2016