

# **Letter of the Superior General to the Congregation for the “Oblate Day” - February 17, 2019**

The letter of Dear Brother Oblates, and all our Brothers and Sisters who live the Oblate charism,

Happy feast day to all of you! We celebrate today the 193<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the approval of our Constitutions and Rules by Pope Leo XII. As our Oblate tradition calls us to do, we give thanks for the grace of our vocation. This is a cause for gratitude and joy.

In several days, Pope Francis will be meeting with the Presidents of the National Conferences of Bishops to arrive at a common commitment and action in the face of our failure to deal honestly and compassionately with the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and the too frequent denial and cover-up of this terrible violence.

His “Letter to the People of God” on August 20, 2018, rings with a strong call to all of us: “The extent and the gravity of all that has happened requires coming to grips with this reality in a comprehensive and communal way. While it is important and necessary on every journey of conversion to acknowledge the truth of what has happened, in itself this is not enough. Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history” (Letter of Pope Francis to the People of God, August 20, 2018).

In 2010, and again in 2016, the highest authority of the Congregation, the General Chapter, called the Major Superiors of all the Units to greater accountability, transparency, and commitment, so that all our places of ministry and our residences would be certified as safe environments for children, young people and vulnerable adults. Every Unit must have a proactive policy, so that our parishes, schools, hostels, ministry sites and Oblate communities are vigilant in respecting and keeping safe those who come to us for ministry. Part of this policy must also be a procedure on what to do if there is a complaint made against an Oblate, an employee, or a volunteer at our ministry sites or houses. In every Unit, the appropriate administration must regularly review the practices, be familiar with them, and keep them up to date.

The recent document from the Synod on Youth, discernment and vocation, places the theme of sexual abuse in a wider perspective. “Abuse exists in various forms: abuse of power, abuse of conscience, sexual or financial abuse. Clearly, the ways of exercising authority that make all this possible have to be eradicated and the irresponsibility and lack of transparency with which so many cases have been handled have to be challenged. The desire to dominate, the lack of dialogue and transparency, forms of double life, spiritual emptiness, as well as psychological

weaknesses, are the ground on which corruption thrives. (From the “Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”, # 30). We recognize that clericalism is an extremely destructive form of this abusive power.

The Central Government will have a professional in the field of abuse prevention working with us in the upcoming April/May plenary session. We need to grow in our awareness of the reality of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and to learn how to foster a greater commitment on the part of the entire Congregation to create safe environments. In July, at the Interchapter gathering, there will also be an entire day devoted to this question, to help the entire leadership of the Congregation understand, and become committed to responding to, the critical question of safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults in all our houses and wherever we minister.

While this theme may not be a happy one to entertain on our feast day, I believe it is at the heart of conversion and the call to become saints to which Eugene de Mazenod called us in his Preface of 1825. He was a minister of mercy whose heart was impassioned for the dignity of the poor and vulnerable. He would demand that we strive our very utmost to do the best to create safe environments for all those who come to us.

Jesus welcomed the children and touched them, blessing them with such love and freedom (Mk 10:16). May this beautiful and tender attitude between pastoral ministers and children be healed and protected by our integrity and responsible behavior. We pray to Mary Immaculate to assist us in taking on “...the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit” (Letter of Pope Francis).

Happy feast day!

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Fr. Louis Lougen OMI  
Superior General