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Letter of the Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI

YEAR OF OBLATE VOCATIONS

December 8, 2017 – January 25, 2019

The Joy and Generosity of Oblate Life!

L.J.C. et M.I.

Happy Feast Day to all those who live the Oblate charism! We begin the **Year of Oblate Vocations** on the solemnity of our patroness, Mary Immaculate. The grace of her immaculate conception fills us with great joy, love and gratitude for all that God has done in her. This is a missionary feast. Mary's immaculate conception prepared her for the call and the mission which God would entrust to her: to be a worthy dwelling place for the Son of the Most High. Mary's faith-filled response inspires us to live faithfully our oblation as missionaries of the Kingdom of Jesus. We entrust this special year, the Year of Oblate Vocations, to the care of Our Lady, firmly believing that she will intercede so that God's grace, in God's own time and in God's own way, will bless our efforts.

Why this year?

I wrote to you on December 8, 2013 and August 15, 2017, that many Oblates asked me to call the Congregation to get serious about the ministry of vocational discernment. At each World Youth Day in which I have participated, Oblates and young people challenged me to support Oblate vocational ministry as an essential element of the missionary project of every Oblate Unit. The insistence of other Oblates from around the world, particularly from the Regions of Latin America and Europe, reinforced the need to address our commitment to invite new members to join us. These calls of the Spirit led to the

first Congress on Oblate Vocations in Aix-en-Provence in July 2016. At this Congress and then at the General Chapter 2016, the Superior General in Council was called to proclaim a "Year of Oblate Vocations."

This year is indeed a response to the call of Oblates moved by the Spirit. With the same passion as the words of Pope Francis to us at the General Chapter (Oct 7 2017), these Oblates are convinced of our future, both as vowed Oblates, and in many other forms of living the charism by lay and consecrated women and men. They believe we must continue to serve the Church in the most difficult missions. In the Vocations Congress last year, three participants really challenged the assembly, saying that it appears we have lost faith in God and in young people: we doubt that God calls and we don't believe that young people can respond to God's call or can be generous.

The theme of this Year

A beautiful theme, chosen from the Oblate Region of Latin America for its first Vocational Congress, expresses the focus of the Year of Oblate Vocations: "*The Joy and Generosity of Oblate Life.*" This theme offers us much to consider and should question and strengthen us. I invite us to keep these two words in our thoughts and near our hearts throughout this year, deepening them in our silent prayer, pondering

over them in our communities and sharing about them in gatherings of the Oblate Family and with the poor in our ministries.

The experience of joy and generosity in my Oblate life

Perhaps the first step for each one of us is to focus on our own experience of Joy and Generosity in our vocation. The Year of Oblate Vocations should begin by helping us discover the sense that our vocation involves a deepening relationship with God, a journey of mystery, an ongoing dialogue, listening and responding to God throughout life. During this year we are invited to rediscover the dynamism of growing into our oblation and becoming more fully Oblate throughout our lives.

I invite us to reflect:

- Do I experience joy and generosity in living my Oblate vocation?
- Is my vocation lived with prayer and accompanied by a spiritual director so that it is deepened, lived more fully and faithfully?
- Please read our beautiful Constitution number 29, regarding the vow of Perseverance. Has my Oblate life imitated Jesus' love for us until the end?
- What can I do to become more fully Oblate?

The experience of joy coming from mission, community and friendship with God

The joy of our vocation is rooted in the **mission**. Whenever I ask Oblates, "What brings joy to your life?" the first answer is always that it is our closeness to the poor that brings great joy. This special relationship we have with the poor comes from our charism and reflects the heart of Saint Eugene. Actually, we often discover in the lives of the poor a surprising joy and this is a gift of God. We are touched by their capacity to be joyful even in oppressive situations. The poor teach us about joy. We discover over and over: we went to bring Good News to the poor, and we did. But we also discovered very Good News among the poor and that called us to conversion. The poor evangelize us!

The joy of Oblate life is present in our **apostolic communities**. It is true that our relationships can get a little tense now and again! But, we know how to laugh at ourselves and to enjoy each other,

together. I believe that our closeness to the poor gives us a perspective that helps us appreciate the gift that we are to one another and to recognize our own poverty. This generates joy. We touch the wounds and suffering of the poor and we are able to be gentle and compassionate toward one another. This too comes from the heart of Saint Eugene; ours is a special charism to live this charity. Charity begets joy.

Whenever Oblates come together for meetings, retreats and study days, these events are joyful gatherings. After the funeral of an Oblate, a lay person told me she was a little shocked by all the laughing and joking before, during and after the funeral rites! Then, she said, "Well, I guess it expressed the affection you all have for him and the belief that life is not over, the best is yet to come." We may not even be aware of how the people we serve notice the joy among us.

The joy of Oblate life is also present in our way of **relating to God**. Our relationship is real and we know God as full of compassion and mercy. The experience of God's love manifested in the cross of Jesus marked the life of St. Eugene and it marks the life of every Oblate. We come before the Trinity with the suffering of humanity in our hearts. Although society has exploited, rejected and ignored the poor, we know God has preferential love for the poor. This motivates us to preach the Gospel with compassion and mercy. We are drawn to God's presence to contemplate this love which fills us with so much joy.

The Founder often wrote of the joy he experienced in prayer and in the liturgy and this is surely part of our charism and a grace open to all of us.

Let us reflect personally and share among us:

- What joy have you experienced in mission; with your brothers in community; in your relationship with God?
- Pray that we might all live more deeply the gift of joy.
- Does the joy of our Oblate life speak to young men today as a vocational call? How can we make it an invitation to them to consider our way of life?

The generosity of the Oblate vocation lived in prayer, mission and community

Qualities like joy and generosity seem to accompany each other. Generosity is closely aligned with joy and is something very akin to God. Living the Oblate charism requires great generosity. The more we give ourselves to our vocation, the more open-hearted we become.

In our **life of prayer**, we deepen our friendship with the Trinity, three mutually generous self-giving Persons Whose love and life overflow to creation. God graciously offers the gift of Himself over and over to us without limits. As we encounter such a magnanimous God, we become more generous and grow in freedom. God is simply and entirely generous toward us. Oblate spirituality calls us to daily periods of silent prayer to rest in the Mystery of God. This experience makes us more generous in our vocational journey, in the way we relate to the poor and in apostolic community.

In the **mission**, it is often through the interaction with the poor that we are evangelized and become more generous. Our vocation draws us to be close to the poor and we witness the generosity of the poor. Those who have little or nothing at all are often our mentors in becoming generous. In another perspective it is true that we give ourselves entirely to the mission and at times this takes away from our health, our life of prayer and our life in apostolic community. Perhaps this too comes from the heart of Saint Eugene, who became ill because he over-worked! We need to strive for a healthy practice of generosity and a balanced way of giving ourselves to mission, to our relationship with God and to meaningful community life. These three dimensions are not meant to compete with each other, but to enrich, strengthen and deepen one another.

Life in **apostolic community** is characterized by generosity. We readily help one another, make sacrifices for each other and give our time to aid another brother. Sometimes we have interpersonal difficulties among us, but when there is a need to give assistance to another Oblate, we are there for each other. This is done with the spirit of gratuitousness and joy. Some Oblates carry deep wounds because they feel

there was a time when they were forgotten by their community. We can grow in being more generous and thoughtful to one another outside of crisis-times and seek to live this generous presence on a day-to-day basis.

I invite you to reflect on these questions and share with other members of your community:

- Share a time you witnessed the generosity of the poor in your missionary life. How did that affect you?
- Tell others about a time you felt the generosity of a brother Oblate.
- How have you experienced God's generosity?
- Is the generosity of Oblate life an attractive dimension to young people today?

The witness of our lives

I would like to invite all of us to consider that the witness of joy and generosity in our lives can awaken a vocational interest in young people. The witness of our lives is the first step for all Oblates to own the ministry of vocations: the quality of our lives together will be a sign that is as old as the first Christians: see those Oblates, how they love one another, how they are close to the poor, how they are men of God! In this way the Year of Oblate Vocations will become a year to review the joy and generosity of our lives and to commit ourselves anew to Oblate values.

- The Constitutions and Rules are a prayerful guide to renew our vocation. Why not reflect on one article each day, allowing it to call you to a more authentic style of Oblate life?

The call to every Oblate

In light of the Church's call to us to write new pages of evangelization, with confidence in Jesus' mandate to pray for laborers for the harvest, and in recognition of the overwhelming needs of God's people, this year commits us to encourage the discernment of vocation as a gift of God that arises in a community of faith. We must make known our charism and invite young men as part of the mystery of God's grace to join our life. We have a responsibility to go out to young people and call them by name, to invite them in among us to know us and to make a proposal to them to consider our way of life.

I invite every community to review the material sent out by Father Cornelius Ngoka on October 11, 2017, and to plan how you could implement some practical ways of stimulating a culture of vocations in your Unit and community.

A final word

In a very special way, I would like to thank all of you who have dedicated prayer, time and much effort to the ministry of vocations. It is a very challenging ministry! Many of you have labored much in this field and have had no results or at times some results, but then great disappointments and heartbreaking losses. Thank you for your commitment! We ask God to help every Oblate assume responsibility for vocations

and to keep up the efforts or to start anew to act in this area. Our vow of perseverance enables us to continue with loving faithfulness and great patience to trust in the Lord. “The Spirit at work among us will do infinitely more than we can hope or imagine (Eph. 3:19-20). Let us continue on the journey with much joy and generosity to live the Oblate charism. Mary Immaculate continues to smile upon the Congregation and to pray for us.

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI
Superior General

General Administration

OBLATE COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE New omiworld website

On 25 October 2017, the General Service of Oblate Communications introduced the new omiworld.org website of the world. Fr. Louis LOUGEN, the Superior General, officially launched it at the General House in Rome before the presence of the community of the General House and the International Scholasticate.

The event also marked the entrance of Fr. General into the world of social media as well. Now he has his own Facebook page: *Louis Lougen*. With that, he hopes to build a closer relationship with the Oblate family around the world, and especially the young Oblates and seminarians.

During the ceremony, Fr. Shanil JAYEWARDENA,

the director of the Oblate Communications Service also revealed the future ‘birth’ of a mobile application called “OMI app”.

All these steps are a direct response to the call of the last General Chapter about the necessity of Oblate involvement in the field of media and communication for evangelization. Chapter V of the final document of the 36th General Chapter, “Mission and Social Media”, was a reflection on that topic alone.

In his speech, Fr. General encouraged all the Oblates, especially the young Oblates and seminarians, to make use of modern communication platforms, including social media, for evangelization, but with responsibility and prudence. The new website might well be a useful instrument in that regard. (www.omiworld.org)

Africa-Madagascar

ANGOLA

A new Oblate parish in Angola

On October 15, 2017, Dom António Francisco Jaca, Bishop of Caxito, canonically erected the Virgem dos Pobres (*Virgin of the Poor*) pastoral center in the Nossa Senhora do Rosário Parish (*Our Lady of the Rosary*) and installed Father Jean-Claude KIANGA MBULUKU as parish priest.

Since September 2011, the Oblates have served the rural Christian community of Panguila in the diocese of Caxito, Bengo Province, 50 km from Luanda. After six years of pastoral work and considering the spiritual growth of the community, the bishop saw fit to raise the pastoral center a parish.

In his homily, the bishop thanked the Oblates for the pastoral work done in his diocese and

especially for their willingness to meet a new challenge, that of a new parish in a very poor rural area, among the abandoned. It's your specialty, he said, to go into poor areas.

The new parish priest, Father Jean-Claude Kianga, thanked the Bishop and the superior of the Oblate mission in Angola for the trust placed in his humble person, in order to meet the challenge of a new parish, which in his eyes is a blessing of heaven and a grace of the Virgin Mary, in this year when the Nossa Senhora do Rosário Shrine of Fatima in Portugal celebrates 100 years since the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to little shepherds, and especially in this month of October dedicated to Mary and the rosary.

Father Jean-Claude, seeing the situation of human, moral, intellectual, material and spiritual poverty

of his parish, focused his pastoral action around this sentence of the Founder: "We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints." (Saint Eugene de Mazenod 1826).

Consequently, the parish priest would like Nossa Senhora do Rosário parish to be a school of kindness and prayer, a place of knowledge and understanding of the faith, a unified Christian family and above all, a path to holiness. Father Jean-Claude counts on the grace and mercy of God, the maternal care of Mary, on the fatherly support of the bishop and his Congregation, his Parish Pastoral Council, the leaders of groups and movements, and especially of all the faithful, to meet together the challenge of evangelization. He remains optimistic and believes with all his heart in the growth of this parish.

Asia-Oceania

TURKMENISTAN

A mission with "open doors"

Ashgabat (*Agenzia Fides*) - "We announce Jesus Christ with our closeness and our ministry, especially that of preaching. People welcome the Gospel with passion and the message that God is love. There are not any other religious congregations yet, not even priests: for the time being we three priests and missionaries are the only presence of the Catholic Church in Turkmenistan. But in this country, where 82% of the surface is occupied by the Karakum Desert, we learned that even a single drop of water is like a golden nugget". This is what Fr. Andrzej MADEJ said to *Agenzia Fides*. He is a Polish priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Superior of the "*missio sui iuris*" of Turkmenistan, where he lives with his two confreres, Fr. Rafal CHILIMONIUK and Fr. Pawel SZLACHETA.

Today, explains Fr. Andrzej, "the Catholic community of Turkmenistan gathers in the Chapel of the Lord's Transfiguration, in the capital Ashgabat, and has about two hundred faithful". Prayer, Eucharist, charity are the three pillars on which the mission is based: "Every day we dedicate a few hours to

prayer, to the celebration of the Eucharist and to visit families, not only of Catholic faith. Caritas is also slowly organizing itself as a sign of a Church that witnesses the love of God. Announcing Christ in Turkmenistan means leaving the door of our home open not only for matters of faith but also for so many human relationships that we are establishing".

In the former Soviet republic of Central Asia, the Catholic Church was reborn in 1997, when John Paul II instituted the *Missio sui iuris*. Initially, Mass was celebrated in the diplomatic territory of the Apostolic Nunciature of Ashgabat and they met in private homes. In 2010, the Turkmen government officially recognized the presence - hitherto only admitted in the form of Vatican diplomatic representation - but this measure only partially led to the hoped-for results: "So far, we have not built anything because we have no authorization. Slowly, however, roads are being opened: we would like to build a small church and the seat of the apostolic Nunciature. We continue to pray and hope to get the necessary permits", the priest says.

Turkmenistan has over 5 million inhabitants; 90% are Muslims. The small Catholic community, according to Fr. Madej, is mainly made up of

people of German and Polish origin and relate daily with Christians of other confessions and Muslim families: “They gladly welcome our visit. We often meet with members of the evangelical Church for moments of prayer and hymns of praise. In addition, we also participate with pleasure in Islamic feasts we are invited to”, the missionary emphasizes. The desire, he concludes, “is to build fertile and peaceful relations with everyone, even to eliminate the prejudice that Christians or Westerners are only interested in war or want to impose their civilization”. (LF-PA) (*Agenzia Fides*, 8/11/2017)

AUSTRALIA

Iona College’s first student became an Oblate

October 18, 2017, marked the beginning of the 60th anniversary celebrations of the founding of Iona College. Sixty years ago, the first Oblate missionaries arrived at Lindum. They made a firm commitment to enhancing the educational opportunities of local families in a Catholic faith context.

One of the very first students at Iona became an Oblate of Mary Immaculate: Fr. William OUSLEY. The local Catholic newspaper, The Catholic Leader, published this article about Fr. Bill and Iona:

Bill Ousley was the first young student to step through the gates of Iona College 60 years ago. He was schooled by priests of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) from Year 6 to graduation, and it was their inspiration that led him to become a priest himself.

“Because they were a community. I always noticed that,” Fr Ousley said, returning to Iona College to join in celebrations. “With the encouragement of the retreat master I wrote to the novice master and joined (the Oblates) just after school.”

He was back there on October 18 for the college’s 60th anniversary.

Fr Ousley grew up across the road from Iona College, literally, in North Road, Lindum. “It

was a brand new experience for all of us coming here – fifty-six students in Grades 6 and 7,” he recalled. “It was a big farmhouse. We used to have morning assembly at the foot of the stairs and then troop down to the classrooms.”

Iona College was the first school opened in Australia by the Oblates, a missionary order founded in France in 1816 by Eugene de Mazenod, who was canonised a saint in 1995. St Eugene de Mazenod’s calling to other Oblates was to minister to the marginalised and abandoned, and for all to strive to “know what you are in the eyes of God”.

The name Iona comes from a small island close to the Scottish mainland off the south-west coast of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. It is about six kilometres long and about two kilometres wide. Some have called it, “The cradle of Christianity” in Scotland. The original Iona was a famous seat of learning established in the year 563 AD by St Columba off the coast of Argyll, Scotland.

Brisbane’s Iona College was founded by rector Fathers Tim LONG and Denis McCARTHY on October 1, 1957. At the “turning of the sod” ceremony on December 1, 1957, Fr Long noted that the first Iona was the birthplace of a tradition. The 1957 ceremony was a highly symbolic occasion signifying the “rebirth of a tradition” of learning.

“As the years go by, let us never forget our humble beginnings, the unconditional love and generosity of so many who believed in the vision and worked to make this school a reality,” Fr Long said. “For those who paved the path have also moved on, leaving only the path, the path to pursue more from life, may God continue to bless Iona College. May we continue to tell our story as the years go on, as more and more.”

Fr Ousley said he believed Fr Long’s vision had come to pass.

Looking around the current Iona College campus he said he was struck by just how far the campus had come. “When I left here in 1964 there were 12 missionary Oblates and one lay staff

member,” he said. “It’s got very big. It’s like a university.”

As an Oblate priest, Fr Ousley worked as a missionary in New Zealand, taught for nearly 20 years, including a return to Iona College, and now helps in parish ministry in Victoria. (By Mark Bowling, in THE CATHOLIC LEADER, October 27, 2107)

TURKMENISTAN

On World Day of Poor, six new baptisms

(*Fides News Agency*) Ashgabat – Taking part with joy in the baptism of six new Turkmen sisters -- this is how the Catholic faithful of Ashgabat, Turkmenistan celebrated the first World Day of the Poor - proclaimed by the Pope for November 19.

This is what Fr. Andrzej MADEJ, Polish priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Superior of the “*missio sui iuris*” of Turkmenistan told *Fides News Agency*: “Pope Francis gave a clear message for this day dedicated to the least: ‘We do not love in words, but with facts’. This clearly shows how works of charity on behalf of one’s neighbor are salvific actions that help build the story of our redemption. The greatest saving work is the path towards baptism. And it is with great joy that, this Sunday, we will baptize a young woman and her five daughters”.

Fr. Madej told *Fides* the story of the six women: “Over the last few years, this family in financial difficulties was accompanied by a French woman, a volunteer, who gave witness of human and Christian solidarity. This closeness generated

interest in the gospel and the beginning of the journey towards baptism. The date of November 19 seems to be a coincidence, but it is certainly a day chosen by God. It will be a great celebration for us all”.

With this celebration, which brings together the little flock of the Turkmen faithful, World Day of the Poor is being celebrated in Turkmenistan, a country in which to talk about “poverty” is almost forbidden. The concept of “poor” is, in fact, one of the taboos in society, given that the government of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, president named for the third time at the helm of the country in February 2017, wants to show the face of a growing country and in full development.

During the Soviet era, Turkmenistan was considered one of the poorest republics in the Union, with about 45% of the population in 1989 living below the poverty line. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, unequal economic development contributed to creating a population of elite that holds most of the wealth and strong disparities among the provinces. Measuring poverty was a taboo in the Soviet Union, but the scarcity and incompleteness of data on poverty in the post-independence era also indicates that poverty is still a politically delicate topic in Central Asia. In 2012, the Turkmen government estimated poverty at 0.2% of the population, contradicting all independent indicators and studies, that gave estimates of around 30%.

Turkmenistan has over 5 million inhabitants, of whom 90% are Muslims. The Catholic Church was recognized by the Turkmen government in 2010. (*Fides News Agency*)

Europe

SPAIN

A missionary journey to the land of “*teranga*”

Recently, a group of Spanish youth visited the Oblate mission in Senegal. Here, one of them tells of their experience.

This trip took place from July 19, 2017, until August 22, and changed the lives of 8 young,

energetic students, who chose to spend their summer in Senegal, the people of *teranga*, which means *hospitality*, to live one of the most beautiful missionary experiences of their lives.

The organizers of the encounter were the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, represented by Jean Marie SENE, an Oblate missioned in Spain for the past four years, and who is also studying for a Master’s

Degree in the Faculty of Theology of Granada.

We lodged primarily in three areas:

- Dakar (capital of Senegal): where we stayed in the Oblates' house of formation, living with members of the order (Father Maurice SENE and Father Claudio CARLEO). That was our central point of reference before and after each contact with the most powerful realities of our experience there.
- Elinkine (Casamance, southern Senegal) is where we spent most of our time, because of the hospitality of the people there and the number of activities that could be done: (camping with children in the village, meetings with families and young people, missions in the islands, sharing celebrations with the leaders, visits to the surrounding regions, etc.).
- Nghel (Diourbel, a region in the central-west of Senegal) is the town of Jean Marie Sene, where we have lived in his own home as part of his family.

In summary, we had the opportunity to live with people in coastal areas and in the interior: two communities that offered us a very interesting contrast in terms of customs, food, living conditions, etc. and that without a doubt we recommend for later volunteer experiences, because of the fraternal bonds that were formed and because of the possibilities that each one of these regions offers us in terms of humanitarian projects and human exchange.

In addition, we had a weekend of experience with the young people of Elinkine. With them, we spent two great days in which we talked, ate together, shared, played a good game of football and had a brief dialogue to talk about the issue of immigration, from both points of view on one side and the other, Spain and Senegal. Each one spoke of his experience or point of view about the current situation in each country.

To put it simply, thanks to all those who made it possible, especially to Caritas Granada, to

the Oblate Missionaries of Senegal, of Spain and of the whole world for making us discover their missionary Charism. <http://nosotrosomi.blogspot.it>

ROMANIA

Ministry with Youth and Vocation Ministry

The annual meeting of European Committee on Ministry with Youth and Vocation Ministry took place from 20 to 25 October 2017 in Romania, specifically in the Oblate community of Maracineni, next to Pitesti, a city in the diocese of Bucharest.

The purpose of this gathering was to focus on the theme of "vocation". The committee also took the opportunity to discuss the GECO (*Giovanile Europeo Carismo Oblato – European Youth and the Oblate Charism*), a meeting last August in Aix-en-Provence that brought together 45 young people from Europe who are close to the Oblates.

This meeting took place as usual in two stages:

- from October 20 to 22, a session that brought together Oblates, consecrated persons including a representative of "Las Oblatas" and young representatives of different provinces or Units: Germany, Spain, Italy, Romania, Ireland, France, Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic.
- from 23 to 25 October, a meeting of just the Oblates, for the consideration of the administrative portfolios of the committee.

The theme of this meeting, "Come and See", gave a sense of personal challenge before the launch of the Year of Vocations to be held from December 8, 2017 to January 25, 2019. It was therefore into an atmosphere of warmth and fraternity that we were welcomed to their community by Frs. Damian CIMPOESU and Lucian BOSOI; this contributed to the joy of our reunion and our various exchanges. (Michel Yapi, young Oblate layman in www.oblatfrance.com)

FRANCE

Four youth and the Oblate charism

Ingrid, a native of Benin, a midwife by profession,

is a student in Health Law in Paris. Clement from Sainte Foy-Lès-Lyon, French, works as an engineer in Paris. Manta from Chad, Michel, from Ivory Coast, are students in Lyon, respectively in Computer Science and Purchasing. Two of them have lived or are living at the Chavril House. The other two took part last year in “Thursdays at Chavril”. Three of them participated in the GECO (European Gathering of Youth around the Oblate Charism) in Aix-en-Provence, last August.

But all four have been touched by the spirituality of St. Eugene de Mazenod. On Sunday, September 17, they made a commitment for one year, as “Lay Oblates”, to follow Christ, to know him better and to live the mission among the most abandoned, together with the Oblates.

Rule 37a of the OMI Missionaries says: “The charism of Saint Eugene de Mazenod is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it radiates throughout the world. Lay people recognize that they are called to share in the charism according to their state of life, and to live it in ways that vary according to milieu and cultures. They participate in the charism in a spirit of communion and reciprocity between them and with the Oblates.”

These four young people are not the first to engage in this way; Astrid, Jean-Baptiste,

Maxime, Sophie, Thibault, these 5 young students or young professionals led the way the previous Sunday, September 10, in Aix. Last year in Lyon, there were also Fanny and Ivana who had composed their prayer of commitment in these terms: “Lord Jesus, you who call us to serve our brothers and to make your Church live, we thank you for this call, your presence, and your mercy. O Christ on the cross, we adore you, because you loved us, even dying for love of us. With Mary our mother, who stands at the foot of the cross, we say again and again, ‘Your will be done.’ Saint Eugene, guide us in our mission, help us to remain faithful to our commitment, to be cooperators with Christ the Savior and close to the human race. Teach us to practice charity, charity, charity and zeal for the salvation of souls.”

These young men and women meet several times a year, in Aix, Chavril or Fontenay sous Bois. Therefore, there seems to be opening a new and unprecedented way that inspires young people who wish to live their Christian life in the spirit of the Missionary Oblates.

The Eucharist during which these four young people committed themselves was a very beautiful celebration! Twenty of their friends, a veritable “rainbow” of origins from all countries, accompanied them with their faith and their joy! Deo gratias! (Pierre Court in www.oblatfrance.com)

Latin America

URUGUAY

Awaiting an historic moment

Father Alberto GNEMMI, Provincial of the Mediterranean Province, and the Vicar Provincial, Fr. Ismael GARCIA, recently visited the Delegation of Uruguay, which in a short time will become part of a new province in Latin America. Here are some excerpts from the letter which Fr. Alberto wrote to the Oblates and Lay Associates.

First of all, I mention something that can, in a way, illustrate the historical moment that the Oblate Mission is living: probably, this visit will be the last of a Provincial to the Delegation, since

as of next February (except for unexpected last minute changes) the Provincial Unit of Uruguay, with a long canonical history, exactly forty years, will become part of a new province, which in the documents bears the name of “*Provincia Cruz del Sur*” [Southern Cross Province]. In effect, the Delegation will be part of this new Unit of the Congregation, together with the two provinces of Argentina-Chile and Paraguay.

The new Province, which could count on as many as eighty Oblates, already has its first “Provincial-elect”, named by Father General in Council on September 22, namely, Father Jorge ALBERGATI, 54 years old, and superior of the

Uruguayan Delegation since 2013. ...

I think it is important to highlight that the mission in Uruguay has its historical roots and its own development in what is now the Mediterranean Province. Indeed, in August 1930, the first Oblates who entered the country were the Spanish Frs. Emiliano DÍEZ and Jesús CALLEJA and the Italian Pietro CENTURIONI, whom Spanish Frs. Álvaro VEGA and Daniel FRANCO, and Brothers Alvino GARCÍA and Santiago MARTÍNEZ joined shortly thereafter. This formidable team, linked to the Province of Texas [*ed. Former Southern Province, USA*], on which the Spanish territory depended, after having started the first mission in the region of Salto, will give life, first to a missionary experience in Paso de los Toros and in San Gregorio of Polanco in the Tacuarembó region, located in the center of the country; and successively, in 1939, in the Cerro area, on the periphery of Montevideo, where the San Rafael mission will be born.

Other Spanish Oblates joined these first Oblates and, at the beginning of the fifties, the Italian, Fr. Donato CELLIE. In March 1972, when the Spanish Oblates were fewer than ten, four Italian Oblates arrived in Uruguay, attached to the Province of Argentina: Fr. Giuseppe BORGHESE (who had been in Argentina since the 1950's), Fr. Carlo MATTIUSSI, Fr. Antonio ALBERTI and Bro. Carmine SCOGNAMIGLIO. In December 1976, while the Spanish Oblates, Frs. Florencio DOMINGUEZ and Jesús ISASO continued their ministry, there arrived in Uruguayan territory four Italian Oblates returning from Laos: Frs. Bramante MARCHIOL, Luigi SION, Angelo PELIS and Mario BIFFI, who were joined, in March 1977, by Frs. Rino MARTIGNAGO and Mario GAZZOLA, also from the Laotian mission. In that same year, when the last Spanish Oblates left the Uruguayan territory (Fr. Dominguez would go to Argentina and Fr. Isaso would return to Spain), after some negotiations between the Province of Argentina and the Province of Italy, on February 8, 1978, the Delegation of Uruguay of the Province of Italy was born.

If in February of next year the *Cruz del Sur* Province is born, the Delegation will cease to exist canonically when it is exactly forty years

old. In any case, whether considered many or few years, these four decades, as well as those that preceded with the presence of numerous Spanish Oblates, will remain as the precious leaven fermenting the always new bread of the Gospel that, surely, the Oblates of the new Province will continue to knead so as to nourish the Christian faith of those who experience hunger for love and reconciliation, fraternity and sharing, values that give meaning to life and truths that show the eternal dimension as the fullness of human existence. As the Gospel tells us, "the seed that dies in the ground bears fruit": the Spanish Oblate presence on Uruguayan soil since 1930 and the history of the Delegation of Uruguay, which has continued from 1978 until today, have carried out a missionary journey, characterized by a fruitful apostolate, full of evangelical words and gestures, which can only but flourish in the furrow of the history of our Congregation, through the new reality of the *Provincia Cruz del Sur*.

This awareness "of the old that leaves space for the new", that is, of the transformation that will happen in the Oblate mission with the birth of the "*Provincia Cruz del Sur*" in the Latin American continent, was the subject of dialogue and sharing of the Oblates of the Delegation during a day of spiritual retreat, held on Monday, October 9, at the Religious Institute "Familia Myriam Bethlehem" in the small town of Villa Rodríguez, about eighty kilometers from Montevideo. In the discussion on the specific theme of unification, the advantages that the Oblate reality will enjoy were especially evident: a greater possibility for the exchange of personnel; sharing of resources and proposals in the various apostolic activities; a new impulse, especially in Uruguay, of youth ministry; an improvement in the quality of government initiatives and formation, in particular, of lifelong formation. ...

Someone jokingly but correctly said: "One provincial leaves, but another stays." Anyway, the congratulations to the Provincial (still only "elect") to the new *Provincia Cruz del Sur* and its members, expressed by the two European visitors from the Mediterranean Province, is sincere and made in the name of the entire Oblate Family: "*Ad Multos Annos, Provincia Cruz del Sur!*" May Mary Immaculate protect

you and accompany you in this new gospel venture. Always at the service of the Church and of the Kingdom of God.

ARGENTINA & PARAGUAY

Where life calls us

I have been asked to share my experience working among people who use drugs, this long journey of learning, of light and shadow, inside and outside the Congregation -- a path marked by the cross and also by the resurrection. I am Brother Luis Lorenzo LUJÁN. I am 33 years old and I am currently finishing theology at the scholasticate in Paraguay. Since my arrival at Partido de la Manza, Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2005, I have felt challenged by the reality of drug users. Since then, I slowly began to approach and get to know that world which is so different and so in need of love.

In 2010, I wrote "*Vía crucis por los Jóvenes en riesgo*" ["*Way of the Cross for Youth at Risk*"] so that they could pray and contemplate the passion of Jesus, who still is being crucified today in these brothers. This charism of being an Oblate of Mary Immaculate has led me towards those existential peripheries, to accompany the anguish, the pain of death and the hope for the recovery of so many people. Today, after many years, there is a sense of greater hope for the organization of self-help groups in Argentina, Chile and Paraguay. It is a delicate ministry, because it puts into play all of life, both one's own and that of those who are being cared for. We continually face pain, and this is an unpleasant aspect. Many times, you experience the failure of not being able to help, the threat from the merchants of death, and the continuous pressure game that they exert to let you know that you are in the crosshairs. While a few of us dream and work, fighting every day with this scourge, the drug trafficking networks are gathering thousands of people and leading them on a path that for many has no way out.

For three years I lived in a therapeutic community "Fazenda de la Esperanza" ["*Hope Farm*"], accompanying day by day so many people who pass through there on the path of recovery. In January 2013, after living in a center with 70 inmates, they asked me to be responsible for opening a new community of the Fazenda

in the Archdiocese of Bahía Blanca, south of Buenos Aires, Argentina. When I started in this, I understood that I just could not do it alone; so we began to link up with other groups. In all this, I met and worked with different organizations, such as the National Ecumenical Forum from the Courtyard of the Gentiles (program promoted by the Vatican). This led me in 2014, during the visit of Cardinal Ravassi, to make a presentation in the Argentine Foreign Ministry, on the work done on prevention. Also the invitation to give talks in different dioceses allowed me to meet with many gospel workers.

As a missionary, I do not focus only on the few young people who participate in the groups of the parish communities. It hurts and worries me to see that there are many more who stand around outside the church, in the corners, taking drugs, calling out from their silence, calling for our attention. And every day I see more and more that the vast majority of those young people who are missing from our communities are those who are losing their lives today. Amid extreme situations, overflowing with violence and abandonment of all kinds; a word from Saint Eugene urges me not to get tired, to keep trying everything, when he says: "We have the grace to do them some good". To be able to embrace a desperate family, to dedicate time to listen and fight for life amid so many death threats, to walk through the abandoned neighborhoods, to enter barefoot and up close, to invite them to live a new life.

Believing that I could no longer continue with this work, as I was being harassed by the threats due to my work making people aware and the opening of self-help groups, before my return to life as an Oblate, I wrote the book that bears the title: "*Aprender a Caminar*" en libertad frente a las adicciones ["*Learning to Walk*" in freedom from addictions] which was launched this year with the support of my Oblate brothers from Argentina and Chile.

I am convinced that life calls us today, not tomorrow, and we must arrive before, not after. Since I arrived in Asunción, Paraguay, I found the lack of this ministry. For many it is not an important reality. However, entering the neighborhoods along the river, seeing the drug traffic in broad daylight, and the young people agonizing and dying without being

heard, moved me to present a pastoral project to create the ministry for the addicted. At first, it was not received well. In recent months, by the grace of God, we began to join with the work of different groups and that has led us to live this phase with great hope. Since October 14, we have been training one hundred pastoral agents from thirty parishes to begin pastoral work in their communities, thanks to the support of the Archbishop of Asunción, Bishop Edmundo Valenzuela.

Drugs are synonymous with slavery and death. As a Christian, convinced that God loves freedom and life, and moved by listening and making heard the cry of those who are suffering, I believe it is a reality for mission, a frontier where we must be present and proclaim there the gospel of life.

BRAZIL

“The Paths of the Nazarene”

On the afternoon of November 17, the Province of Brazil rejoiced with our brother, Fr. Beto MAYER, who officially launched his book: *Pelos caminhos do Nazareno* [*The Paths of the Nazarene*] at the Paulinas Bookstore in the center of São Paulo.

A great number of people were present to honor our brother, to ask for his autograph and to congratulate him for this important moment. Several groups were represented: the Oblate Province of Brazil by Fr. Francisco RUBEAU, Provincial, and other Oblates; the Southeast District of the Oblate Province of Brazil by the newly elected animator, Fr. Genivaldo CORDEIRO DE OLIVEIRA; and the Conference of Religious of Brazil, São Paulo section, by its President, Fr. Rubens Pedro CABRAL. There were also members of the missionary Fraternity Charles de Foucauld, founded in 1980 by Fr. Beto Mayer.

Speaking briefly about the book and Fr. Beto, the former monk Mauro Lopes, who was one of the great collaborators in the realization of the work, spoke about how much the book is a faithful reflection of the life and missionary testimony of its writer: “Beto lives what he writes, and writes what he lives.”

Soon after, Fr. Beto spoke a few words of his happiness in launching the book, and he sang a mantra of thanks to God. Then there was a time for Fr. Beto to sign the book; this was followed by a cocktail. (Deacon Sérgio DE SANTANA)

Anniversaries for December 2017

70 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|------------------------|---------------|
| 08/12/1947 | 08431 | Fr. Ottorino Casarotto | Mediterranean |
|------------|-------|------------------------|---------------|

60 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------------|------------------|
| 08/12/1957 | 11607 | Bro. Gérard Buisson | France |
| 08/12/1957 | 10998 | Bro. Willi Dickmann | Central European |

60 Years of priesthood

| | | | |
|------------|-------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 08/12/1957 | 09725 | Fr. Alexis Atangana | Cameroon |
| 21/12/1957 | 09449 | Fr. Michel Courvoisier | France |
| 21/12/1957 | 09035 | Fr. Léo Laberge | Notre-Dame-du-Cap |
| 23/12/1957 | 09543 | Fr. Paul-Emile Poulin | Notre-Dame-du-Cap |

50 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------------|---------|
| 08/12/1967 | 12163 | Bro. Edouard Prince | Lacombe |
|------------|-------|---------------------|---------|

50 Years of priesthood

| | | | |
|------------|-------|--------------------|---------------|
| 07/12/1967 | 11335 | Fr. Dino Tessari | Mediterranean |
| 17/12/1967 | 11470 | Fr. Bernard Colgan | Brazil |
| 17/12/1967 | 11348 | Fr. Francis Ryan | Anglo-Irish |

| | | | |
|------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 20/12/1967 | 11326 | Fr. Daniel Corijn | Belgium/Holland |
| 20/12/1967 | 11062 | Fr. Oswald Firth | Colombo |
| 20/12/1967 | 11342 | Fr. Michael Hughes | Anglo-Irish |
| 20/12/1967 | 11129 | Bishop Roger Schwietz | United States |
| 23/12/1967 | 11354 | Fr. Anton Lötscher | Central European |

25 Years of priesthood

| | | | |
|------------|-------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 12/12/1992 | 12840 | Fr. Hugo Oliva | Mexico |
| 13/12/1992 | 13163 | Fr. Bonard Joseph | Haiti |
| 13/12/1992 | 13162 | Fr. Duronce Laroque | Haiti |
| 13/12/1992 | 12990 | Fr. Jean-Pierre Loubeau | Haiti |
| 19/12/1992 | 13155 | Fr. Joseph LaBelle | United States |

Anniversaries for January 2018

70 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|----------------------|---------|
| 06/01/1948 | 08437 | Fr. Virgilio Baratto | Lacombe |
|------------|-------|----------------------|---------|

60 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------------------|---------|
| 06/01/1958 | 10410 | Fr. Antony Lisema Matsoso | Lesotho |
|------------|-------|---------------------------|---------|

60 Years of priesthood

| | | | |
|------------|-------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 02/01/1958 | 08858 | Fr. Joseph Bouvet | Notre-Dame-du-Cap |
| 19/01/1958 | 09036 | Fr. Fermin del Blanco | Mediterranean |

50 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------------------|---------|
| 25/01/1968 | 12021 | Fr. Venantius Makabanyane | Namibia |
| 25/01/1968 | 11973 | Fr. Gabriel Tlaba | Lesotho |

25 Years of religious life

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---------------------------------|----------|
| 06/01/1993 | 13547 | Fr. Michael Thabang Khotso | Lesotho |
| 06/01/1993 | 13545 | Fr. Martin Lebohang Malemoha | Lesotho |
| 06/01/1993 | 13546 | Fr. Samuel Sello Maliehe | Lesotho |
| 06/01/1993 | 13544 | Bro. John Tiisetso Maphala | Lesotho |
| 17/01/1993 | 13461 | Fr. Publio Anibal Cazuriaga | Paraguay |
| 17/01/1993 | 13480 | Fr. José Ariel Martínez Morales | Mexico |
| 17/01/1993 | 13454 | Fr. Sérgio Cordeiro Nunes | Brazil |
| 23/01/1993 | 13424 | Fr. José Manuel Santiago | Mexico |
| 24/01/1993 | 13425 | Fr. Ramón Ayala | Mexico |

Suffrages for our Deceased**No. 74-82**

| Name | Prov./Del. | Age | Died at | Date |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Fr. Othmar Grüber | Paraguay | 88 | Asunción (Paraguay) | 27/10/2017 |
| Fr. Paul-Eugène Plouffe | OMI Lacombe | 91 | Winnipeg (Canada) | 01/11/2017 |
| Fr. James Hyland | Anglo-Irish | 84 | Dublin (Ireland) | 08/11/2017 |
| Fr. Paul Waldie | United States | 84 | Sarita (USA) | 11/11/2017 |
| Fr. Józef Kowalik | Poland | 82 | Lubliniec (Poland) | 14/11/2017 |
| Fr. Gregory Zaba Mbanjwa | Natal | 52 | Pietermaritzburg (R.S.A.) | 15/11/2017 |
| Fr. Andrzej R. Maćków | Poland | 48 | Lubliniec (Poland) | 26/11/2017 |
| Fr. Andres Leenders | Belgium/Holland | 85 | Leuven (Belgium) | 26/11/2017 |
| Fr. Carl Kelly | OMI Lacombe | 86 | Ottawa (Canada) | 26/11/2017 |

“They are before God, bearing the sign, the kind of character proper to our Institute, the vows common to all its members, the firm habit of the same virtues. We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our main residence. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them.” (Letter of Founder to Fr. Courtès, 22 July 1828)

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