



MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

The Superior General

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LETTER FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL FOR THE FEAST OF ST. EUGENE DE MAZENOD MAY 21, 2020

L.J.C. et M.I.

“We were born for times like this”

Dear Oblates, and all our Brothers and Sisters imbued with the Oblate Charism,

May you have a joyful celebration in honor of Saint Eugene de Mazenod!

In a very short period of time our lives have been drastically changed by the pandemic of the coronavirus. Was anyone untouched? Very quickly, the pandemic took over our lives. All forms of media kept the news and the pictures before us: cities of millions, shut down and empty streets; overcrowded hospitals, with stressed-out health care workers; morgues, without space for the bodies of the deceased; over and over the numbers: those who contracted the virus and those who died. Masks, hand gel, social distancing, lockdowns, and essential services jumped into our everyday vocabulary. We saw the excruciating pain caused by the virus and so many people dying alone, in isolation, separated from loved ones, often without the solace of the sacraments. Uncertainty, fear, anxiety and stress; unemployment, no salaries, hunger. The poor hit hardest by the pandemic.

The churches, at the high point of the liturgical year, Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum, were closed and empty. Many people expressed their great sorrow at being excluded from the special liturgies, and the inaccessibility to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Live-streaming of celebrations of the Eucharist were present through the internet and helped fill a vacuum. Who wasn't strongly moved to see Pope Francis, on March 28, walking through the rain in an empty St. Peter's Square, to bestow the Urbi et Orbi blessing? He expressed the pain of the world and our unflinching trust that God is in our midst and holds us tenderly close to him.

We've lost some of our brother Oblates and members of the Oblate family in this pandemic. At the time of this writing, I am aware of five Oblates who died due to the COVID-19. We are praying for six others who have contracted the coronavirus and whose conditions are very serious.

The Oblates and our brothers and sisters who live the Oblate charism have reached out in many creative ways to continue to minister and to be available to people while respecting social distancing and lockdowns. Especially in service to the poor, the home-bound, and homeless persons, bags and boxes of essential needs, food and medicines, masks and hygienic liquids, were distributed. In spite of sickness and death, anxiety and stress, there also have been beautiful signs of solidarity, generosity and bravery. Fr. Shanil Jayawardena, our Director of Oblate Communications Service, has collected, from all around the Congregation, the witness of Oblates and lay people who are living out the charism of St. Eugene in the most diverse circumstances and ways. Please take some time to look at our website, www.omiworld.org, and see what Oblates and our co-workers have been doing.

Two years ago, one of our prenovices expressed this thought: *“The Oblates are not a congregation of the past; it's one of the present and future, and even more so, considering the world today. We were born for times like this.”* Isn't there a spark of St. Eugene de Mazenod in these words? **We were born for times like this:** a period of fear, anxiety, confusion, and uncertainty, in which the most abandoned, the poorest, suffer the greatest hardship. And at the same time, a period offering new insights, new possibilities, new challenges, calling us drastically to wake up and care for our common home and its peoples.

I am grateful to all of you for your creative efforts in service of our brothers and sisters in this pandemic. At times, risking your own health, you have provided needed spiritual and material assistance to God's people, especially to those most forgotten by society, those who have no access to the health systems, those who live in dire conditions, the poor with their many faces. Thank you!

We begin our Oblate Week of Prayer for Vocations today. These are days of grace between the Solemnity of Saint Eugene and the Feast of Blessed Joseph Gerard. This is an opportunity to reflect on our commitment to engage young people in God's mission, to which the Church and the Oblates are committed. The words of the prenovice, **“We were born for times like this”** can certainly motivate us in our vocation ministry.

In visiting the Congregation, I am impressed that, in many Units there is a clear commitment to the

ministry of vocations. This is most evident where leadership has made three things happen. First of all, the Unit leadership chooses to prioritize vocation ministry as a significant part of their ministry of leadership and of the missionary vision of the Unit. Second, the leadership of the Unit expresses this commitment by calling and preparing an Oblate for full-time vocation ministry in the Unit, and by forming a vocations committee of several members, including lay and other consecrated people who live the Oblate charism. Third, in addition to these two essential elements, the Unit leadership involves the entire membership of the Unit in creating a cohesive, overall plan for the ministry of vocations, organizing districts for local vocation animation.

A lack of commitment to vocations ministry is clearly indicated when an Oblate is appointed as director of vocations and then assigned another ministry, such as in a parish or a school. Vocations ministry demands a full-time commitment, hard work, and intentional support from leadership. It requires an Oblate who is on fire with the charism, who believes in our life and our future, and who is a witness to the joy of Oblate life.

Without new members we will be unable to respond to the call to mission. During this special week, while we pray for vocations to our Congregation and to the many other forms of life that are expressions of St. Eugene's charism, that is not enough! We are also called to action, to do something! Let's not be satisfied with meager results. Let's not repeat the mantra of the self-fulfilling death wish: we have made our contribution to the mission of God and we can now disappear.

I call on St. Eugene to inflame us to be creative and bold in fishing for followers of Jesus who embrace our charism. I invite each one of us to be attentive in actively supporting those who have this special responsibility of vocations ministry, in expressing our gratitude to them and by praying for them, because they have been called to one of the most challenging ministries of all. **“We were born for times like this!”**

May Our Lady, Comforter of the afflicted and Health of the sick, journey closely with us at this time.

Your brother Oblate in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Father Louis Lougen, OMI
May 21, 2020