



General guidelines for the Year of Oblate Vocations

“On this feast of Mary’s Assumption, we recall the special grace Saint Eugene received while blessing the statue of Mary Immaculate on August 15, 1822. That grace lifted his worries about the future of his little missionary group and gave him the assurance that it was not just his own idea, but truly the work of the Spirit. He was given the conviction that "our dear Society" would be the source of great holiness for us and of great missionary benefit for the Church. We entrust the "Year of Oblate Vocations" to Mary Immaculate, the model and guardian of our consecrated life. May her witness engender in us a deep belief that nothing is impossible with God. Her presence in prayer among us will make this "Year of Oblate Vocations" a Spirit-filled happening, giving us surprising perspectives and filling us with immense hope” (*Letter of Father General to the Congregation, Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 2017*).

In preparation for the two hundred years of our Religious family, we began a journey of faith, the Oblate Triennium, in December 2013. In the letter introducing that year, Father General invited every member of the Oblate family to:

1. *Contemplate and follow Jesus' vocational ministry*
2. *To pray in our local communities and in our Units asking God to send us men whom we might receive and welcome as new members...*
3. *To discuss the vocational reality in our Units, as men of faith and in hope*
4. *To organize a pastoral ministry of outreach for new members through the involvement of every Oblate by appointing full-time coordinators.* (Letter of Superior General, 8th December 2013).

It was a call to create a “culture of Vocations” in our Congregation. We want to take these four invitations as objectives and guidelines for the Year of Oblate Vocations.

1. To contemplate and follow Jesus' vocational ministry.

During the first moments of his ministry, Jesus went out to meet and invite some people to follow him and become his disciples. He encountered and called Peter, James, John, Andrew, Mathew etc. (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Mark 2:13-17). During his entire ministry, he continued to encounter people some of whom he called to follow him. Some did follow him, others did not. But he kept calling. After the resurrection, he asked his disciples to continue the mission of preaching the Good News and calling others to be disciples.

Christ continues to call people to follow him as disciples and missionaries. He continues to encounter people in their lives to involve them in his mission of preaching the Good News of salvation to the world. Vocation is a gift from God. It is God who calls, who transforms and who sends. Encounter with the person of Jesus Christ is crucial in the process of vocation ministry.

- During the Year of Oblate Vocations, we listen to some vocational stories in the Old Testament and how the first disciples encountered Jesus Christ and followed him. We also listen to and reflect on our own vocation stories, share them with others, renew ourselves in the calling we received some years ago and continue to receive today.
- We contemplate the vocation stories of Saint Eugene de Mazenod and his first companions. We return to Aix, our Holy Land, where it all began.
- Mediations: We reflect on the importance of mediation in vocation ministry. The various mediations through which we heard the call to follow Christ: family, parish community, events, encounters with Oblates, other priests and religious, words, experiences etc.

- Different forms of mediation today: Oblate charism and missionary experiences, oblate community living and individual oblates, Oblate Mission with Youth and its various activities, various vocational activities and encounters, vocation directors and teams, etc.

2. To pray for vocations

Prayer was an integral part of Jesus' mission, including his vocational ministry. Before choosing the Apostles, Jesus went to the mountain to pray. He spent the night in prayer. Then he called his disciples and chose the Apostles (Luke 6:12 – 16; Mark 3: 13 – 19). When he saw the great missionary needs and the few available labourers, he invited his disciples to prayer: “the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Mathew 9: 35 – 38). Jesus was prayerful; he lived in deep communion with the Father. We are men of prayer, and our missionary activities must be rooted in prayer and lived in the context of constant communion with God. Pope Francis reminds us that Vocation ministry is above all a ministry of the knees, of prayer. During the Year of Oblate Vocations, we are invited to pray for vocations to Oblate Religious Missionary Life.

Prayers: the opening liturgy for the Year of Oblate Vocations (around the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception) should be well organized, elaborate, with the involvement of the youth, Oblate communities and Oblate Associates.

During the Year of Oblate Vocations every Unit, communities, Oblate Associate groups and Mazenodian family members are invited:

- To pray each day for vocations in our communities and houses during the whole year. Some prayers will be provided or the Units can also find other suitable prayers for vocations
- To organize Faith-Sharing moments using the themes proposed by the General Administration or other suitable materials.
- Eucharistic adoration moments for Vocations can be organized during the year
- To organize prayer moments with Oblate Associates, Friends of the Oblates and members of the Mazenodian family. It could be good to have a group of Oblate Associates/friends who will be praying for Vocations during the year and even beyond. They are called “vocations prayer group” in some Units.
- To organize and encourage “Prayer partners” during which Oblates – especially senior Oblates – pray for one particular candidate or young person in vocational discernment
- To include prayer moments and reflections on Christian vocation and the call to Oblate religious life in our ministries with the Youth and other Youth Chaplaincies.

- To organize various activities with different Youth Groups and Oblate Associates: Mission outreach with Oblates, visiting the poor, the sick, the prisoners etc. Other social activities such as sports, marathon etc. with the theme of Oblate Vocation and Mission
- To organize pilgrimages and novena prayers on the theme of Vocation and Oblate charism with different groups and associations in our missionary and pastoral places and activities: Oblate communities, Oblate Associates, Oblate Youth, Chaplaincies, parishes, Christian communities etc.
- To include Oblate charism and vocation in our celebrations
- To organize special novena prayers for the celebration of important Oblate celebrations and Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 25 January, 17 February, 21 May, 15 August, 8 September, 8 December, Oblate Saints: Blessed Joseph Gerard, Blessed Jozef Cebula, Blessed Oblate Martyrs of Spain, Blessed Oblate Martyrs of Laos.
- To organize special Marian Prayers during the months of May and October
- To use several aspects of the theme during Oblate celebrations

3. **Sharing and listening to Vocational stories and experiences, reflections, ideas and hopes** within Units, in formation communities and with other Congregations, groups etc.

“We are fired by a charism that is unique and special in the Church, one that makes us very close to the poor, the rejected, the forgotten, the people that society ignores, and the people who don’t feel accepted in Church. We show a very human face of Jesus to the world, one full of compassion and solidarity” (*Father General’s letter to the Congregation, 8 December 2013*).

From the time of the Founder to this day, Oblates have contributed in a unique way to the Church’s mission of Evangelization. In addition, each Oblate has his personal vocational story to tell and to share with others. It is important to find or to create ways, means and opportunities to share our stories and experiences, and to reflect on Oblate charism, our hopes for the missionary future of the Congregation.

- Ask some Oblates to share their vocation stories in every Unit and to share those stories through the mass media and other means of communication
- Organize reflection days for different groups on various topics such as Vocations, Oblate charism and spirituality, youth in the Church, Missionary realities of the Congregation etc. During such encounters, some Oblates could share their vocation stories, as well as some Oblate Associates, Oblate Youth etc.

- Conferences could be organized by Oblate Institutes and Formation houses on various related topics in collaboration with other Religious Congregations and groups

4. Well-organized Vocational Ministry in every Unit of the Congregation

Involvement in Vocation Ministry is an act of faith, of hope and fruit of personal and community conversion. It implies an attitude of thanksgiving to God for the gift of Oblate charism, and an openness to share this charism with other people. It is important that every Unit appoint a Vocation Director and a team (of Oblates, Oblate Associates/Oblate Youth) that will support him in the animation of the Unit in the area of Vocation ministry.

1. Community and personal involvement of each Oblate: The 2010 General Chapter invited each Oblate to reflect on the witness of his religious life, living the vows in a prophetic way so as to share these values with the world, as an invitation for others to join our Oblate family (cf. *Conversion, 2010 General Chapter*). This is an invitation to create a *culture* of Vocations
2. Vocation Directors and teams: the appointment of a vocation director in each Unit. He should be given a small group of Oblates, Oblate Associates and Oblate Youth to work with him for the animation of communities and the Unit during the Oblate Vocational Year and beyond. They will help the Unit to put together, coordinate and implement the objectives of the Year of Oblate Vocations.
 - i. Clear missionary mandate to make Oblate charism known by talking about Oblate missions in the Unit, the Region and the Congregation – pamphlets, audio-visual material etc.
 - ii. The theme of Oblate Vocation should permeate the retreats and homilies during this year
 - iii. Common programs with Oblate Mission with Youth groups – common initiatives, prayer moments, pilgrimages, parish missions with Oblates, organizing “Come and See” programs and well prepared short “come and see” stays in Oblate communities etc.
 - iv. To help Oblate communities understand, promote and highlight the vocational dimension of every aspect of Oblate mission
 - v. Where there are formation houses, we strongly recommend their active involvement in organizing and animating various initiatives for Year of Oblate Vocation.

- vi. Accompaniment of prospective candidates through visitations to and regular contacts with the families, Christian communities/parishes, work places etc., regular meeting with the candidates for personal colloquium, recollection and prayer moments etc.
- vii. Vocation exhibitions in parishes, schools and other places will be encouraged. Such exhibitions could be Oblate history, missions, activities, communities, Oblate realities: Saints, Blesseds, Martyrs etc. with clear vocational dimension
- viii. Use of mass media: Facebook, Tweeter, WhatsApp groups to engage youth groups and young people in our places of mission. Send short reflections, biblical passages, images of Oblate missions around the world and other vocational materials through these means of communication.

5. Vocational manual for the Unit or a group of Units /Region.

- Why a manual? To help the Vocation directors in their ministry. They need some guidelines on how to organize their ministry of animating Oblate communities as agents of vocation ministry, and in accompanying those who wish to know more about our charism or wish to discern their vocation to Oblate life.
- Content of the manual?
 - Life experiences with young people: sharing life experiences, involvement in Oblate missions, catechetical accompaniment etc.
 - Basic information on Vocation to religious life, oblate charism and Christian religious /missionary vocation
 - Different steps of accompaniment of the youth and vocational accompaniment
 - How to organize “come and see” programs
 - How to prepare the communities to welcome young people
 - Basic requirements for vocational discernment and journey with Oblates.

Coordination team, Year of Oblate Vocations

Rome, October 7, 2017