

**Acts of the 37th General Chapter (2022)**



# **PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION**

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate



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# I. ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS

*Clementine Hall, Monday, 3 October 2022*

*Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!*

I am pleased to meet you, on the occasion of your General Chapter. I thank the Superior General – poor thing, taken from the desert and brought here to Rome! – for his introduction, and I wish serene and fruitful work to him and the new Council. And let us thank the Superior and the Counsellors who have concluded their service.

You are a religious family dedicated to evangelization, and you are gathered to discern together the future of your mission in the Church and in the world. You have chosen, for this Chapter, a demanding theme, very similar to what has been chosen for the Church's next Jubilee: "*Pilgrims of Hope in Communion*". It is a theme that sums up your identity on the streets of the world, to which, as disciples of Jesus and followers of your founder Saint Eugène de Mazenod, you are called to bring the Gospel of hope, joy and peace. It is a world that, on the one hand seems to have reached seemingly unreachable goals, yet on the other is still enslaved by selfishness and full of contradictions and divisions. The cry of the earth and that of the poor, wars and conflicts that shed blood on human history, the distressing situation of millions of migrants and refugees, an

economy that makes the rich ever richer and the poor ever poorer, are some aspects of a scenario where only the Gospel can keep the light of hope burning.

You have chosen to be *pilgrims*, to rediscover and live your condition as wayfarers in this world, beside the men and women, the poor and the least of the earth, to whom the Lord sends you to announce his Kingdom. Your founder too was a wayfarer, at the origins of your religious family, when he would go walking with his first companions in the villages of his native Provence, preaching the popular missions and restoring to the faith the poor who had turned away from it, and that even the ministers of the Church had abandoned. It is a tragedy when the ministers of the Church abandon the poor.

Pilgrims and wayfarers, always ready to set out, like Jesus with his disciples in the Gospel. As a missionary Congregation, you are at the service of the Church in 70 countries throughout the world. To this Church, which the Founder taught you to love as a mother, you offer your missionary zeal and your life, participating in her exodus towards the peripheries of the world beloved by God, and living a charism that leads you towards the furthest, the poorest, those whom no one reaches. Walking this road with love and fidelity, you, dear brothers, render a great service to the Church.

You have heard the call to rediscover your identity as priests and brothers united by the bonds of religious consecration. *Pilgrims of hope*, you walk with the holy

people of God, living in fidelity your missionary vocation, together with laypersons and young people who share in the Church the charism of your holy Founder, and who wish to play an active part in your mission. Saint Eugène taught you to look at the world with the eyes of the crucified Saviour, this world for whose salvation Christ died on the cross.

You have already dedicated one of your preceding General Chapters to the theme of *hope*, when you heard a particular call to be witnesses to this virtue in a world that seems to have lost it, and that seeks elsewhere the source of its happiness. Being missionaries of hope means knowing how to read the signs of its hidden presence in the daily life of the people. Learning to recognize hope among the poor to whom you have been sent, who often succeed in finding it amid the most difficult situations. Letting yourselves be evangelized by the poor you evangelize: they teach you the way of hope, for the Church and for the world.

In addition, you wish to be witnesses of hope *in communion*. Communion today is a challenge on which the future of our world, the Church and consecrated life may depend. To be missionaries of communion, it is necessary first of all to live it among ourselves, in our communities and in mutual relations, and then to cultivate it with everyone, without exception. You frequently referred, during your Chapter, to the ecclesial pathway of this time, which is rediscovering the beauty and the importance of “walking together”. I

urge you to be promoters of communion through expressions of solidarity, closeness, synodality and fraternity with all. May the Good Samaritan of the Gospel be an example and a stimulus to make you close to every person, with the love and tenderness that impelled him to take care of the robbed and wounded man (cf. *Lk 10:29-37*). To make yourself a neighbour is a daily job, because selfishness pulls you in, pulls you down; to make yourself neighbour is to go out.

In this Chapter, you have also often evoked your *commitment to the common home*, seeking to translate it into concrete decisions and actions. I encourage you to continue to work in this direction. Our mother earth nourishes us without asking for anything in exchange; it is up to us to understand that she cannot continue to do so if we do not also take care of her. They are all aspects of that conversion to which the Lord calls us continually. Returning to the common Father, returning to the source, returning to the first love that prompted you to leave everything in order to follow Jesus: this is the soul of consecration and mission!

May your Founder, the *charism* he transmitted to you, and his *missionary vision* be and remain points of reference for your life and your work; to stay rooted in your missionary vocation, above all by living the testament of your Founder, in mutual love among yourselves and in zeal for the salvation of souls. It is the heart of your mission and the secret of your life, and this is why the Church still needs you. In the immense field

of mission that is the entire world, may Jesus always be your model, as he was for Saint Eugène. Before the crucified Saviour, he decided one day to offer his own life so that everyone, especially the poor, might be able to experience the same love of God that had restored him to the path of faith.

This year you celebrated the memorial of a special grace that Saint Eugène received two centuries ago, before the statue of Our Lady Immaculate in the church of the mission in Aix-en-Provence. This renews to you the invitation to take Mary as your travelling companion, so that she may always accompany you on your pilgrimage. Mary the pilgrim, Mary journeying, Mary who arose in haste to go and serve. After saying her "yes" to God through the archangel Gabriel, she departed in haste to go to her cousin Elizabeth, to share the gift and to place herself at her service. In this too, may Mary be an example to you, for your life and for your mission.

Dear brothers, I wish you a good conclusion to your Chapter, and I accompany you with prayer. From the heart, I bless all of you and your confrères, especially those who are sick and frail, and those who are in difficulty at this time. And you too, please, pray for me. Thank you!



## II. MESSAGE OF THE 37TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Dear brother Oblates of Mary Immaculate,  
Dear brothers and sisters of the Mazenodian Family,  
Peace and grace to you all.

1. The 37th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is a grace and a blessing for the entire Congregation. The 79 capitulars representing 70 countries of the world have met at the Centro Ad Gentes in Nemi, Italy from September 14 to October 14, 2022. We thank the Lord for his love. We salute the memory of those who have gone before us to the house of the Father, especially that of our holy Founder Eugene de Mazenod. We thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who received us in audience on October 3 and who encouraged us to go forward in our mission.
2. We go back to our respective Units after having experienced the joy of the Gospel. We would like to share our joy and hope with you, our brothers and sisters of the Mazenodian Family, and with all our brothers and sisters in the human family.
3. This letter is an expression of our gratitude, our feelings, our experiences, our hopes, our commitments, and above all the wish to see us more united than ever as a family living the same charism.

4. The General Chapter was a moment of discernment and of questioning for a renewal in our vocation to the mission. Our liturgical celebrations gave us the impetus to live a deep fraternity and to feel the presence of the Spirit. The joy of meeting confreres from other units was visible from the first Eucharist presided by the outgoing Superior General Louis Lougen. In his homily, he invited us to let the Spirit speak in us for our renewal. A “happy adventure” was beginning. It led us, on September 29, 2022, to elect Father Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso as the 14th Superior General, successor of Eugene de Mazenod.
5. The new Superior General was at his mission in Western Sahara when he was elected. He joined us in Nemi. We went with him on pilgrimage to the Holy Father to express our communion with him and with the Church. We too are committed to building a synodal Church with the Holy Father.
6. Pope Francis gave his blessing to the Chapter and to the entire Mazenodian Family. He noted the similarity between the theme of our Chapter and that of the upcoming Jubilee of the Church, “Pilgrims of Hope”, and that it sums up our identity as disciples of Jesus. The encyclical *Laudato Si* is for us an exhortation to be closer to the people and to creation.
7. The Covid 19 pandemic, the wars in the world, climate change, the crisis of faith, etc. are signs that

the world is undergoing radical changes. Testimonies from suffering countries such as Ukraine, Canada, Haiti, Sri Lanka, and others point to the concrete situation of our Oblate brothers and lay associates who are in solidarity with the poor. The cries of the poor demand of us a different way of living and a revisiting of the way we do our mission, in the footsteps of St. Eugene. This mission retains its original identity of evangelizing the poor with their many faces (C.5) but in a bolder way.

8. *Pilgrims of hope in communion* was indeed the theme of our General Chapter. The Oblates feel challenged by many of the cries that resound in our world, the voices of the poor and the abandoned reach out to God who is looking at us and calling us to a response. The Church asks us to leave our comfort zones and go to the peripheries. The contribution of our lay associates helped us to see that we are not alone in our missionary field and in living the charism. We are on the way together.
9. We are called to be signs of hope, witnesses, and artisans of the Kingdom in these difficult times for the Church and the world. The General Chapter has given us new energy and a new vision to look forward with joy and confidence and to commit ourselves for a better world.
10. At the end of this 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we have made some commitments to life and action: We

are missionaries, like the disciples of Emmaus, on the road with a burning heart.

- a. Following Christ, the first pilgrim and missionary, we commit ourselves to a true personal and communal conversion.
- b. We will work to reorganize the structures of the Congregation for a better mission at the service of the poor.
- c. We commit ourselves to work united as a body but also as Units and persons, for the protection of our common home.
- d. We want to console and support all those who feel abused or offended in their being and in all aspects of their life, and to be reconciled with them. We give the first place to minors and vulnerable adults but also to all those who, through our actions and behavior, have been offended.
- e. We make a commitment to go to the aid of the poor with their many faces. They are disfigured by suffering. They are marked by the stigma of war. They are traumatized by abuse and exploitation at work. They are alienated from their own original history. They are scorned in the land of welcome and exile. They are humiliated because of their color, culture, or language.

- f. We take the responsibility to do much more to promote justice and peace. The earth belongs to God, but the fruits of the earth belong to all.
- g. We commit ourselves to promote the Oblate charism in communion with the lay associates (R 37a).

As Eugene de Mazenod said, “how vast the field that lies before us!”

- 11. The Virgin Mary, our Mother, the pilgrim of the Visitation, walks with us. On Monday, October 3, 2022, the Holy Father also recommended that we always be accompanied on our pilgrimage by our Mother Mary.
- 12. May St. Eugene, our Founder, continue to intercede for us and for the poor we serve, and may his intercession renew us each day in the love of Christ, the first missionary and pilgrim.

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate!

Nemi, Italy, October 14, 2022.

The Capitulars of the 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter.

### III. ELECTION OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND COUNCIL

Through elections held according to the prescriptions of our Constitutions and Rules, the General Chapter called the following Oblates to the service of authority:

Superior General **Luis Ignacio ROIS ALONSO**  
(Spain – Mediterranean/Western Sahara)  
(Elected: September 29, 2022)

Vicar General **Antoni BOCHM**  
(Poland – General Administration)  
(Elected: October 1, 2022)

1<sup>st</sup> Assistant General **Raymond MWANGALA**  
(Zambia – Zambia)  
(Elected: October 1, 2022)

2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant General **Henricus ASODO**  
(Indonesia – General Administration)  
(Elected: October 1, 2022)

General Councillor for Africa-Madagascar

**Erastus Kapena SHIMBOMEH**

(Namibia – Namibia)

(Elected: October 4, 2022)

General Councillor for Latin America

**Jorge ALBERGATI TEJERA**

(Uruguay – Cruz del Sur)

(Elected: October 4, 2022)

General Councillor for Asia-Oceania

**Eugene BENEDICT**

(Sri Lanka - Jaffna)

(Elected: October 4, 2022)

General Councillor for Canada-United States

**James BROBST**

(United States – United States)

(Elected: October 4, 2022)

General Councillor for Europe

**Alberto GNEMMI**

(Italy – Mediterranean)

(Elected: October 4, 2022)

## IV. PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN COMMUNION

1. "The Chapter is a privileged time of community reflection and conversion. Together, in union with the Church, we discern God's will in the urgent needs in our times and thank the Lord for the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us" (C 125). The capitulars of the 37th General Chapter, profoundly reflecting upon the various challenging realities in the world and the Church, and illumined by the theme "Pilgrims of Hope in Communion," discerned what would make our identity as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate more relevant and authentic as we move forward through the third Millennium. It was an Emmaus experience of walking together, patient listening, expressing our anxieties, and finally recognizing the enlivening presence of Jesus as revealed during our pilgrimage.
2. Walking as Pilgrims calls us to look forward the path we journey, and look back at what came before. The pilgrimage did not begin with us; it began with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the charism of our founder, St. Eugene. The Constitutions and Rules that St. Eugene left us with are the valuable, treasured sources for the renewal of our life and vocation. As Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we cannot think of continuing and revitalizing our journey without carrying them in our minds and



hearts. A new reading of our “Book of Life” through the lens of hope can immensely guide us along our journey.

3. Hope is our way of being in the Church. It is foundational in all that we believe. It carries us forward in mission. As we await the second coming of Jesus, we evangelize as persons of hope to bring the Good News to the poor and to care for the earth, our common home. This hope that we bear, in turn, brings hope into our own religious life and commitment.
4. Communion signifies relationships that permeate our soul and create paths of healing and reconciliation within our communities and with the world. In communion, we nurture the bond of fraternity among us as Brothers and Priests, calling us to live out our consecration in apostolic community, celebrating its richness and embracing its challenges. It is in this same Communion that we uphold, affirm, and evangelize with, the lay people who desire to live fully the charism of St. Eugene.
5. This document is the fruit of our communal discernment in this Chapter of 2022. The Scriptures, ecclesial documents, our Constitutions and Rules, previous Chapter and Congregational documents all guided us in writing this Chapter document. May it help us animate the entire Congregation and our Oblate Associations, in being “pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love” (C 31).

## A. Pilgrims

6. As a Chapter we invite Oblates to respond to the call of Pope Francis to recognize that we are first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God (*Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) 111). As pilgrims, we are people who begin a journey without knowing what the end of the road looks like, trusting that God is guiding us. Consider that two senses balance our pilgrimage. The first is that we begin with an idea of who we are and understanding where we came from; the second is the realization that as we walk the path, we are transformed as we encounter the other. What we thought we understood takes on new meanings, and how we understand ourselves changes as we encounter Jesus. Recall the two disciples who walked along the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35). They thought they knew the end of the events that occurred in Jerusalem, but their understanding of the things which they thought they knew changed when they arrived at Emmaus. Their hearts were burning as they walked. Their identities also have changed, and now they identify themselves as evangelizers who go to announce the Good News!

### 7. Our Constitutions and Rules

- 7.1 Our identity as pilgrims calls us to “achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ” (C 31). Our “Constitutions and Rules

set out a privileged means for each Oblate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ” and to “allow each Oblate to evaluate the quality of his response to his vocation and to become a saint (C 163). In the Preface of the 1825 Manuscript of our first Rules, St. Eugene stated that this “holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline ... make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members”. Reading, praying, and providing animation on the Constitutions and Rules help us to live out these texts and ensure that they inspire, encourage, and guide us as a united missionary body evangelizing the poor and the most abandoned. As we approach 200 years since the approbation of our “Rule of Life,” we believe that the Holy Spirit is calling us back to our roots and to our Constitutions and Rules, through which we renew our vocation and mission.

- 7.2 Going back to our roots affirms the Church as she goes forward proclaiming the Gospel. We do not live in the past or outside of the world; we live in today’s world with the people we serve. Our roots do not bind us to one moment in time but continue to spread and grow as we keep in mind our constant call to respond to the “most urgent needs of the Church” (C 7). Being nourished anew by our roots as Oblates calls us to renew our apostolic religious life.

During this Chapter, we heard the fervent desire of our Oblate Brothers to be recognized more in their equal and complementary responsibility in evangelizing (cf. C 7). We were made aware, too, about the reconciliation that is needed with Indigenous communities. We heard the call to rejuvenate our communities as the truly “life-giving reality fashioned by the vows which bind us in love to the Lord and to his people” (C 12). In revisiting our roots, we carefully made changes to the Constitutions and Rules, to move them forward with the Church.

- 7.3 Our pilgrim journey and Oblate identity as missionaries to the many faces of the poor call us to live as consecrated men through our vows of chastity, poverty, obedience, and perseverance, “making visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called” (*Vita Consecrata* 20). Animation around the vows is always essential in first and ongoing formation. Reflecting on the vows helps us to understand the freedom we gain from them – freedom to love, to go where we are called, and to live simply. Our faith and trust in God as religious men are directly reflected in how we live our vows. Authentic and fraternal growth can spring forth by living the vows daily, recognizing our human

frailties, and persevering in our efforts at conversion. We look to Mary as our model and rely on her help for the strength to overcome obstacles we encounter along the way (cf. C 13).

## **8. Pilgrims in Ongoing Formation**

- 8.1 Another essential element of our pilgrim journey is to be open to continued growth and progress as we walk as pilgrims with one another. The 36<sup>th</sup> General Chapter called us to strengthen the missionary formation of candidates in initial formation and that good work should be continued. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter discerned that the crucial value of Ongoing Formation needs renewed attention, to assist us further in living out our Oblate identity.
- 8.2 At the end of initial formation, there continues to be a need for growth opportunities. In ministry after first formation, new issues arise due to challenges we face in the community, mission, and personal relationships. Gatherings of those who are new to full-time ministry are life-giving and life-affirming in helping them “learn from life experience” (R 68a). Ongoing formation, however, is more than a stage of formation. It is a space we share to reconnect with the brothers we know well and to engage

in fellowship with brothers we meet along the way.

- 8.3 Ongoing formation must consider that we are not isolated Oblate Units but are part of a larger intercultural family. We reiterate the call of the 36th General Chapter “to conversion in the area of interculturality: to live more deeply the creative tension between strong unity and rich diversity, being able to learn something new like a child, to develop the ability to learn, to unlearn and to rebound, to choose interculturality as a lifestyle, as a way of being in mission” (*Acts of the 36th General Chapter, no. 62*). We are profoundly thankful that our pilgrimage connects us also to a larger family of laity that enrich our lives in mission.
- 8.4 Formation involves us in an ever-renewed conversion to the Gospel and a readiness to learn and to change in response to new demands (cf. C 68). This Chapter believes that ongoing formation enhances our consecrated life regardless of age and years of ministerial experience. As we grow, we have different experiences of living out our religious vows, along with the joys and challenges we encounter. We are not alone as we walk along on our journey, and spaces can be created where we can openly discuss and learn about human de-

velopment. Ongoing formation should include professional and spiritual topics vital to our world today. Our Units should have dedicated time to discuss difficult issues we face within our own communities and provide space for healing and reconciliation.

## **9. Some Mission Directions**

- 9.1 All Units of the Congregation are to engage in a program of animation on our Constitutions and Rules, as we approach the 200th anniversary of its approval. Creative resources for animation can be developed by the General Administration and by formation communities and shared across the Congregation, e.g., utilizing the OMIWORLD website as a platform for sharing animation materials. Passages from our Constitutions and Rules can also be read during our community prayers.
- 9.2 Each Oblate should recognize and commit to his personal responsibility for his own ongoing formation. Each Unit should have a program of ongoing formation, especially for Oblates within their first five years of ministry.

## B. Hope

10. Taking up the invitation of the theme of the 37th General Chapter, we recognize our missionary vocation of being called to offer hope to a broken world that experiences war, poverty, and the degradation of creation. Hope in Jesus Christ calls us to “offer explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives” (EG 121). Mary Immaculate, for her part, “received Christ in order to share him with all the world, whose hope he is” (C 10). She also offered hope to our Founder St. Eugene in his experience of the Madonna’s “smile,” an encounter of which we celebrate 200 years this year. For us in this Chapter, the two outstanding issues of hope in these times are the calls to care for our common home, and to grow in interdependence or communion.

### **11. Our World as a “Common Home” and the Care for the Earth**

11.1. The urgent call to care for the earth, launched by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si’* (LS) and complemented by the *Post-Synodal Exhortation Querida Amazonia*, especially concerns us in our missionary work. We have been made aware of our in-



adequate efforts for the care of the environment. We are thus challenged to commit ourselves more fully to prioritize ecological conversion as a fundamental part of our lives and an integral part of our evangelization. Pope Francis reminds us that “the objective is not to gather information or to satisfy our curiosity, but to become painfully aware, to dare to convert into personal suffering what is happening to the world, and thus to recognize what contribution each one can make” (*LS 19*). In *Querida Amazonia* (*nos. 6-7*), Pope Francis speaks of “four great dreams that the Amazon region inspires” in him—a social dream where the rights and dignity of the poor are advanced; a cultural dream where distinctive cultural riches are preserved; an ecological dream where the natural beauty of rivers and forests are protected; and an ecclesial dream where the Church is generously committed and welcoming of the local culture.

- 11.2 We must not forget that the cry of the earth is the cry of the poor, to whom we are to give preference (cf. C 5). During this Chapter, we have heard voices proposing to take up again the centrality of the poor—especially the indigenous, migrant, young, and urban—in our missionary discernment. In

each Oblate Unit, depending on their circumstances, we should constantly discern the presence of each of the faces of the poor, to carry out our missionary work based on the spirituality of listening, dialogue and proclamation.

12. The consequences of not listening to the voices of the poor can be found in the emerging awareness of our painful colonial history in Residential Schools in Canada. It is a reminder that our presence has at times not been good news to those we were sent to serve, and that the hard work of healing and reconciliation must remain a priority for all Oblates.
13. This preference for the poor is an invitation to step up the work for justice and peace, as Rule 9a reminds us. This call is addressed in a special way to our parish ministry, in which we have a strong presence. Oblate parishes, which should have a particular missionary character, are appropriate places, for example, to offer an adequate response to the widespread indifference to the tragedy of migration and the degradation of creation. The joint work of Oblates and laity in such Christian communities can be the basis for recovering the “sense of responsibility for our fellow human beings on which every civil society is founded” (*LS 25*).

## 14. Our Congregation as a “Common Home” and the Call to Interdependence

14.1 “Nothing in this world is indifferent to us” (LS 3). We have become aware of the bonds that unite us as a religious family. This reflects the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council which affirms: “It was God’s will to sanctify and save [humanity], not in isolation, without any connection with one another, but by constituting a people” (*Lumen Gentium* 9; cf. EG 113; *Fratelli Tutti* 137). The word used in the Chapter to express this reality is *interdependence*, as a way of channeling what is written in Constitution 25, “By obedience, we become the servants of all. Challenging the spirit of domination, we stand as a sign of that new world wherein persons recognize their close interdependence”.

14.2 Integrating interdependence is learning to live as a member of a body. Every mission in the Congregation is our mission. This reality invites us to accept that we cannot be in all the places and countries we would like to be. However, when an Oblate Unit does something in favor of the most abandoned, we are all carrying out that missionary action. This expresses the character of universality and communion as Oblates.

- 14.3 During the Chapter, it became clear that in order to foster this sense of a “common home” a restructuring is necessary. We restructure for the sake of the mission and take into account mutual responsibility between diminishing and growing Units. Implementing common modes of discernment at the Regional and General levels favors the sharing of resources—human, selecting the most suitable people for each mission; and financial, ensuring relative sustainability. Together, even with our aging and infirm brothers, we are stronger to work for the Kingdom of God in our world.
- 14.4 One of the most characteristic features of our present society is the mobility and co-existence between cultures in different countries. Restructuring will also favor interconnected communities more capable of the present mission and give witness to the new relationships that are born of our baptism and our personal relationship with Christ. The most appropriate place to begin to develop this mentality is in first formation, where interprovincial post-novitiates could be formed to offer common criteria both at the level of religious life and at the pastoral level (*cf. Acts of the 36th General Chapter, nos. 34–41*). Young men who are discerning to join our formation programs

will also experience cross-cultural exchange when visiting our houses of formation. It is here that we can display how the universal Church exists directly within the fabric of our communities. The witness of living out this hope on display can be a strong attraction for vocations (cf. C 53). Vocation directors who highlight that we are an interconnected worldwide Congregation, present a vision of the Kingdom of God.

## **15. Some Mission Directions**

- 15.1 Study *Laudato si'* and uphold its value and urgency in all our communities. Sustain and promote our positive programs and activities and connect to other groups through the *Laudato si'* Action Platform of the Church. Be mindful of the simple things we can do in our communities, e.g., recycling.
- 15.2 Learn about the realities in other Oblate Units through social media and other communication platforms.
- 15.3 Consider restructuring Units and boost the sharing of resources.

## **C. Communion**

16. In inviting the Church to Synodality and fraternity, Pope Francis reminds us that communion is

a challenge in our world so profoundly marked by divisions and selfishness. In his message to the capitulars, he said that Oblates will be pilgrims of hope only if they live in communion among themselves, in the Church, with all humanity, and the whole of creation. Indeed, during the 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter the capitulars experienced fraternal sharing as a time of renewal. As Oblates we can thus strive to be specialists in communion, faithful to our Founder's legacy: " *'Among yourselves practice charity, charity, charity – and, outside, zeal for the salvation of souls.'* In fidelity to that testament, each member's zeal is sustained by the bonds of fraternal charity. By growing in unity of heart and mind, we bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us in order to send us out to proclaim God's reign" (C 37). Of the many topics considered for the Chapter that speaks to the theme of Communion, Intercultural Community and our work with lay people were highlights of our discernment.

## **17. Intercultural Communities**

17.1 Community life, in its many forms, has always been essential to our Congregation. We are now being challenged to explore more deeply our living in intercultural communities. We desire that our community life be an outward reflection of the Church as Communion, or a "Church as

God's Family" (*John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa*, 63), always nurturing "love of the family" in order to do mission as expressed by our Founder (*Eugene de Mazenod, to Fr. Mille, June 6, 1831; C 37*). Together with Christ, lived in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, our community life gives a testimony of faith, love, and hope to humanity. Community is a place for dialogue and healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

- 17.2 To live communion and enrich our community life, especially in international and intercultural communities, it is essential to know ourselves as Oblates, to recognize each other as brothers, and to be open to values other than our own.
- 17.3 We are blessed to have a richness in diversity within our formation programs. The Chapter encourages an intentional exchange of formandi among Units during the important phase of first formation. In this way, our newly professed Oblates can have an intercultural community experience, which will help them in the future to live the reality of our missionary life.
- 17.4 Though there are challenges to be faced in living our life interculturally, programs can be offered that will help both the individual

Oblate and the community he enters adjust to this life. We need to learn, for example, from the mistakes of racism and cultural colonization in its past and new forms today, when we disregard the sacredness of other people's cultures, traditions, and languages. "Once more we are being reminded that 'each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations, while setting its sights even higher. This is the path. Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day'" (FT 11).

## 18. Lay Associates

- 18.1 We received, as a grace, the presence of Lay Associates at this General Chapter. In the early days of the Chapter, we listened to their report and prayed with them each day. We recognize that through them, the Spirit calls us today to let the charism of St. Eugene radiate throughout the world. From the beginning, the Founder himself had a deep sense of respect for the diverse gifts that lay people brought to the various ministries. He regarded them as cooperators in mission (*cf. Letter of the Superior General, Directory of Oblate Associations, p.3*).



- 18.2 As Oblates we will always be close to the people (cf. C 8) not only because we evangelize them, but that they in turn evangelize us. The diversity of cultures and experiences of people enhance our Congregation. We stay close to them as we celebrate, collaborate, respect, and appreciate them and the gifts that they share with us in our mission and ministry. We have seen how in some places where Oblates no longer minister, the Lay Associates carry on the good works. In an impassioned presentation, the Lay Associates at this Chapter stated they, along with the Oblates, recognize their mutual vocational call to the charism, their profound sense of belonging together, and their commitment to mission lived out through the charism of St. Eugene (cf. *37th General Chapter, Report of the Lay Associates, Doc. 8.11.1*).
- 18.3 We see the need for better coordination, so that lay people may participate in “the charism in a spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates” (R 37a). We encourage Lay Associates to gather at the Unit level and ask that they be accompanied by an Oblate within that Unit.

18.4 Young people share in this desire and can be witnesses to our charism far beyond our reach. In their report to this Chapter, the Associates expressed special concern “that we do not forget formation in the Oblate charism for the young people who are the future in both vowed and Lay Oblate life. The application of the social doctrine of the Church, combined with the spiritual themes of St. Eugene are so attractive, especially for young people” (*Report of the Lay Associates, Doc. 8.11.1*).

## 19. **Some Mission Directions**

19.1 Challenge each Oblate to deeply understand what interculturality means to the Church. Ensure that Oblates undergo cultural orientation programs when entering into another culture. Formation houses, especially at the post-novitiate level, should be staffed by a team of intercultural formators.

19.2 Discuss in our communities the report that the Lay Associates presented at the General Chapter. Affirm, encourage, and collaborate closely with, our Lay Associates in our missionary endeavors. Identify people who are already living the Oblate charism with-

out acknowledging it themselves, and invite them to deepen their experience. Share across the Congregation the materials that local lay groups develop, e.g., *The Story of Eugene in Palermo*.

## 20 Conclusion

- 20.1 Since the previous General Chapter in 2016, we have seen many changes in the Congregation and in the world. Many important issues and concerns were raised during our discussions during the Chapter of 2022 regarding the past six years. As pilgrims, we continually reflect at our past journey while we move forward. The discernment continues.
- 20.2 Being conscious of the dynamic of a pilgrimage as missionaries of hope, we feel the call to find new ways of responding to the realities of the poor today. Our commitment to the people on the margins who cry out for justice remains a constant concern. We must pursue healing and reconciliation wherever it is needed. This is true also with regard to caring for the earth.
- 20.3 In communion, we listen intently to the voice of the Church through the process of Synodality. We seek renewal in our Congregation as we approach, in 2026, the 200th

anniversary of the approbation of our Constitutions and Rules. At the end of the Emmaus journey of this 37th General Chapter, a new one begins. A new moment of conversion and appreciation for all that has come before is made possible. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we return to our respective Units with renewed hope to announce the Gospel.

- 20.4 May this Chapter, with the intercession of Mary Immaculate, bear fruit that lasts until such time that all things are fulfilled in Christ.
- 20.5 The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter concluded on October 14, 2022.

## **V. MANDATES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 37<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**

### **A. EDITING THE CHAPTER DOCUMENTS**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

The 37th General Chapter delegates and authorizes such persons as shall be appointed for this purpose by the Superior General in Council to edit and prepare for publication the documents approved by the Chapter in proper grammatical and stylistic form in the original language in which they were approved by the Chapter and to provide for appropriate translations of the above mentioned documents into the other languages of the Chapter.

### **B. CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. That the General Administration develop a plan of action for Ongoing Formation in the Congregation focusing on the CC&RR, to deepen our appreciation and living out the “Book of Life” so as to revitalize each Oblate, Community and Mission.
2. That the Committee for the CC&RR review its membership (temporarily expand membership)

and objectives; to develop programs and resources for such animation in collaboration with the Community and programs in Aix-en-Provence

3. That Superiors and their Councils ensure the implementation of animation in their respective Units, in tune with this Chapter recommendation.

## C. OBLATE BROTHERS

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. In our Constitutions and Rules, we read, “We come together in apostolic communities of priests and Brothers, united to God by the vows of religion” (C 1) and “As priests and Brothers, we have complementary responsibilities in evangelizing.” (C 7) In light of this, the capitulars of the 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter call on all members of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate to recognize that as a religious community, we are incomplete without the witness of our Oblate Brothers. We echo the words of the document *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, which states, “The fraternity of Religious Brothers is an encouragement for the whole Church, because it makes present the Gospel value of fraternal relationships of equality in the face of the temptation to dominate, to search for the best place or to exercise authority as power”. (p. 13) We make our call cognizant of the change initiated by Pope Francis’ 2022 RESCRIPTUM EX AUDIENTIA SS.MI.

2. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter recommends that:
  - 2.1 Congregation-wide efforts be made to be inclusive in our language when referring to Oblates, taking into account that we are a Congregation of priests and Brothers.
  - 2.2 Work be done to increase the representation of Brothers in Unit and Congregational leadership positions.
  - 2.3 A Brother, who is an active staff member at a house of formation, be appointed to the General Formation Committee.
  - 2.4 Every Province, Delegation and Mission commit to actively including the promotion of the vocation of the Oblate Brother.
3. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter mandates that:
  - 3.1 The General Formation Committee, in conjunction with the Permanent Brothers Committee, undertake a full and complete review of the General Norms for Oblate Formation with respect to the formation of Oblate Brothers, ensuring a wholistic, international and intercultural formation. This review be conducted at Unit and Delegation levels of the Congregation as well.
  - 3.2 The General Administration, in conjunction with the Permanent Committee of Brothers,

plan and organize a Congress for all active Oblate Brothers to take place within the next three years. This Congress would be a preparation for 2028 when the Congregation marks the 200th anniversary of the first vows of the first Oblate Brother Jean Bernard Ferrand.

- 3.3 The Year 2028 be marked as the Year of Vocation for Oblate Brothers and Religious Life.

## **D. ASSOCIATION OF OBLATE INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. The General Chapter establishes the Association of Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning (AOIHL) as an official network of the Congregation for the mutual support and development of these Oblate Institutes to promote the “Elements of a Vision for Promoting an Oblate Catholic Institution of Higher Learning” [as approved in 2015].
2. The General Chapter recommends that the Central Government designate a member of the General Council as its liaison with the Association.
3. The General Chapter recommends that the Association promote Oblates to be prepared for ministry in higher education for our Oblate formation programs and the Oblate mission in diverse local contexts. It will also help Oblates, especially those sent



for preparation as formators, to deepen understanding and promote the Oblate charism in our institutes. Members of Oblate associations can be invited to contribute their gifts and talents to the mission of our institutes.

4. The General Chapter recommends that the Association help to grow interdependence and share human and financial resources among the institutes.
5. The General Chapter recommends that the Association promote a network among Oblate Units and Oblates responsible for secondary schools to develop a communication channel to better share the Oblate charism among the youth.

## **E. PROTECTION OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. Each Province, Delegation, and Mission of the Congregation be mandated to have a person appointed or employed to oversee and coordinate the area of Safeguarding and Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
2. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter recommends the appointment or employment of a person to oversee the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in the Congregation; this person would be accountable to the Superior General.

## F. LAUDATO SI'

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. The Central Government will develop and sustain a Congregational Plan of Action along the inspiration of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, in collaboration with other groups and organizations, particularly the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform
2. Major Superiors and Mission Superiors, and their Councils, will initiate and sustain their respective programs in their Units, in tune with the Congregation's Plan of Action
3. Each Oblate and every Oblate community, ministry, and institution, will undertake a process of reflection and concrete action leading to a "prophetic and contemplative lifestyle" (LS 222), an "attitude of the heart" that looks at creation with the eyes of our crucified Savior (C 4), and with Jesus' look of love (LS 226; cf. Mk. 10:21)
4. The 37th General Chapter invites Oblate lay associates and associations to collaborate in this effort according to the conditions and circumstances of their life.
5. The 37th General Chapter recommends that the Superior General and Council discern the possibility of opening a new mission in Ecuador, in collaboration with the Conferencia Interprovincial Oblata de América Latina (CIAL), as a concrete opportunity

to renew ourselves in our missionary identity, to care for our common home, and to accompany in a special way the native peoples, in coordination with La Rete Ecclesiale Panamazzone (REPAM).

## **G. FINANCE**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022)*

1. That the General Administration strongly encourage succession planning for Treasurers in the Units, including professional training in the local region (formandi with interest and aptitude chosen for training in finance).
2. The development of a spirit of sharing within the regions (examples are European Region and Asia/Oceania Region Formation Funds).
3. That travel insurance covering medical and personal effects be mandatory for all members and this be included in the Finance Directory of each Unit
4. That the Management Report of the Independent Audit be submitted to the General Treasurer along with the Consolidated Report each year.
5. That the current prudent distribution method (4% of the 3-year rolling average) be a normal practice by Units when they use their invested endowments to support their operations.

6. That the 10% contribution from the sale of fixed assets be used to build up the Dontenwill Trust for Mission and Ministry.
7. That if the General Chapter recommends the establishment of a new fund, new program or service, that the amount and the source of the funds must be specified, being mindful that our resources are the patrimony of the poor (R 22a).

## H. LAY ASSOCIATIONS

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

1. Having listened to the aspirations, hopes and dreams of the lay participants at the Second Oblate Lay Associations Congress in May 2022, and the seven lay representatives to the 37th General Chapter on September 17, 2022, the 37th General Chapter mandates the development, at the Congregational level, of an official network of laity sharing in the Oblate charism. Such a network will analyze and carry forward the Congress recommendations regarding Communion, Formation and Mission as well as study the identity and the proper relationship between Oblates and Laity to “promote a common vision in the Congregation” (R.37a).
2. We further mandate the establishment of a new General Service or an Office for laity sharing in the Oblate charism to support the official network.

3. In every Unit, appropriate concrete steps be taken to move ahead the most viable recommendations and hopes which are inspired in the Second Oblate Lay Associations Congress of May 2022 (cf. 37th General Chapter Document 8.11.1). To this purpose, the recommendation is to have a coordinating group to foster relationships within the various members of the lay associations within Units.
4. A coordinating group be established in each Region, composed of members of Lay Associations and vowed Oblates. This Regional group should be connected to the Unit coordinating groups and the official network.
5. At the General level, this recommendation is in keeping with Rule 144a that assigns the coordination of the official network to the Vicar General or one of the Assistants General.

## I. YOUTH

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

1. The General Chapter recommends that in order to allow and facilitate mutual knowledge and exchange of ideas and experiences on the future of the Oblate mission and life among the youngest generation of Oblates, a formation journey in the Congregation, which would lead to a meeting-congress of representatives of young confreres from the whole Oblate world be organized. This longer-

term process of sharing should take place first at the level of the local Units and then at the level of the regions. A meeting-congress at Congregational level would complete this journey.

2. The preparation of such a “journey-congress” (how, when...) could be the responsibility of the Assistant General who will be in charge of Formation.
3. Suggested timing: the first triennium after the Chapter as a part of the implementation of the spirit of the Chapter within a specific group of the Oblates

## **J. INITIAL FORMATION**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

1. The 37th General Chapter mandates the Superior General in Council to begin the process of centralizing the novitiate and post-novitiate formation programs in the Congregation, to ensure the missionary and intercultural formation of candidates.
2. The process will see to it that:
  - the formation houses in these stages are staffed by formators in sufficient number, are stable, multi-cultural, and well-prepared for their ministry;

- a succession plan and program of preparation for future formators are put in place;
- the finances of these formation houses, in collaboration with the participating Units and with the support from the Congregation's solidarity funds and other sources, are adequately set up.

## K. RESTRUCTURING

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter mandates the Superior General to exercise his authority according to Constitution 135 and, with his Council, draft a restructuring plan for the entire Congregation. This plan will consider the Units, the Regions, the structure of the General Administration and the Central Government, so that the whole Congregation follows the call to conversion for the renewal of community life and mission. The restructuring will be implemented with the following steps:

1. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years: The process begins with a discussion initiated by the Superior General with the Units, the Regions, the General Administration and the Central Government to envision new structures that may better serve the mission of the Congregation (e.g., the number of Units, the number of Regions, the need for Regional Councillors or not, etc.).

2. The work is done through a synodal process.
3. Each Unit and Region is accompanied and guided by the Superior General and Council. The work begins locally in each Unit and Region.
4. The Superior General determines the means which are needed to move in this process (i.e., ad hoc committee or commission with specialists in processes, organization of structures, canon law, etc.).
5. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years: In dialogue with the Units and Regions, the Superior General with his Council draws up a restructuring plan for the whole Congregation. All the requirements from the Constitutions and Rules will be observed. The document "Discerning and Sustaining Oblate Mission" will be a crucial resource.
6. Inter-Chapter: The Superior General presents the restructuring plan; it will include tools to ensure the Congregation experiences restructuring as a synodal and spiritual process.
7. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years: Restructuring is implemented, distinguishing between what must be decided by the Central Government and decisions belonging to the General Chapter.



## **L. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 37<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**

*(Approved by the General Chapter on October 13, 2022)*

The 37th General Chapter of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate asks the Superior General to approve in Council the Chapter Minutes that have not been approved in Chapter Assembly (Nos. 33- 47).

The members of the Chapter will be guaranteed access to the Minutes for a period of 30 days after the end of the Chapter. During that period, all the members of the 37th General Chapter will have the right to submit amendments and corrections.

## VI. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES APPROVED BY THE 37<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER

(Added or changed text is shown in *italics*)

### Changes to the Constitutions

**C 77.** *Oblates live community in a canonically erected house, or in a constituted house, or as a district community. Every community is entrusted to the care of a local Superior.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 6, 2022.*

This is a remarkable change which consists in simplifying the description of the different forms of living community in the Congregation. The form that was called “residence” is suppressed, while the reference to Oblates living alone is treated elsewhere (see R. 92c).

**C 83.** An Oblate appointed or elected Superior, Vicar, or replacement of a Superior, must have finished his first formation, received his first obedience, and completed the required period after perpetual profession.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 7, 2022.*

In this new text, the words “*and be ordained*” have been deleted.

## Changes to the Rules

*The following Rules are changed because of the change in C 77:*

**R 77a.** *A district is a local community whose members live, for the sake of the mission, in different places under the care of a local superior.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

The new text of this Rule considers only the districts; the reference to residences is deleted, as well as that of Oblates living alone.

**R 77b is deleted.**

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

The elimination of this Rule is a direct consequence of the change to C 77.

**R 92b.** District communities are governed by their particular statute determined by the Major Superior in Council.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

In the new text the words “*and residences*” have been deleted.

**R 92d.** The suppression of a canonically established house is reserved to the Superior General in Council at the request of the Provincial in Council. The suppression

sion of a constituted house, which has not been canonically established, pertains to the Provincial in Council, as does the suppression or modification of a district community.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

In the new text the words “*or a residence*” have been deleted.

**R 151a.** The special statute of Missions and district communities will determine whether they have the right to acquire, retain, administer, and alienate property.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

In the new text the words “*and residences*” have been deleted.

**R 92c.** Living together in community has, from the time of the Founder, been our ideal. *However, following appropriate discernment and for the sake of the mission, the Major Superior in Council can allow an Oblate to live alone, but only for a defined temporary period. The Oblate will receive an obedience to a community to which he belongs and where he will participate regularly.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

In the new text, the part concerning Oblates living alone has been reworded.

*The following Rules are changed due to the change in C 83:*

**R 83a.** *An Oblate Brother who has completed at least one year of perpetual vows in the Congregation may be appointed Superior of a local community. This appointment is done by the Superior General in Council, on the request of the Major Superior.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 12, 2022.*

In this new text, the words “*with the necessary indult*” have been deleted and the last sentence has been added.

**R 84a (new).** *An Oblate Brother may be appointed Provincial Superior, Vicar Provincial or Delegation Superior after having obtained written authorization from the Holy See at the request of the Superior General in council.*

*An Oblate Brother may be elected to these same offices. Such election, confirmed by the Superior General in council (R 104a), also requires the written confirmation of the Holy See on the request of the Superior General in council.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

This new Rule concerns the appointment or election of an Oblate Brother as Provincial, Vicar Provincial or Delegation Superior.

**R 84b (new).** *The election of an Oblate Brother as Superior General or as Vicar General requires, on the request of the General Chapter, the written confirmation of the Holy See.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

This new Rule concerns the election of an Oblate Brother as Superior General or as Vicar General.

### *Other amended Rules*

**R 7b.** Preaching missions at home, mission *with* youth, and sending missionaries abroad have been traditionally central to our apostolate. There is no ministry, however, which is foreign to us, provided we never lose sight of the Congregation's primary purpose: to evangelize the most abandoned.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 6, 2022.*

The change in the first paragraph of this Rule is to replace the preposition "to" with the preposition "with".

**R 60a.** Temporary vows are made for one year at a time. Annual vows are to be understood as extending until the date of the subsequent profession which, *at the discretion of the Major Superior*, may be anticipated or deferred but not by more than three months. If, however, the profession is deferred, a religious who does not wish to renew his vows may lawfully leave at the end of twelve months. Perpetual profession may be made only after completion of three full years of temporary vows, but can, *at the discretion of the Major Superior and for a just cause*, be anticipated or deferred by a period of up to three months.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 7, 2022.*

The change in this Rule is to replace the phrase “*at the discretion of the superiors*” with the phrase “*at the discretion of the Major Superior*”. These same words – *at the discretion of the Major Superior* – are also added in the last paragraph of the Rule.

**R 65h.** *At the end of initial formation, Oblates request a first obedience from the Superior General.* During the first years after their initial formation, Oblates will receive guidance and supervision from other Oblates more experienced. This is a time when they need the support of a community which, in turn, they enrich.

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 8, 2022.*

A sentence has been added at the beginning of this Rule: *At the end of initial formation, Oblates request a first obedience from the Superior General.*

**R66f.** *At the end of initial formation, Oblates take up their ministry as priests. If a scholastic in perpetual vows discerns that he is not called to the priesthood but intends to remain an Oblate, he asks the Superior General for an obedience to begin his mission as a Brother.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 6, 2022.*

The phrase “*At the end of the formal scholastic training*” is replaced by the phrase “*At the end of initial formation*”; the phrase “*If a scholastic discerns*” is replaced by “*a scholastic in perpetual vows discerns.*”

**R 128e (new Rule).** *It shall be the responsibility of the Superior General, Provincials, Superiors of Delegations and Missions, with their respective councils, and the Presidents of Regions, to ensure an animation on the vision and spirit of the Chapter and see to the implementation of its decisions in the different Units after the publication of the Acts of the Chapter.*

*Approved by the General Chapter on October 10, 2022.*

With the introduction of this new Rule, the current Rule 128e becomes Rule 128f.