



Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate United States Province

October 17, 2016

Dear Brother Oblates, Oblate Friends and Collaborators,

The 36th General Chapter was adjourned on Tuesday afternoon, October 11, 2016, almost a month to the day of its opening. There were 84 capitulars and a good number of Oblates who served in a variety of ways. I am grateful for the experience and consider it a privilege and honor to have participated.

As you know there were four capitulars from the U.S. province: *Jason Rossignol, Lou Studer, Jim Taggart* and *myself*. I want to recognize many others from the U.S. province who served as translators: *David Muñoz, Tom Ovalle, Ron Laframboise, Fernando Velázquez* and *Daniel LeBlanc*. Also, thanks goes to *Jim Allen* who served as Chapter secretary and to *Bill O'Donnell* in the secretariat. We worked closely with the Oblates from Canada who represented with us the Canada-U.S. Region.

An official Chapter report and document will be sent out in the coming months. Final editing needs to be done, and there are a number of items that still need approval from the Vatican. Even so, I would like to highlight the overall ***missionary thrust*** of the Chapter for the Congregation as we move into the future.

Perhaps the place to begin is the Chapter theme: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me. Pauperes evangelizantur—He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor. The poor have received the Good News.*" This theme, our motto since our founding 200 years ago, was chosen by the superior general after consultation, and it naturally led us into a Chapter focused primarily on "*Mission.*" Various recommendations were made and voted on to undertake a renewed and ongoing missionary discernment on all levels.

As an example of the missionary thrust, I can say that the Chapter led us to commit ourselves:

- to learn to recognize and respond to the "***new faces of the poor***" in today's world;
- to focus more strongly on the ***mission with youth***;
- to make sure that our life-long ***formation***, both first and on-going, is truly preparing us to be missionaries who are living our consecrated religious life in community;
- to use better the potential of ***social media*** as a tool for evangelization;
- to value more and deepen our experiences of ***interculturality***;
- to improve our ***management of finances*** on all levels for the good of the mission.

Also significantly, among other emphases, the Chapter has underlined:

- a stronger role of the Central Government as regards a number of first formation matters and the possible restructuring of Units;
- enhancing the integral role of Oblate Brothers in the life of the Congregation;
- the greater integration of justice, peace and the integrity of creation in all our ministries;

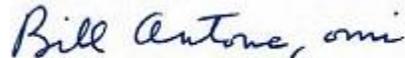
- increased animation for groups and persons who are associated with the Oblates;
- greater transparency and accountability in financial matters;
- enhancing our participation in dialogue with the Islam;
- the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults in every Unit;
- our identity as missionary disciples in apostolic community.

There were many other moments of discernment during the Chapter and most notably was the ***election of leadership***. Both the superior general and vicar general, *Louie Lougen* and *Paolo Archiati*, received very solid support to continue for another term. *Cornelius Ngoka* was re-elected as assistant general and *Ramon Bernabe*, a Filipino Oblate, was surprised by a groundswell of support for his election as 2nd assistant general. *Four new general councilors* were elected (*Alberto Huaman-Latin America, Guillaume Muthunda-Africa/Madagascar, Antoni Bochm-Europe, Peter Stoll-Asia/Oceania*) and we are very grateful to *Warren Brown* for accepting a second term as general councilor for the Canada-U.S. Region.

The death of *Kennedy Katongo*, only 36 years of age, was a shock on the first day of the Chapter. He died of a heart attack at the General House. Kennedy, a Zambian, was the director of the General Administration JPIC office. Our “plans” are not God’s plans. We pray now for Kennedy, a zealous young Oblate, that he may now live the fullness of life in God.

Finally, the truly wonderful meeting with *Pope Francis* for about a half hour on Friday, October 7, was a blessing of peace and encouragement. His deep inner convictions are writ large in his words and gestures. *I have attached the Pope’s message to us as a postscript to this letter.* May this message I am writing to you also be a blessing of peace and encouragement for each and all.

Fraternally in Jesus and Mary Immaculate,



**Bill Antone, OMI
Provincial**

Pope Francis’ message to the Oblates, as translated by Vatican Radio. Oct. 7, 2016

Dear brothers,

It is with particular joy that I welcome you, who represent a missionary religious Family dedicated to evangelization in the Church. I greet you all with affection, beginning with the newly-elected Superior General and his Council. You are here for the General Chapter, in the year in which you celebrate the bicentennial of your foundation through the work of St. Eugene de Mazenod, a young priest eager to respond to the call of the Spirit. At the beginning of its history, your Congregation labored to reignite the faith, which the French Revolution was extinguishing in the hearts of the poor in rural Provence, overwhelming also many ministers of the Church. In the space of a few decades, it expanded throughout the five continents, continuing on the path begun by the Founder, a man who loved Jesus with passion and the Church without conditions.

Today you are called to renew this twofold love, remembering the two hundred year lifespan of your religious Institutes. Your jubilee, for a fortuitous and providential coincidence, occurs in

the Jubilee of Mercy. Indeed, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were born from an experience of mercy, lived by the young Eugene one Good Friday in the presence of Jesus crucified. May mercy be ever at the heart of your mission, of your efforts of evangelization in the world today.

On the day of his canonization, St. John Paul II defined Father de Mazenod a ‘man of Advent’, docile to the Holy Spirit in reading the signs of the times and aiding the work of God in the story of the Church. May these characteristics be present in you, his children. May you also be ‘men of Advent’, capable of discerning the signs of the new times and guiding your brothers on the paths which God opens in the Church and in the world.

The Church is living, together with the entire world, an epoch of great transformation in the most diverse areas. She needs men who carry in their hearts the love of Jesus Christ, which permeated the heart of the young Eugene de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for the Church, which seeks to be a house ever more open. It is important to toil for a Church for all, ready to welcome and accompany! The work necessary to realize all this is vast; and you also have your specific contribution to make.

Your missionary history is the history of many consecrated persons, who offered and sacrificed their lives for the mission, for the poor, to reach distant lands whose people were still ‘without a pastor’. Today, every land is a ‘missionary land’, every human dimension is a missionary land, which awaits the proclamation of the Gospel. Pope Pius XI defined you ‘specialists in difficult missions’. The scope of the mission today seems to expand every day, embracing ever new poor people – men and women with the face of Christ who plead for help, consolation, and hope in the most desperate situations of life. Therefore, you are needed: your missionary daring and your availability to bring to all the Good News, which frees and consoles.

May the joy of the Gospel shine above all on your faces and make you joyful witnesses. Following the example of the Founder, may ‘among yourselves practice charity’ be your first rule of life and the premise of every apostolic action; and may ‘zeal for the salvation of souls’ be the natural consequence of your fraternal charity.

During these days of work at the Chapter, you have expanded your vision and hearts to envelope the expanse of the world. May this fraternal experience of prayer, confrontation, and communitarian discernment be a stimulus for a new missionary drive – a point-of-departure for new horizons – to reach new poor people and bring them together with you to encounter Christ the Redeemer. Adequate, evangelical, and courageous responses to the questioning of the men and women of our time must be sought. For this reason, look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope, without becoming discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in the mission but rather be strengthened by faithfulness to your religious and missionary vocation.

As your religious Family enters its third century of life, may the Lord allow you to write new and evangelically fruitful pages, like those of your brothers who throughout these 200 years have testified – at times with blood – to a great love of Christ and the Church. You are Oblates of Mary Immaculate. May this name, defined by St. Eugene as ‘a passport to Heaven’, be for you a constant commitment to the mission. May Our Lady sustain your steps, especially in moments of trial. I ask you, please, to pray to her also for me. May my Blessing, which I wholeheartedly impart upon you and your entire Congregation, accompany your path.