

L.J.C. et M.I.

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

Happy feast of the Assumption of Our Lady!

During the course of the past few years, the voices of many young Oblates of various Regions of the Congregation, alive with passion for our future, made it clear to the members of the Central Government that they wanted support and direction in renewing the ministry of inviting new members to join us. They expressed their love for our charism and the desire to invite new members, often in the face of discouragement and criticism from fellow Oblates who simply accept and even justify the lack of young men interested in missionary religious life.

Some senior Oblates, likewise, were calling for a renewed commitment to vocation ministry. They expressed their deep faith in God's ability to raise up vocations even in the most challenging situations. Remember the rock which Moses struck! They are convinced that the Spirit's action still draws young people to commit themselves to follow Jesus as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

In light of these voices, on December 8, 2013, I addressed a letter to the Congregation regarding the ministry of vocations. Oblates felt supported to move ahead in promoting vocational awareness. One of the first fruits of this movement of the Spirit was the Vocational Year 2015-2016 celebrated by the Region of Latin America. This was the first Region, and the only one so far, in our Congregation to sponsor a vocational year and to organize a congress for an entire Region. Congratulations!

Another fruit was the first Congregation-wide vocation congress held in Aix in July of last year with 32 Oblates from all over the world. The theme was beautiful and significant: “**‘Come and See’ (John 1:39): Focusing on the Joy and Generosity of Our Oblate Life.**” The members of this Congress called the Congregation to dedicate a year to the theme of Oblate vocations. This momentum of the Spirit was welcomed by the 2016 General Chapter, and a recommendation was given to the newly-elected Central Government: “*Declare a Year for Oblate Vocations during the current mandate, as recommended by the Congress on Oblate Vocations.*” (Article 28.4, p. 31 ACTS, English edition).

In response to the call of the General Chapter, I announce the “Year of Oblate Vocations” from December 8, 2017 to January 25, 2019. The theme is that from the Congress of vocations of 2016: “**‘Come and See!’ (John 1:39): Focusing on the Joy and Generosity of Our Oblate Life.**”

This “Year of Oblate Vocations” will both give support to and be strengthened by Pope Francis’ call for a year dedicated to “Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment.” In fact, his personal message to us at the audience with the members of the General Chapter on October 7, 2016, placed before us the urgency to commit ourselves to vocation ministry in light of the needs of the Church: “The work to be done in order to achieve all of this (a Church for everyone) is vast; and all of you also have your own specific contribution to offer... The current field of mission seems to expand every day... Therefore, there is need of you, of your missionary courage, your availability to bring to everyone the Good News that frees and consoles” (Acts, Address of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, p. 5, English Edition). These words, and his entire message, do not sound like Pope Francis believes we have done our job, that we can retire our Crosses and can now fade into the past. The Church is counting on us to respond to the needs of the poor today, and to “write new pages” in the history of evangelization!

The “Year of Oblate Vocations” is being coordinated by Fr. Cornelius Ngoka, OMI, under his portfolio as Assistant General for Formation. The organizing committee is headed by Father Antoni Bochm, General Councilor for Europe, with the assistance of Father Guillaume Muthunda, General Councilor for Africa/Madagascar. More information will be forthcoming. I ask that each Unit already begin to think creatively and work to make this year a dynamic renewal of our commitment to vocation ministry. The formation of a special committee in each Unit, working together with the Unit leadership, would be a most appropriate way to begin to plan this special “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.

Already I would like to express my gratitude for your generous and full-hearted participation in this “Year of Oblate Vocations.”

Sincerely in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Father Louis Lougen, OMI

Superior General

Solemnity of the Assumption, August 15, 2017.