



# convocation 2024

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## OMI Lacombe Convocation 2024: Dare We Hope? Fr. Salvador Gonzalez, OMI

### Dare

Our Constitutions and Rules of 1826 declare, *"We must overlook nothing, leaving nothing undared to advance, to extend the reign of Christ."* This saying, a cornerstone of the Congregation's missionary drive, invites us to delve into the idea of daring. Daring is a concept often lived rather than articulated; a concept that has shaped the Oblate missionary life and its historical significance.

Ironically, if we explore Oblate writings for references to daring, we come up short. Eugene de Mazenod appears to have yet to revisit this saying, and the term *'daring'* is noticeably absent from the thematic index of his works. It was not until Father Léo Deschâtelets, a Canadian Oblate, assumed the role of Superior General in 1947 that this formulation was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of Oblate missionary life. However, as we mentioned earlier, daring is revealed through practice, history, and life rather than verbal expressions.

Eugene de Mazenod and his Oblates were not theorists; they were missionaries bursting with daring in their efforts to extend the reign of Christ. These daring endeavors can only be hinted at; describing them adequately would require volumes. Yet, precisely, these practices form the essence of a study on daring.

Let us take a look at our Founder and our CCRR: in the Constitutions and Rules of the Missionaries of Provence, as outlined in 1818, Chapter One, entitled *"The End of the Institute"* was structured into three segments: preaching the Word of God to the people; compensating for the absence of religious communities; and reforming the clergy. Following Article 3 of this section, there is a Nota Bene spanning one hundred and thirty lines, with the second last paragraph stating:

*How vast the field that lies before them! How worthy an undertaking! The people are wallowing in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation... It is therefore urgent to bring back the multitude of those sheep who have strayed from the fold...to lead people to act as human, then as Christians, and finally to help them become saints.*

In the expression *"it is urgent,"* we find an echo of *"the love of Christ urges us on"* (2 Corinthians 5:14). In the numerous letters Eugene de Mazenod wrote to his mother prior to his ordination, Eugene speaks of both total dedication and urgency, but specific reference to *"daring"* is not to be found.

Yet, attention should be drawn to the letter dated August 16, 1805, addressed to his father. The discourse revolves around Fortuné de Mazenod's reluctance to entertain a possible offer of an episcopal position: *"When one wears the livery of Jesus Christ, ought one to fear anything, and should one not place one's hope in him who strengthens us?"*

This passage resonates most profoundly with the theme of daring in Eugene's writings. It underscores the Church's future, the priest's responsibilities, and simply the essence of being a Christian. Despite being a layperson at the time and distant from the notion of the priesthood, the phrase *"imposes upon us"* says how Eugene felt responsible for bringing the Church back.



## *Some Daring Initiatives of St. Eugene*

Eugene de Mazenod epitomized an apostle, a man driven to action. His resolute phrase, ***“one must not hesitate,”*** underscores his willingness to do daring things even without using the term. Initially, the bold choices made by the Founder impacted primarily on his own life. However, as time progressed, they increasingly involved his companions and disciples. For example:

In 1808, Eugene de Mazenod left his family to enter the seminary. While at Saint Sulpice, he displayed great courage in challenging the claims of the Emperor's police force to safeguard the Church's liberty.

Returning to Aix, he refuses to join diocesan structures, and rather he engages in efforts to care for youth, servants, and prisoners afflicted with typhus.

He chose to preach in Provençal and encouraged his confreres to do the same.

His bold attitude is further evident in his choices regarding foreign missions for his Congregation. Despite setbacks, each subsequent foundation – whether in Canada (1841 in Montreal), the Red River (1845), or Texas (1849) and Fr. Lacombe's ministry in 1852 – reflects his unwavering commitment to go even further. His correspondence with fellow missionaries consistently urges them to press forward.

This summary helps us understand Eugene de Mazenod's special gift or talent. It focuses on what he dared to do to share his charism with others.

We, as Oblates, were never meant to just fit into the status quo. Our being daring was not limited to or within the inner structures of the Church, but rather took place in the streets. Pope Francis reminds us of this in his address to our recent Chapter:

*‘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 Eugene de Mazenod, you are called to bring the Gospel of hope, joy, and peace.*

The source of Eugene de Mazenod's daring was not found in his temperament. He was not a tough guy, at heart; he was a softy with a temper. But rather, his daring was found in others' need for salvation, a need to which his faith in Jesus Christ called him to respond, personally at first, then with his Congregation.



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Like Eugene de Mazenod, we are called to exhibit daring in our choices and actions, even if we do not explicitly discuss them. The history of the Oblates in Canada exemplifies this daring spirit through their bold actions and unwavering dedication to their ministry. While we may not always emphasize the importance of daring, we can continue to embody this attitude today by following their example:

- To be fully and mindfully present to today's world and with the people we serve is daring.
- To stand as ministers and members of the Church in today's world is to be daring.
- To bring into the center those on the margins is daring.
- To stand with our Indigenous brothers and sisters is daring.
- To be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people in all our ministries is daring.
- To invite others to share in the charism of St. Eugene and to join us is daring.
- To care for our Common Home and defend the environment is daring.
- The Gospel dares us to be daring.

## We

We are the Charismatic Family of St. Eugene, a diverse community that includes Oblates and Oblate Associates of the Lacombe Province.

Oblates are individuals who have taken vows and are from various countries, including Canada, Poland, India, USA, Peru, Portugal (Azores), Sri Lanka, Kenya (Democratic Republic of Congo, Australia, Senegal), UK, Vietnam, Philippines, and Italy. Oblate Associates, on the other hand, are individuals who share in our mission and spirituality but have not taken formal vows.

You also have a dedicated team of co-workers who support our community in various ways. Together, you form a province filled with life, diversity, and positivity, and we as Oblates and Associates are in right relationship with the Church and those we minister with.

Divided into these three types of communities, you are in communion with our brothers in community, our Associates, and the people with whom we minister. You are not just a community, but a community of evangelized evangelizers. You are open to the workings of the Spirit and fully engaged in a synodal way of life.

You possess the capacity to discern the newness happening in the Church and in your current society. It is not just necessary, but it is your calling, to have a renewed awareness that is prophetic, sapiential, and apocalyptic.

You are the ones who can promote what is new and become the utopia that needs to emerge in our present time in the history of the Church and of our people.

Fr. Ken will speak to us about numbers and demographics. Our numbers are not getting bigger, they are becoming smaller. We may be experiencing diminishment in personnel, but we are not diminishing in importance. The information shared with us is not to frighten us but to encourage us to keep walking the talk.



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However, we will be needed only in the measure that we are capable of looking with hope at the horizon before us; that we commit ourselves to understand the dynamics of today's global and diversified world.

We choose to be a synodal community that practices listening with charity... listening with charity and compassion to the Church, the poor, and the earth. That is why we are needed today. Pope Francis reminded us that when he met the capitulars, he said, *"Stay rooted in your missionary vocation, in mutual love among yourselves and with zeal for the salvation of souls. ...this is why the Church still needs you."*

Brothers and sisters, this is your time, your place, and your Kairos moment. Your institutions are indeed undergoing a profound change of Spirit and organization. This is not a moment of fear, but a moment of hope. All over the world, consecrated life is transitioning, and while it may be challenging, it is also an opportunity for new structures to emerge from a new spirit, bringing us closer to our mission and purpose.

For this reason, it is necessary to point to a new paradigm.

This new paradigm is about shifting our focus from individual actions to collective efforts, from hierarchical structures to collaborative models, and from traditional practices to innovative approaches.

A conversation with one person can solve a problem. Conversation with several people can generate commitment, bond a team, develop new options, build a vision, and renew religious life and mission. Each one of you has a role to play in this new paradigm, and our collective efforts can bring about significant positive changes in our community and beyond.

## Hope

As we convene for our Convocation 2024, I am deeply moved by the theme that guides our gathering: *Dare We Hope?* It beckons us to reflect on the profound nature of hope and its transformative power in our lives and communities.

Hope, as we understand it, is not a simple concept to define. It transcends mere optimism; it is an active force that propels us forward, even in the face of adversity. Hope is the bedrock upon which we build our vision for a better future.

In our mission, we often encounter situations where hope seems elusive. But let us be clear: hope is not passive. It requires courage, determination, and action. It is the fuel that drives us to imagine and strive for a world where justice, peace, and compassion reign supreme.

Distinguishing hope from optimism is crucial. While optimism may entail a belief that everything will work out, hope demands more from us. It calls us to roll up our sleeves and actively engage in the pursuit of our aspirations. Hope is not wishful thinking; it is a steadfast resolve to make a difference, no matter the odds.

Hope comprises both emotional and cognitive dimensions. It is rooted in trust, care, and connection to others, but it also requires practical planning and a pathway for action. This dual nature of hope underscores its potency and resilience in the face of challenges.



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We have witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of hope in our ministry. Indeed, hope is not just a sentiment; it is a catalyst for tangible change and growth.

Yet, we cannot ignore the challenges to hope that abound. Fear and despair often threaten to extinguish the flame of hope within us. The fear of the unknown, the fear of failure, the fear of rejection – these can all erode our sense of hope and leave us feeling disempowered.

But we must not succumb to despair. We must confront our fears head-on and cultivate a spirit of resilience and courage. We must dare to hope, even in difficult times, knowing that our collective strength and solidarity will see us through.

Adding to the discussion of collective hope, here are a few more inspiring examples:

**Civil Rights Movement:** united people in the 1950s and 60s the fight against racial segregation.

**Marriage Equality Movement:** LGBTQ+ individuals and allies worldwide came together to advocate for marriage equality. Their collective hope paved the way for legal recognition and equal rights for same-sex couples, challenging discriminatory laws and social stigma.

**Global Climate Movement:** Concerned citizens globally are uniting to address climate change. Through activism and advocacy, they're working toward a sustainable future, inspiring policy changes and commitments to renewable energy.

These examples show how collective hope can drive social change and overcome challenges, reminding us of the power of unity and shared aspirations.

## ***Embracing Hope and Daring to Act***

In conclusion, let us return to our initial question: *Dare We Hope?* Through our discourse today, we've seen how our history is steeped in acts of daring that inspire our current mission. Let this history not merely inform us but transform us. Let the daring legacy of St. Eugene invigorate us to act boldly and hope profoundly, even amidst today's uncertainties. Dare to hope, dare to act, and dare to make a difference.

Thank you, dear brothers and sisters, for your unwavering commitment to the mission of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Remember that you are children of Eugene de Mazenod, Sons, and daughters of a Saint! A man with a heart as big as the world!



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## Questions for reflection:

### See

What examples of daring actions and decisions are highlighted in the historical accounts of Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates as described in the text?

### Judge

Considering the theme of "daring," how does the concept of daring align with the spiritual and missionary goals of the Oblates as articulated in the text?

### Act

What concrete steps can members of the Oblate community take today to embody the daring spirit of St. Eugene de Mazenod in addressing modern challenges such as inclusivity, environmental concerns, and global missions?