

LACOMBE CONVOCATION

200 Years of Grace: A Future We Shape in Hope

What is emerging for the future of the Congregation?

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Introduction.

Thank you for your invitation and for the opportunity you give me to pilgrimage with you in communion and hope. Thank you for discerning in this gathering the steps we must take to continue embodying this wonderful charism in our time, open to the future.

"What is emerging now for the future of the Congregation?" is the question you proposed to me for this moment. I would like to begin our conversation by recognizing that it is not possible for us to answer with all the depth it deserves. In my response, I am content with opening a few paths for dialogue, keeping in mind your subsequent discernment.

1. Celebrating Our Charism, Our Identity

One of my greatest joys is seeing how our charismatic family has celebrated the 200th anniversary with great creativity and enthusiasm. Events, congresses, retreats, etc., have been celebrated in most of the Units. Many Units have created an animation program for local communities throughout the year. Some have opened new missions to mark this bicentennial. We have new animation materials. All houses of formation have participated in animation sessions with the entire congregation in virtual meetings.

This has been an occasion to revisit the essential elements of our charism through a re-reading of the Constitutions and Rules (CC&RR). Indeed, the CC&RR continue to be a reference for evaluating our missionary lives and are generators of new life.

Challenges: For me, the bicentennial presents the primary challenge of going to the essentials of our vocation: we must live the Gospel to be witnesses of the Risen Lord among the poorest. In my homily of February 17, which you can revisit, I used three images that are three calls to live our charism in an evangelical way: to be a Mystic, a prophet and a Missionary. We must live these dimensions at both personal and community levels. I leave to your personal discernment the conclusions you may draw to live the essential elements of our charism with renewed fervor today.

2. Walking Synodally as a Charismatic Family

In recent years, what we have called the charismatic family—Oblate religious with vows, lay men and women, and members of other forms of consecrated life and other lay associations—has been developing in an impressive way. Our charismatic family is growing in numbers and vitality! We seek how our family can take shape and become, more and more, a missionary family with diverse models of belonging.

It is interesting how, in some units, this growth of the charismatic family is accompanied by a synodal model in which various realities walk together, mutually respecting the autonomy of each group, yet expressing in different ways the same charism given to us. In this sense,

we are called to learn from one another and to walk together in common discernment of what the Spirit is asking of us to announce the Good News to the most abandoned. Our charismatic family must explore how we will be the leaven of the Beatitudes and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in our world.

Challenges: We learn from the Church that there can be no synodality without implementing certain principles: solidarity and subsidiarity. In addition, there must be management that develops our charism through concrete structures that respect transparency, accountability, and co-responsibility. The synodal path is pursued through a strong commitment to the integrity and safeguarding of the most vulnerable as a missionary priority.

A second challenge is walking locally while pilgrimaging with the whole charismatic family. Obviously, the charism is embodied locally, but within a shared journey. Perhaps we need to be more creative in seeking ways to develop this common discernment for the good of the mission and in communion with the Church. At times, we lack the boldness to let go of beloved and familiar forms to venture into new forms of missionary collaboration and communion.

3. The Quality of Community Life

Within our congregation, an effort to rediscover community life is evident, attempting to regroup Oblates in a meaningful way. There is a growing awareness that the charism cannot be lived without this community dimension. Some decisions from the last General Chapter have helped in this regard. Internal restructuring efforts within Units and globally aim to ensure our charismatic identity is safeguarded by streamlining structures to favor authentic community and missionary life. Across the Oblate world, we see an effort to revitalize community life. There is still a long way to go, but steps are being taken. Interculturality is growing at all the levels as a prophetic and missionary opportunity for the Congregation

Challenges: The greatest challenge remains the quality of our community life, striving to make it more evangelical and missionary. On numerous occasions, I have had the opportunity to challenge our communities to be homes where the Gospel is breathed, where the poor and most vulnerable are welcomed, cared for, and protected, where creation is respected, and where homes of peace and reconciliation are built as signs and sacraments for the whole world.

The challenge of interculturality is becoming crucial for the entire charismatic family and it is a lot to explore for the good of our life and mission. We have to do more to growth in interculturality and to learn from each other cultures how to incarnate the Gospel in intercultural way. The challenge of making all the first formation intercultural will be one of the most important for the future of the Congregation.

4. The Quality of Our Mission with the Poor

To mark the celebration of the bicentennial, many Units have opened new missions or explored new ministries. As previously announced, this year we will open three new missions in three countries where we have never been present: Ecuador, Mozambique, and Rodrigues Island. Each has unique characteristics: In Ecuador, we will collaborate in serving the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon; in Lichinga (Mozambique), we will collaborate with the Church in evangelizing the poorest; in Rodrigues, we respond to a call from the Church to foster a renewal of its pastoral agents.

Challenges: Our identity is to be missionaries to the poor. It is true that the poor present many faces. But it is equally true that we are called to be witnesses of hope among the most abandoned of those poor. The future of our charismatic family depends on fidelity to the poor. Personally, I believe the most important challenge facing us is being missionaries not only for the poor, but **with** the poor—placing the poor at the center of our lives, our discernment, our communities, our finances, our actions...

I also think this applies to the ministry of JPIC, which must be renewed and strengthened from the perspective of the poor, making them its main protagonists. We must do much more for peace and reconciliation and take far greater care of Mother Earth. In one of my first letters, I had the opportunity to challenge our family in this regard, and what I shared there can help continue your discernment in this area.

Another challenge, which is not new, is engaging everyone in ongoing discernment of our pastoral work, our structures, our missions, etc., in light of our charism as missionaries to the poor living in apostolic communities, walking together as a charismatic family.

5. A Final Call: For a Magnifica Humanitas Oblata

Our CC&RR invite us to listen to the call of Jesus Christ made heard in the Church through the salvation needs of humanity. We cannot remain indifferent to how these needs have been presented to us through the voice of Pope Leo XIV in our day. His Apostolic Exhortation **Dilexit te** and his Encyclical **Magnifica Humanitas** present challenges we must answer as Oblates. If we read both documents allowing them to illuminate each other, our Oblate heart beats to their rhythm: the preferential option for the poor embodied in concrete actions, and the call to safeguard humanity in the era of AI.

In so many pages of both documents, the words and actions of Saint Eugene de Mazenod resonate. In his Sermon at La Madeleine, he sings of the dignity of the poor and asks us to show them who they are in the eyes of God. In the Preface, he shows us the missionary dynamic of proposing that people live their humanity fully first, and then become Christians and saints. His very life shows us how to take action to be, together with the poor, the proclamation of a new world born from the Resurrection of the Savior. We have a magnificent vocation, sharing and collaborating with Jesus in his mission. How do we do this in our time?

We are faced with the challenge of writing a Magnifica Humanitas Oblata with our lives. We must try everything, courageously, remaining faithfully creative to our charism rooted in charity. We must collaborate with the men and women of our time to safeguard a humanity threatened in a world broken by war, injustice, and all forms of abuse against the most vulnerable and the poor, as well as abuses against Mother Earth. Perhaps, through your decisions during these days, you can illuminate the path of our charismatic family so that we may become a Magnifica Humanitas Oblata in today's world. I look forward to your conclusions to share them with the whole family.

May God bless you on your journey of discernment. Thank you very much.

Your brother pilgrim of hope in communion