



**Provincial Letter for the 200th Anniversary of the Approbation of our CCRR
February 17, 2026**

Dear Brothers in Christ, beloved sons of St. Eugene de Mazenod, and all men and women who share in our Oblate charism,

Grace and peace to you in Jesus Christ, our Savior and the source of our mission. As we gather in spirit across our communities around the globe, I invite you to pause with me and mark—gratefully and boldly—the 200th anniversary of the approbation of our Constitutions and Rules. This is not merely a historical milestone; it is a moment of grace, a call to remember who we are, to thank the Lord for His fidelity, and to renew the flame of our shared missionary vocation.

As many of you know, on February 17, 1826, Pope Leo XII officially approved the Constitutions and Rules written by St. Eugene de Mazenod and his small band of missionaries. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they had crafted not only a rulebook, but a way of life deeply rooted in the Gospel and in the needs of the poor.

The first Constitution reminds us that “the call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through people’s need for salvation, draws us together as Missionary Oblates” (C1). This remains our starting point.

But as Jean Leflon recounts (yes, from that famous four volume series!), this moment of approbation did not come without struggle. Rome in the 1820s was cautious about new religious institutes. The wounds of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era were still fresh; suspicion of anything “new” in religious life was strong. Eugene entered the process with zeal but also with vulnerability. He faced delays, questions from consultors, and the quiet fear that the Church might not recognize the congregation he believed God had inspired.

Leflon notes that Eugene suffered during this period—not because he doubted the value of the Rule but because he feared it might never receive the Church’s blessing. Yet he persevered. And when approval finally arrived, Eugene wrote with profound relief that the Pope had seen “nothing of the man” in the Rule but something “inspired by Heaven.” It confirmed for him—and for us—that the Church recognized the Oblates as a small but significant instrument of God’s mission.

“Weak and few in number,” Eugene wrote the next day, “we nonetheless have an existence in the Church no less than that of the most celebrated bodies.” That conviction has carried us through two centuries of grace, challenge, tears, and triumph.

The CCRR continue to shape us as a prophetic missionary family called to be “one heart and one soul.” This unity is not simply an ideal, it is something I see lived among you every single day.



Brothers, as your Provincial, I want to speak from the heart. In my visits across the Province—in small communities and large parishes, in retreat houses, in elder-care residences, and in mission outreach—I have seen the CCRR lived with sincerity and conviction. Thank you for your fidelity, often unseen, often unrecognized, but never unnoticed by God. Our mission remains what it has always been: “to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned... These are the poor with their many faces; we give them our preference” (C5).

In our world today, in the midst of so much unnecessary violence and division, I long for hope. I remember when we studied the vows and were told by Jim Deegan, OMI, that our vows are not mere promises; but they can be signs the poor and marginalized can recognize. They are signs of unity and hope.

- Chastity, which “frees us for a love that reaches out to everyone” (C15), becomes visible when you sit with someone who feels forgotten or alone.
- Poverty, by which “we follow a Master who became poor for our sake” (C19), shines when you share from the little you have with those who have less.
- Obedience, through which “we become servants of all” (C25), is active and alive whenever you discern together what Christ asks of your community.
- Perseverance, rooted in Christ who “loved those who were his own... to the very end” (C29), is revealed in the Oblate who keeps loving, keeps serving, and keeps praying even when struggles are present.

I see these vows lived out all the time! Recently during a visit to one of our smallest communities, an Oblate said to me, “It might seem like we don’t have much here; there are not a lot of people here every day, but I know that we are here for the people, and the people know we are here for them. This is where God wants me today.” Ministry is sometimes simple: Daily prayer and presence among the people. They live C12 profoundly “in a radical way” following Jesus. It reminded me that mission is measured not by size, but by depth.

During another visit, one of our elderly Oblates, now living in a retirement home, preached at the morning Mass: “We can say thank you, because even though we might not be able to do what we used to, we still have everything we need; we receive one hundred fold of what we have given.” That fidelity is C29 lived beautifully.

Oblates, I want to say this clearly: I am deeply proud of you. This letter cannot possibly contain the full breadth of what you do: parish ministries, youth programs, Indigenous accompaniment, prison ministry, migrant services, retreats, hidden acts of mercy, and so much more. If we tried to list every good work of this Province, we would need not a letter, but a book. But heaven knows. The poor know. And I know. Thank you for being faithful to your Oblation.



Mary Immaculate, our Mother and Patroness, accompany us on this journey. May her example lead us ever closer to Christ and to the poor. And as the Constitutions remind us: The CCRR “are a privileged means for each Oblate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ... and to become a saint.” (C163) Brothers, with gratitude and hope, we go forward—one heart, one spirit, one mission. We carry the crosses of those who have gone before us; we lift them high knowing that one day someone will carry our cross and celebrate 300 years: An event I will not see in this lifetime but will hopefully celebrate in the next.

With Fraternal Love and Blessings,
Ray Cook, O.M.I.

A private prayer for you to offer:

God of infinite goodness,
I thank You for the gift of the Constitutions and Rules, and for St.
Eugene de Mazenod, whose vision gave life to our Congregation.

I praise You for two centuries of missionary service, lived in
fidelity to the Church and the poor.
Grant me the grace to cherish this legacy, to deepen my unity with
others, and to follow the Gospel with courage.

Bless all Oblates with wisdom, zeal, and the joy of Your Spirit. I
pray particularly for (name and Oblate) who was a personal
witness to me of what it meant to be a good Oblate.

Amen.