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of Mary Immaculate

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Europe: Looking Back on the Joint Session

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From 15 to 21 June, participants came together for a week dedicated to reflection and shared discernment on the mission in Europe. Throughout those days, they engaged in moments of input, dialogue, and Conversation in the Spirit, seeking to listen attentively to one another and to discern the paths the Spirit was opening for the future. The General Councillor for Europe reflects on the rich experience shared during these days, highlighting the depth of communion and the hope that emerges for the mission ahead.

At the beginning of the European Joint Session in Romania, we set ourselves a clear goal: to reflect together, in a spirit of synodality, on how we can continue to live our Oblate missionary vocation in Europe. We sought to discern how today's challenges might become opportunities for the growth of God's Kingdom in a society that is increasingly losing its sense of the infinite and finding it difficult to view reality through the lens of faith. Looking back, I believe we achieved that goal.

The session was filled with a genuine spirit of fraternity. An atmosphere of openness, spontaneity, and mutual trust accompanied our work from beginning to end, while the careful preparation of the meeting reflected a shared commitment to prayerful discernment. Although some discussions would have benefited from more time, I was encouraged by the attentive listening during the plenary sessions and language groups, the quality of the reports presented by both the Central Government and the Units, and the frank, constructive dialogue between the Major Superiors and the Superior General, together with members of the General Administration.

One especially hopeful sign was the courage shown by the Belgium-Netherlands and France-Benelux Delegations as they began a discernment process toward the possible unification of their Units. Their example may encourage similar conversations as the Region continues reflecting on the future of its structures. Our common prayer, especially the Eucharist and Evening Prayer, remained the heart of the gathering, while the visits to the Catholic Cathedral in Bucharest, where we met Auxiliary Bishop Damian Cornel, and to the Oblate community in Mărăcineni strengthened our fraternity and mutual understanding.

The evaluation at the end of the session was overwhelmingly positive. There were no negative comments, only a few observations expressing concern that decisions regarding administrative restructuring and formation are progressing more slowly than some had hoped. Perhaps we could have accomplished more, but it is equally true that we achieved what the Holy Spirit enabled us to accomplish, while recognizing that we must not become passive in continuing the work of renewal entrusted to us.

The Superior General offered heartfelt encouragement during his closing address, inviting the region to continue their discernment with passion and to make the decisions that will lead them toward a truly shared mission in Europe. Reflecting on Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, he reminded us that renewal begins with small but courageous steps taken in openness to the Holy Spirit. Europe, the cradle of our Congregation, is called to be reborn by welcoming the surprises of the Spirit, who continues to guide the Church in unexpected ways.

He also reminded us that the vision of the 2022 General Chapter remains our common path forward. By embracing solidarity, subsidiarity, synodality, and intercultural living, our communities can offer a credible witness to the Gospel in an increasingly diverse society. He further encouraged us to strengthen the animation of our local communities by placing the Constitutions and Rules at the center of our common life, preserving our charismatic identity, fostering a deeper sense of belonging, and embracing 2027 as the Year of the Vow of Poverty during this Bicentenary of our "Book of Life." The Joint Session also marked the conclusion of Fr. Renaud Saliba's two-year term as President of the CIE, and the Major Superiors of the Region's eight Units elected Fr. Wojciech Popielewski, Provincial of Poland, as the new President.

The Church is missionary, and so are the Oblates. May we continue to be humble and passionate witnesses of the Gospel that saves, remembering that we ourselves have first been saved by love. With grateful hearts, may we always be ready to give an account of the hope that fills us to all those whom God places along the path of our missionary journey.

Alberto GNEMMI, OMI General Councillor for Europe

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**With heavy hearts, we honor and celebrate
the lives of the following departed Oblates:
May their souls find eternal peace,
and may their lives and devotion to service continue to inspire us all.**

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