



General Chapter XX of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

Fraternal Humanism: Cultivating Salesian Solidarity Among Ourselves and Within our World

A Pastoral Exhortation to the Apostolic Units of the Congregation

Dear Confreres,

We, as members of General Chapter XX of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, spent several sessions discussing themes which are concerns of our Church and society at large. The themes we considered were: violence in our world and against the environment, interculturality, and youth. Our reflections and recommendations are summarized below.

We encourage this conversation to continue within the individual units of the Congregation, where particular responses may be made within our apostolates and communities. In addition, we ask you whenever possible to make an intercession during Mass at the Prayer of the Faithful for one or more of the following themes.

1. Violence in our world and against the environment

Recognizing the profound influence St. Francis de Sales' concept of *douceur* had on the militant Catholicism of his day and its impact on the many congregations and spiritual teachings that followed, our spiritual heritage allows us to be "a gentle presence in a violent world." In concert with Pope Francis' exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, we Oblates of St. Francis de Sales respond to the violence found within the societies in which we live and minister through our social work, teaching, preaching, and also addressing, with appropriate protocols and activities, the violence within the Church, such as the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

Each unit will search for the appropriate ways by which to implement these protocols. In so doing, we share the Christian humanism found in the life and works of our patrons. Not only does societal violence affect the people within our communities, but we Oblates of St. Francis de Sales recognize how, as a global community, we participate in violence against creation. In response to such violence against the environment, we strive to apply Salesian teaching and embrace the principles of *Laudato Si'* in order to model environmental stewardship in a 21st century world.

We recommend that units, communities, and individual Oblates should: study and discuss the principles of *Laudato Si'*; promote renewable energy sources; discuss what can and should be done regarding violence against the environment; do our part to lessen air pollution and support low carbon initiatives; build an awareness of what we eat, where it comes from and the benefits of locally grown and organic foods; attempt to cut down on our waste; have a recycling program;

support the use of solar for electricity and hot water; avoid wasting paper; join movements that have the environment as their focus (e.g., Greenpeace).

2. Interculturality in our communities and ministries

Distinguishing interculturalization from mere assimilation or merging of cultures, we recognize that interculturalization calls us to promote an openness to another's culture. We Oblates of St. Francis de Sales strive to learn from one another in this process. While we value our common spirituality rooted in our patrons and founder, we also acknowledge how each culture understands and appropriates the Salesian spirit differently; through experiencing the other among us in the Congregation, we can more richly embody and spread the charism to the Church.

We encourage intercultural exchange and ministerial experiences among Oblates, especially our young Oblates, and learn one another's languages and thus immerse ourselves in each other's culture. To learn best practices, we should attend local meetings of other groups who have engaged effectively with interculturality.

We note that issues of community life and interculturality are related. Modeling an openness to another's views and customs in our own interactions at home, we can create an atmosphere of appreciation; for example, each Oblate community could discuss the topic of immigration, being open to the views of one another. We can recognize that within each culture that joins our community, there are many customs, and we are encouraged to more actively learn what those customs are.

While there is much more to be done, we note that we are already doing much in the area of intercultural ministry, with our pastoral responses to the migrants and refugees entering our parish and school communities. We recommend that each apostolic unit implement at least one event annually that promotes intercultural unity, friendship, and cooperation. For example, Indian-style festivals that include parish based prayer, liturgy, and meals that involve the cultural displays, food, native dress, music, and/or dance of the various cultures present. Another example of such an event would be the Salesian Marathon in Benin, which brings people of many cultures together for a common task, and includes an element of evangelization: a particular Salesian theme/quote, Oblate Sisters-staffed pit stops, t-shirts, etc.

Let us find ways to share our stories (e.g., via social media), and so encourage, cultivate, and multiply the rich experience of interculturality among ourselves and within the Church.

3. Engagement with Youth

The youth are the "Young Church of Today." Therefore, just as Bl. Louis Brisson and St. Leonie Aviat listened and responded to the youth of their day, we too, as Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, do the same, meeting the young where they are.

In the spirit of our founder we recommend that the units of our congregation familiarize themselves with the documents of the synod of bishops entitled "Young People, the Faith, and Religious Discernment" and implement its suggestions as much as possible in each unit. This

implementation may be accompanied by giving a special focus on youth, their faith, and the discernment of their vocation in all of our communities and apostolates.

Encourage a ministry of prayer for youth both within your unit and your respective ministries so that the youth may be helped in their faith and vocational discernment. Listening to the youth can be defined not only as personal contact but also, at least initially, through the use of social media.

Each Oblate is encouraged to reach out to youth in his pastoral ministry in ways that are appropriate and respectful of boundaries, and at both the community and province levels, have discussions with each other about how they are listening and interacting with the youth. Finally, we affirm that many Oblates are already working with youth. We support their ministry and encourage them to continue and be open to further ways of entering into the experiences of young people.

Approved by the twentieth General Chapter of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales in Annecy, France, July 2018, with edits made for distribution in January 2019.

###