

A LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CAMILLIAN DELEGATION OF TAIWAN AFTER THE FRATERNAL VISIT

This visit to the Camillian Delegation in Taiwan was made by Fr. Leocir Pessini, the Superior General, and the Consultor for Ministry, Fr. Aristelo Miranda, on February 8-11, 2015.

The Camillian mission to Taiwan (formerly the Far East Vice-Province) has completed its 62nd. year. This mission gave birth and nurtured the missions in the Philippines and India. It was constituted as a Delegation of the Province of the Philippines in 2004. At present, it has 17 members (2 temporary and 15 perpetual professed). The members are composed of 4 nationalities, namely, Italians (8), Chinese (6), Filipinos (2) and Malaysians (1). There are also 3 Vietnamese temporary professed but they are not officially listed as members of the Delegation: they are there to help the mission. It has two communities (Taipei and Lotung). In the field of ministry, the Delegation has hospitals (2), a college of nursing (1), a center for handicapped people (1), a nursing home for the aged (2), parishes (6), a chaplaincy and teaching, and the Lanyang dance center. The Taiwan Delegation supports the Province of the Philippines, the community in Indonesia and the CTF. Despite its ageing and small number of religious, it is very dynamic and continually responds to the signs of the times. The various forms of ministry, ranging from healthcare institutions to formation and from education and parishes to chaplaincies, attest to this dynamism. The healthcare institutions are financially self-sustaining. For example, the construction of a new 200-bed geriatric center at St. Mary's Hospital. There are no doubts that the religious are satisfied with, and enthusiastic about, their mission in Taiwan.

Arriving from the Philippines for a two-week fraternal visit, I proceeded to Taiwan and spent February 8-11 there for my first fraternal visit. I visited Taiwan last May (2014) after attending a conference on bioethics in Beijing. It was mainly a friendly visit to our confreres stemming from my curiosity about this small but highly developed country. It was totally beyond my dreams to find myself back in this country in less than a year. Now I came to visit you no longer as a tourist but as a confrere ready to listen and to learn more about you. I did not come with the usual privileges accorded to a Superior General during a canonical visit. I came as one amongst you, as a confrere on a fraternal visit.

Taiwan is a fast developing society. A major transformation has taken place in recent years and the great majority of the population is enjoying the fruits and benefits of these changes. The Taiwan Camillian mission is keeping pacing well with this development in society or, to express the idea better, I would say it has contributed much to this development, from the very beginning, by providing quality healthcare services and specialized education to the least fortunate on the outskirts. In fact, several times this mission has received special recognitions from the governments of Taiwan and Italy. Our mission has been an integral part of the history of Taiwan as well as of the Catholic Church in her mission of evangelization. Moreover, it is gratifying to hear about the mass financial and moral support that is offered,

especially from non-Catholics. This shows that the Taiwanese have placed their trust and hope in our mission. You sowed that trust and you have continued to cultivate it for the past 62 years.

Listening to our confreres, I was enthralled by the courage and determination that each one of them has in the Delegation. I could feel the great love and generosity that you have for the Order. Your predecessors left a great Camillian legacy. Most of them died and were buried in Taiwan and China. There is no doubt that, in addition to St. Camillus, they remain as your true inspirers. I could hardly imagine that while you are ageing and only a few young confreres have joined you, the number of your activities is constantly increasing. So much courage is needed to do this and you have that courage. Your generosity to the Order extends beyond the borders of Formosa and you constantly support new missions and initiatives, in particular in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, I could feel also your fears about tomorrow, in particular because your efforts to promote vocations in this island have not borne much fruit. From its conception up to the present day, the mission has been blessed with less than 10 Camillian religious. Knowing that the Catholic population in Taiwan is only 1.37% of the total population, to raise the number of vocations is an uphill battle. Nonetheless, you are still determined to overcome this challenge because you are all convinced that the future of this mission lies with new vocations. In the recent years you have tried to invite vocations from abroad, for instance from Vietnam and the Philippines. This is a good attempt not only to cast light into the shadows of the future but also to retrieve the international character of the Order. I do hope and pray that this initiative will prosper. Rest assured of our support in this particular area.

As you scale up your activities, the demands are piling up as well. In a society that is very progressive and fast moving, you can but adhere to new standards, particularly in the management of our institutions. Let me just mention some of the concerns that we need to examine together and reflect upon the solutions that are needed. First, who runs our hospitals and educational institutions? Recently, there was an attempt to transfer the management of St. Mary's Hospital to a new Board of Trustees which was purportedly initiated by the incumbent hospital director. One of the arguments being used that justifies the creation of a new Board is that each hospital should be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Instead, ours is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Is this present set up and system of management still viable? If it is not, do we have qualified religious who can constitute and sit on a new Board? A correlated issue is the role of our lay collaborators. Recent General Chapters have affirmed the importance of lay collaboration and I do as well. However, in relation to our lay collaborators in particular, our personnel who have top positions in our institutions should exercise vigilance and prudence. These questions need technical or legal answers and not simply the changing of individuals or personnel. Moreover, your presence in the Church of Taiwan shows dynamism. You do not lack initiatives, creativity and constant expansion. All our institutions and ministries should have proper accounts. In view of this, I encouraged you to deposit all documents pertaining to the goods of the Order (Delegation) with the secretariat of the Delegation, or with the archives, since you are administering the patrimony of the Order.

Secondly, the Delegation has always been generous to the Order, in particular in giving financial assistance, and what legal instruments do we have to justify the transfer of funds abroad? I remember the stories of our missionaries who travelled with millions of lira on their persons. Nowadays, the risk is too high and the penalty is heavy. However, this situation

should not compromise our obligation and duty to support the Order. I am optimistic that there are legal instruments available. Perhaps, we could look at the colleges or universities or hospitals or other Congregations who have exchange programs abroad. We should not simply be complacent. This problem is felt by some Provinces of the Order. There is a need, therefore, to work together and find better solutions.

Thirdly, being in a country where the Catholic population is only 1.37% of the total population, and being in a highly developed country where the young people have a “*mare magnum*” of opportunities, religious vocations are far and few between. You have found an alternative by inviting religious or candidates from abroad. However, we are still faced with issues in terms of obtaining missionary visas to Taiwan. Let us look together at the opportunities that we have in Taiwan. The 1.37% figure means that there is a population of about 300.000 Catholics. According to the Archbishop of Taipei when I visited him, there was a slight increase in baptisms last year. Another opportunity lies in the fact that the Camillians in Taiwan are known to the people and you have prestigious healthcare institutions that provide quality healthcare. From the business standpoint, you have a saleable product. Why do you not reorganize and strengthen your program of vocation promotion?

Fourthly, in response to the lack of vocations, the Delegation is trying to promote vocations in China and has invited candidates from Vietnam and the Philippines. However, these initiatives are not free from challenges. For instance, the Chinese religious are having difficulty in securing a missionary visa from the Taiwanese government. The Vietnamese candidates who are completing their initial formation in Taiwan are free to decide whether to remain in Taiwan and work or to return to the mother province (Thailand). There have been attempts of Filipino religious to work in Taiwan in the past but this did not work because the system of formation did not give adequate emphasis to the missionary character of the Camillian vocation. All of them left Taiwan and some left the Order. At present, the Province of the Philippines has revived this initiative and has sent two religious to the Delegation. We are hoping and praying for the success of your efforts.

Fifthly, the disproportion between the increasing number of ministries and the decreasing number of ministers requires a thorough planning and equal distribution of responsibilities. Where the Delegation council is on top of everything, there is a need to delegate responsibilities and tap competent and experienced religious to engage in the management of our institutions. We must be careful about the *lord of work* and pay attention to the *work of the Lord*. A religious needs to be conscious of his limits and not overburdened with huge responsibilities. Your health is a precious gift of God that needs to be protected. Young religious need to be guided, introduced and directed as regards these major responsibilities so that at the opportune time they can smoothly assume such responsibilities in the future. Thus, there is a need to strengthen your own forces.

Finally, while leaving Taiwan on my way back to Rome I realized that this Delegation has so many good deeds and lessons to share with the world, and in particular with the Camillian missions spread out in more than 40 countries in the world. I have seen that this good news is now being communicated. Apart from external communication, the good deeds and new initiatives that you have achieved must be communicated and planned together by the members of the Delegation. Though you are few in number, the closer you are the stronger you will be. The gaps in age of the religious will turn out to be an opportunity rather than a hindrance if everybody is involved in the planning of activities. The leadership needs to

consider this question for the future of this marvelous mission. The General Council is always ready to help and very willing to listen and to be of service to this mission.

In today's world which is increasingly global, we interact with many different people from different cultures. Until recently, and not many years ago, unity would only have been possible through processes involving uniformity. The approach now is to construct unity in the midst of cultural diversity. This is a challenge that should be faced with a very sensible process of inculturation. This is very important mainly for the new generation of Camillians who come to Taiwan from several other nationalities and cultures and need to be understood within the context of their own cultural values.

Special thanks go Fr. Aristelo de Miranda, our Consultor for the Ministry, who was with me while I visited your Delegation. The celebration of the World Day of the Sick in Chinese in our chapel at Saint Mary's Hospital was especially moving for me.

In coming to the end of this message, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the wonderful hospitality that you provided to us in your communities. We really felt that we were at home in your home.

May the Lord of the compassionate Samaritan always be your guide, and may Saint Camillus our Father, the source and inspiration of our charism, protect you all!

Rome,
February 28, 2015

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