

***Letter to the Camillian Religious Brothers of the Province of Austria  
on the Occasion of the Fraternal Visit of Fr. Leocir Pessini, the Superior General***

17-23 February 2015

**by fr. Leocir Pessini**

*Esteemed Fr. Leonhard Gregostch, Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Austria,  
Members of the Provincial Council,  
Camillian religious brothers,*

***Esteemed religious brothers in Camillian life and the Camillian charism, health and peace in the Lord of  
our lives!***

I still remember vividly, and strongly feel in my heart, the warm welcome that you gave to me during the recent fraternal visit that I made to you in the Province of Austria. I met both personally and as a community the religious who form a part of the three Camillian communities of Vienna, of Nyíregyháza (Hungary) and of Salzburg.

In all of the three community meetings, we had an opportunity to remember and to reflect upon the year (2015) dedicated to consecrated life in the Church, a year that should be lived as a unique opportunity to grow spiritually in terms of the rebirth and revitalisation of our lives as consecrated men. I specifically quoted the words of Pope Francis in his message addressed to all consecrated people: ‘You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!*’. Looking at history, in relation to the past we are called to cultivate an approach of gratitude; in relation to the present, let us live with passion, not only to survive, always complaining like Jeremiah! And we as Camillians in the present are also invited to live with passion, serving with Samaritan compassion in the world of health and health care. In relation to the future we are invited to cultivate an approach of hope’.

Starting with this approach, in order to implement our lives and live them with gratitude, with passion and with Samaritan compassion, and in order to be able to serve in the world of health with hope, we are able to understand the three priorities that the Order is called to develop and which were consigned to us at the last Extraordinary General Chapter (Ariccia-Rome, June 2014).

These priorities revolved around three great questions:

1) *Economics*. Our task is to clarify the economics of the generalate house and to accompany the monitoring of the economic-financial questions of the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations. In this area we have already established the Central Economic Commission which has already met – in Rome in October 2014 – and which will meet again on 16-18 March 2015.

2) *Formation and the animation of vocations*. This question involves the very future of the Order and our very existence. One of the most urgent tasks, which was entrusted to us by the Extraordinary General Chapter, has been to revise and update the *Formation Handbook* as regards all the stages of the pathway of Camillian formation. A specific team of religious is about to be organised by the General Consulta, with the planning of meetings *ad hoc*.

3) *Communication*. Without communication communion is not created and even less is our unity constructed. A family that loves itself, is nourished every day by the news about the lives of all of its members. A little time ago someone observed to me that the only communication that exists between us is

the communication of obituaries! It is certainly the case that we have the duty to pray in suffrage for our deceased religious brothers but this is truly too little! In this sense, the central government of the Order, through the Communications Office, has begun the publication of a digital newsletter which is simple and dynamic: *from Rome to the Camillian world and from the Camillian world to Rome*. Various editions have already been published. I invite all those who have interesting and important news to communicate to share it so that all our religious brothers can know about, and take part in, what is happening inside the Order: decisions, events and major moments describe our lives and encourage us in our journey of faith and of hope.

I had the opportunity to experience for the first time *in loco* the glorious and heroic history of those religious brothers of ours who for over a century have animated through their presence and their lives the proclaiming of the gospel of mercy in Austria. This visit enabled me to meet, at least for a week, those who today continue to carry forward the presence of the Camillian charism in this country with joy and with courage, and this despite the high average age and the low number of religious that there are.

This is the reality that most worries me when I think about the future of some Provinces of our Order: few religious and already advanced in years, a lack of vocations, and an enormous involvement in numerous and important ministerial activities and services!

For this reason, the heads of your Province already for a number of years have turned to other Provinces or Vice-Provinces of the Camillian world, in particular India and Africa, where there is still a certain abundance of young Camillian religious, inviting them to contribute with their fresh human resources to supporting and supplementing Camillian ministry in your religious Province.

Naturally enough, we are faced with the challenge of the encounter of cultures that are very different, with the initial need to learn a new language and to adapt to new and different cultural habits, traditions and sensibilities. Our beloved former Superior General, Fr. Calisto Vendrame (1976-1983), at that time, over thirty years ago, was already talking about the need to create and to live this cultural challenge of inculturation with a new approach (cf. 'Inculturation': in *Letters and Writings to the Order, Camillian Generalate*, Rome 1983, pp.114-124). Perhaps it was the case that in those years this project appeared to be only a question that was more theoretical than practical in character. Today inculturation has become an authentic ethical and practical imperative because, otherwise, we will be eternal foreigners with one other, above all were we are called to live and to serve.

This ideal of fraternal life and communion in the years before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) would only have been possible through a *uniformity* of thought, belief, culture, customs and habits. Now, we have to learn to build it through unity amidst a diversity of cultural values. In particular I realised that there is an interesting life together and respectful fraternal life with the new generation of young religious who have come to your Province, from India and from Africa, in order to provide a new charismatic and ministerial impulse.

It is in line with this vision of the future of the Camillians in Austria that the Province, with the agreement of all its members and because of the strong decrease in the number of religious, began a concrete pathway of analysis and practical bilateral agreements in order to become a Delegation of the Province of Italy. Following the events that involved the former Superior General Fr. Renato Salvatore (November 2013), this pathway of unification underwent a temporary suspension while you awaited the formation of the new central government of the Order.

Now, from the conversations that I had with individual religious, and at the meeting with the Provincial Superior and his council, it was asked again that this process of unification take place during this three-year period (2014-2017). However, other hypotheses are also being studied. One proposal that is meeting with a certain initial support is that of assessing the link of the Province of Austria with the Vice-Province of India which is about to become an autonomous Province. Amongst the reasons in favour of this policy is the increasing number of Indian Camillian religious that are already present in your Province and are cooperating in the ministerial activity of their Austrian religious brothers, as well as the request of these

young Indian religious to be able to continue to have an active and passive voice in their own mother Province.

One aspect that should be highlighted in the Province of Austria is its historical generosity in relation to the many missionary projects linked to Camillian ministry through the funding and economic help for many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Your clear and transparent administrative organisation, which has produced accounts that have always been with a surplus in the past, as they are at the present, and which will certainly continue to be so in the near future, is worthy of praise.

The Lay Camillian Family of Austria has played a very important role in Hungary and Romania. It offers great hope as regards future prospects, with a significant number of lay people involved in ministerial activity, despite the absence of the material resources that are needed to give greater impetus and strengthen its activities. I believe that that this will not be an obstacle in the way of constant growth but, rather, a manageable challenge that can be overcome.

This organisation of men and women has taken up the Camillian charism and has made St. Camillus more known about and loved in these lands, above all through their exemplary behaviour in the Camillian ministry of solidarity between health-care institutions and the sick, the elderly and the disabled. We should not be amazed if Camillian vocations have come forth in these countries where we do not have any Camillian communities but, instead, a very active group of the Lay Camillian Family. I encourage our religious brothers to continue their religious accompanying as spiritual directors of these groups of Camillian lay people. This cooperation with lay people is encouraged and expected by the Church and is one of the priorities of our Camillian project for the revitalisation of our consecrated life together.

During our meetings in the communities we also observed how in the area of formation and the promotion of vocations our future and the very possibility of existing is at stake. As regards this point, I hope, and I encourage you to do this, that with the arrival of new religious brothers you can take up again and organise full-time the animation of vocations, above all where we have special hopes – in Hungary, in Romania and in surrounding areas. We feel the need to take up again this pastoral dimension which because of the lack of religious had become somewhat paralysed. Let us journey forward with hope!

At the end of this message, which summarises my thinking at the end of my fraternal visit, I renew my thanks to you for your hospitality and cordiality, the happy moments together, and the celebrations of the Eucharist that I experienced with you.

May the God of Life and Mary Our Lady of Health protect you always, keeping you steadfast in hope and the joy of living! May our father Camillus illumine us and support us in our Camillian ministry, in the demanding and complex world of health and health care, with us being constantly directed above all towards those who live on the outskirts of life, as Pope Francis always reminds us, those who unceasingly reveal to us the face of God.

I thank each and every one of you for the good that you do in our Order.

Faternally.

*Rome, 28 February 2015*