

**VISIT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CAMILLIAN
DELEGATION OF COLOMBIA-ECUADOR,
QUITO 27-30 March 2015**

Dear Religious Brothers in Camillian Consecrated Life,
the Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador/ the Quito community (Ecuador),
Fr. Alberto Redaelli (local Superior), Fr. Fernando Agredo, and Br. Carlos A. Londoño,

Health and peace in the Risen Lord who gives us new life and renews our hopes!

As I write this letter after my visit to the Camillian community of Quito (Ecuador), we are deep in the celebrations of the Easter Triduum of Holy Week 2015.

We were together, sharing the experiences, worries, sensitivities and hopes of the Delegation, of the Province of Italy and of the Camillian Order, during my fraternal visit to the community on 27-30 March of this year, together with Fr. Juan Pablo Villamizar, the Provincial Delegate of the Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador.

First of all I want to thank you for your great welcome and hospitality, for the conviviality, and for the fraternal sharing of important questions relating to our Camillian religious life. It was certainly a fine fraternal experience, rich in humanity, in joy and in hope.

We had many opportunities in this sense: in prayer meetings and sharing in community, in personal dialogues or in informal meetings in the dining hall, during the meetings with the Lay Camillian Family and with the health-care workers and lay volunteers who support the Camillian ministry in Quito, in particular at the 'St. Camillus' Hospice which is run by *FECUPAL* (The Ecuadorian Foundation for Palliative Care).

For those who do not know this reality or know it only by sight or by reputation, it is important to remember some historical moments of the Camillian presence in Ecuador. The return of the Camillians to Ecuador, to Quito, the capital city of the country, is celebrating this year twenty years of presence since the arrival of Fr. Alberto Redaelli in this country at the beginning of 1995. History had already recorded the presence of the Camillians in this country, with a long history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1789-1870).

In that epoch, this community was united with the historic Camillian community of the '*Convento de la Buenamuerte*' in Lima in Peru. During its first eighty-one years the Camillian community of Quito witnessed the presence of thirty-five Camillian religious. The founder of the community of Quito was Fr. José Elorza, a Spanish religious who died at the age of eighty-five in 1841. Fray Camilo Henríquez, the hero of Chilean independence, also lived in the community of Quito. In that epoch the city of Quito had about 30,000 inhabitants, whereas today the city is enormous and has over two million inhabitants (cf. Virgilio Grandi, *I religiosi Camillo a Quito: una pagina di storia che si rinnova 1789-1870*, Quito, Ecuador, 1998).

When meeting you I had the opportunity to present, and answer questions about, the projects of the general government of the Order after the sad events of the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014. We spoke for a long time about the three priorities that the Order entrusted to the new General Consulta for this six-year period of 2014-2020) during the celebration of the Extraordinary General Chapter in the month of June 2014: a) transparency and rigour in economic matters; b) the promotion of formation; and (c) global and effective communication.

The *Camillian project* for the revitalisation of our consecrated lives, which was approved by the Ordinary General Chapter in the month of May 2013, is the programme of the Order for this new central government. Now we are trying to implement this project together with the three previous options that were chosen as urgent and emergent priorities for the entire Chapter and which were emphasised again by the Extraordinary General Chapter (June 2014) which also elected the new general government of the Order.

We are enriching this process with all the documents that accompany the Year of Consecrated Life in the Church (2015) which was proclaimed by Pope Francis. I believe that it is very useful and meaningful for we consecrated men to reflect and pray with the *Message* that Pope Francis sent to all religious in the world. In this *Message* the Pope reminds us that we do not only have a wonderful history to remember and narrate but also, and above all else, we have a much greater history to plan and to build.

And we Camillian religious today ought to be proud that we are a part of this history which is made up of more than four centuries of service and relief of the suffering of the poor and of marginalised humanity. I continue to repeat, with increasing emphasis, to the authorities and the members of the Church, and to the few pessimistic religious (whom I meet on my fraternal visits), that ‘they are distorting things and want to see the whole of the Order in crisis’, that this historical page of service is the greatest moral and spiritual credit of ours that we can exhibit before God and before the Church! A single and sad episode which has generated tears of pain, above all in the eldest religious brothers of our Order, cannot stain four centuries of service to the sick. Naturally, we have to learn some lessons!

The *Message* of the Pope reminds us that in relation to the past we have to cultivate an attitude of gratitude; in relation to our present witness we must have passion for life, and we Camillians ‘serving with Samaritan compassion’, and as regards the future, are called to serve without fear, with feelings of great hope.

Today the Camillians in Quito have taken up with enthusiasm our identity, which identifies us historically with the ‘Fathers of a good death’, that is to say religious who care for people who are at the end of their lives.

The recent opening (in 2014) of the St. Camillus Hospice, which is able to accommodate twenty-four people who are at the terminal stages of their lives, is a fine synthesis of this tradition, and at the same time is a pioneering example in that country as well as a stimulus for all the countries of Latin America. This hospice has as its mission care for, and teaching those who care for, people who are at the end of

their journey on this earth, educating health-care workers, professionals in the field of health and health care, and volunteers in palliative care.

Also worthy of note in this eminently Camillian world is the aesthetic beauty with which this hospice was planned and built. I was touched internally by the extraordinary harmony between elements of nature (water, light, the garden, flowers, lawns), the architecture, and the internal parts which are coloured and decorated with very fine artistic pictures – landscapes with message of hope and faith!

‘People here really feel well, as though they were in their homes’, the relative of one patient declared. Beyond the architectonic beauty, one should emphasise the activity of the members of the Lay Camillian Family and the volunteers. ‘Without the work of these authentic Samaritans this service would not be possible’, I heard it said on a number of occasions.

This institution for terminally-ill patients is one of the best and the best organised that we have in the Camillian world, and here I do not exaggerate! Without any doubt, this institution will be important in terms of formation and also in inspiring care in other works in the continent of Latin America.

There is no doubt that economic/financial concerns about self-sustainability are always present. The relationship with public health-care authorities is always demanding: it is still the case that there are few public agencies that appreciate this kind of service to the sick, specifically because of its pioneering novelty.

It is interesting and important to notice that this initiative and this institution have come into existence, at this particular moment of global economic crisis, within our Order. Without a great deal of economic support, this work is a prophetic reference point for the whole of the country and for the region of Latin America, in the specific sector of palliative care.

The crisis caused by a lack of resources could have paralysed this project from the outset if it had not been developed with creativity, looking for new alternative resources and concrete solutions within the framework of the local community.

I would say that this work is assured specifically by our Camillian presence in Quito! Who could have the courage to abandon an experience like this which is constantly being transformed into a happy synthesis of the Camillian charism, into an authentic ‘school of charity’?

Normally, the paralysis of a work of care or of a religious community begins when the contribution of religious is absent or material resources become scarce. Here in Quito a different history has begun to be written, one far from that historical form of paternalistic help that pushes people into dependence and leads them to cross their arms in a passive way while waiting for external sources alone!

‘We need to learn to walk on our own legs’ is a phrase that I heard a number of people use. When one speaks in the Church and also in our Order about our need to learn to cooperate with lay people, here we have an experience of great success. Something that attracted my attention as regards the presence and the service of our lay co-workers was the qualifications and the training of the members of the Lay Camillian Family and the volunteers. In fundamental terms, all of them have a highly specialised university education.

An important aspect of our Camillian ministry in Ecuador is taking part in activities promoted by the local Church, within the context of pastoral care in health, through the service of the hospital chaplaincy. Our taking part in the National Council for Bioethics and Health in Ecuador, our presence in the international organisation of the world of health care (WGO – the World Health Organisation), and of that of palliative care (the *Federación Latino Americana de Cuidados Paliativos*), and our taking part in international conferences representing the St. Camillus Hospice, is another important aspect to be attended to in order keep up with the development of processes of the art of care, above all as regards palliative care, assuring a constant updating.

During our meetings we also spoke about the need to organise in a more systematic way the promotion of vocations and Camillian formation. Here we have clearly at stake our ability to exist in the future in this country!

We religious are few in number and certainly there is a need for greater human resources. We are worried at the level of the Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador about the perseverance of many young religious in this vocational area. These young men are presented as the hope for the Camillian future: they are supported in their studies and in their formation...but then they suddenly abandon everything and are transformed for us into a bitter disappointment! We also need to look inside ourselves with humility because we are aware that we need help to meet the new generations and we also need to review our methodology of discernment and accompanying.

We should avoid the pronouncements of pessimistic people who in this sector, as well, are always ready to proclaim that there is a crisis! God, certainly, is the Lord of the Holy Mass and the first and last source of our Camillian vocational call. This solid awareness should not exonerate us from offering our cooperation in the dynamic of vocations. We should have the greatest care, prudence and discernment in formation so as to avoid the creation of ‘little monsters’ amongst us, as Pope Francis has warned in no uncertain terms. The Pope has observed that the problem is not only those who leave religious life but also those who remain in our communities, who in reality should go away so as not to turn the lives of the other religious into a kind of hell.

The lack of vocations should not lead us to lower our guard and be less demanding in relation to fundamental criteria and essential values in discernment, in admitting and monitoring young men on their pathways of formation. We are, and will be, limited facilitators, imperfect but humble mediators in the face of a call of the Lord to a vocation to special consecration, which is what our Camillian vocation is. It is better to turn on a little light to look into the darkness than to get angry and curse the darkness!

At the end of this message of thought and reflection connected with my fraternal visit to the Camillian community of Quito (Ecuador), I renew my thanks for the welcome, the hospitality, the fraternity and the hope that was shared with you! I thank the Provincial Delegate, Fr. Juan Pablo Villamizar, for his attentive listening and his presence amongst us during those days.

May St. Camillus and Our Lady of Health protect us and always keep us healthy and serene in our Samaritan and Camillian service!

Faternally,

Fr. Leocir Pessini, MI

Superior General,

San Paulo (Brazil), 3 April 2015 – Good Friday.