

CAMILLIAN RELIGIOUS

Meeting of the Superior General, the Members of the General Consulta, the Provincial Superiors, the Vice-Provinceals and the Delegates

Warsaw, 18-23 May 2015

Opening Greetings of Fr. Leocir Pessini – the Superior General

My dear Camillian religious brothers

Good morning to everyone, you are truly welcome to Warsaw, in Poland!
Long live the homeland of our beloved and unforgettable Pope John Paul II!

We are commencing the annual meeting of the general government with the Major Superiors of the Camillian Order, namely the Provincials, the Vice-Provinceals and the Delegates, This event has become over the course of recent decades the highest expression of collegiality in the process of dialogue, decision-taking, and implementation of the priorities that are identified by the General Chapter of the Order.

I will introduce this opening session by expressing our gratitude to the *Camillian Province of Poland* in the person of the Superior Provincial Fr. *Arkadiusz Nowak* and to all our religious brothers for the efforts that have been made to welcome us with open arms in their country in order to have this international meeting of our Order.

The agenda of this meeting envisages discussion of the resolutions that we adopted at the recent General Chapters: the fifty-seventh General Chapter celebrated in Ariccia (RM) on 3-17 May 2013 whose theme was 'Towards a Faithful and Creative Life', and the fifty-eighth Extraordinary General Chapter which was also celebrated in Ariccia (RM), on 16-21 June 2014, whose theme was 'Towards a Revitalisation of the Order in the Fifth Centenary of the Order (1614-2014)' and which ended with the election of the new general government of the Order.

Almost a year has passed since we took on the responsibility for the government of the Order, starting with the Extraordinary General Chapter. On the one hand, we were nearly at the end of the jubilee year for the celebration of the fourth centenary of the death of St. Camillus – an event of enormous importance in the history of the Order. On the other, we were going through a situation of rather complex governance that was not in the least pleasant, as, indeed, we all well know. We can state with serenity and animated by experience that none of us fell ill or lost the joy of living because of this: 'we survived', or rather, with the surprising and unconditional support of our religious brothers, today we are more united: we live, we live together and we work with great enthusiasm, serenity and dignity! The general government today is without any doubt a united community of life and work (team work) that is aware of its responsibility and which seeks to develop, with humility and courage, its mission of encouraging and revitalising the Order.

We can repeat today with strengthened conviction what we have said since we took responsibility for the government of the Order: after almost a year, the Order has not entered a state of deep crisis. Certainly our religious have suffered – this is something that cannot be denied! The crisis principally concerned the general government of the Order. It is true: some religious who were already going through personal situations of tension and difficulty sought to use these circumstances to transform their personal crisis into everyone's crisis. But this attempt did not at all have the desired effects. We need to find a renewed trust towards the general government and this requires time – certainly more than six years. I am also convinced that this renewed trust, which has been given 'graciously' to us by our religious brothers, must be confirmed

and upheld by our operational choices! This is the price that we will pay for our recent past with the hope that this will be a lesson that will really be taken seriously.

In all of this context we have experienced the care, the concern and the paternal support of the Church for the Camillians, starting with the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The greetings of Pope Francis to the *Great Camillian Family* during the prayer of the Angelus on Sunday 12 July 2014 on the eve of the fourth centenary of the death of St. Camillus did us a great deal of good, especially in terms of self-esteem.

At the recent two General Chapters of 2013 (Ariccia, 3-17 May) and 2014 (Ariccia, 16-21 June) our Order approved the Camillian project for the revitalisation of our consecrated lives, the outcome of a long pathway which witnessed the participation of all the local communities, the Provinces, the Vice-Provinces and the Delegations of the Order for a number of years. In November 2013, on the occasion of meeting of the Superior Generals with Pope Francis, the Holy Father announced to those present that he would dedicate the year 2015 to consecrated life. In a rather surprising and spontaneous meeting our Pastor declared that the 'mission of religious is to awaken the world', and, to quote him again, he said that 'where there are religious there is joy'.

Nothing would be more appropriate that to put together our *project for revitalisation* with the events, the celebrations and the publications connected with the Year of Consecrated Life. We have already benefited from certain support materials: *Rejoice!: a Circular Letter to Consecrated Men and Women. From the Teachings of Pope Francis*; *Scan: Consecratedeì Men and Women Journeying with the signs of God*; *The Guidelines for the Management Institutes for consecrated sLife and societies of Apostolic Life* (a circular), as well as other documents drawn up by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the *Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*.

Everywhere that we journey as 'pilgrims', on our encounter with those people who are on the geographical and existential outskirts of human life – as Pope Francis emphatically repeats – in the context of world Camillian geography, we constantly remember what is emphasised in that apostolic letter: 'You gave not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, were the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things'. And when we look at our history we must be proud of this almost half a millennium of history of charity and of service to the sick in the world of health and health care. This history made up of martyrs and saints, most of whom remain anonymous, is the most qualified sign of credibility that we have with God and humanity. Nothing and nobody can dirty this history, deny it or even less steal it from us. This is a human story, even with all the vicissitudes and limitations due to the vulnerability of man, but without doubt it is a story made up of heroism and faith, and as such it is a story of holiness! In front of it, respect and reverence are almost an ethical imperative. In order to be continuators of this history, as Camillians, prudence, courage and prophecy are the essential ingredients of the pathway, without which we cannot project ourselves towards the future with hope, taking upon ourselves with responsibility the heritage of holiness of those who have preceded us and who worthily transmitted such holiness to us.

With respect to our Camillian history, which reveals to us 'our charismatic identity as an Order', basing ourselves on this ecclesial perspective we are asked to 'look to the future with gratitude, to live the present with passion' – and we would add to serve with Samaritan compassion – 'and to embrace the future with hope'. In this approach to, and vision of, time as a *Kairos* of God (*a time of grace*) Pope Francis invites us to walk, directing ourselves together towards the emergent and urgent priorities that were defined by the Camillian project for the revitalisation of our Camillian consecrated lives, a project that was approved by the whole of the Order at the recent Extraordinary General Chapter. There are three areas that are priorities at the level of government for this six-year period of 2014-2020.

a) *The economics of the Order*: to set in motion immediately and urgently the reorganisation of the finances of the generalate house and its dependencies (the *Camillianum* and the community of the Casa

Rebuschini House) and the re-establishment of the Central Economic Commission with religious who are expert in the fields of finance and management (and with the possibility of consulting lay people). The *Central Economic Commission* was the first commission to be created and it has already met twice at the generalate house under the coordination of the general financial administrator and with the participation of the Superior General. Its functions were defined and a work programme was established at two meetings in October 2014 and on 16-18 March 2015. The objective is full transparency. In economics, we do not always realise that the trust granted to us must always be demonstrated to be well-founded (suitable documentation), subject to proof (correct documentation and analyses) and involve verification (legitimated by a competent other organ).

b) *Formation and the promotion of vocations*. The aim is to implement the formation of future religious, the formation of those who provide formation, and strategies for the ‘throwing out of nets’ for new Camillian vocations. Here our very existence in the future is at stake. The recent Extraordinary General Chapter asked for an updating of the ‘Rules for Formation’ of our Order. This is a task that should be begun as soon as the membership of the Central Commission for Formation has been decided upon. On the international Camillian map, areas are evident where we are ageing and ‘dying’ (Europe, North America) and if new prospects for innovation and change are not achieved there will be a real risk of disappearing. In other areas, however, we are witnessing a certain vigour and growth (Asia, Africa and Latin America). This decrease at a vocational level is an important aspect that generates suffering not only in Camillians – we also know that it is a critical element at a global level and one shared by many historic Congregations and Institutes that have a long tradition in the Church, as is the case with us.

c) *Communication – what we do and what we experience*. We humans are essentially beings of communication! This is a vital area for the construction of communion and the nourishment of fraternal relationships. I will repeat what I heard from a Camillian missionary who worked for forty years in the Amazon region of Brazil: ‘The only communication that works well in our Order is the communication of obituaries’. Indeed, in our epoch, which is characterised by almost instantaneous communications, the news unfailingly arrives on the same day, only a few days after the death of a religious brother, in all parts of the Camillian world. There is nothing wrong about any of this. Indeed, it is our duty to pray and thank God for the lives of those who have shared their histories with us. But a family whose members love each other and care for each other wants to share and to communicate, beginning with everything that happens to the living! Who of us do not follow what happens to their families, to their parents, to their brothers and sisters and to their relatives? In this sense, the professionalization of this sector, like the creation of an *Office for Communications* at the generalate house, as in Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations, is an initiative that should be taken seriously. The publication of a newsletter with the principal news of the Order in a certain sense fills a gap that exists and meets the widespread wish to know about, and to communicate, the facts and events that tell the story of the vitality of our Order.

The programme that we will follow at this annual appointment in Warsaw is substantially organised around the three priorities that we received from the Extraordinary General Chapter of June 2014. This is a ‘first report’ that we offer to the Order, listing the initiatives that are being developed, reporting their results, the points of strength, and the problems and the prospects for hope that await us. At this meeting each General Consultor as regards his own specific area of responsibility, will describe the needs and the initiatives that should be engaged in during this not six but five years given that one year has already passed quickly!

In terms of strategic planning for our six-year period (2014-2020) we organised a three-day meeting on 22-24 January 2015 at the generalate house of the Sisters Ministers of the Sick, on the outskirts of Rome. On that occasion we had a meeting with the general governments (General Councils and Superior Generals) of the Sisters of St. Camillus and of the Women Ministers of the Sick. At this meeting we made important observations as regards the possibilities of implementing cooperation, collaboration and mutual support in various sectors, amongst which the areas of ministry in the world of health and health care, formation, the promotion of vocations, and spirituality. In many countries of the international Camillian world we Camillians are very near, through our communities and our works, to the Daughters of St. Camillus or to the

Women Ministers of the Sick, and at times we work in the same health-care institutions as them. The Superior General when he visits Camillians in a country usually goes to visit the women Camillian religious who are also there and vice versa. We await with confidence the future developments of this cooperation, improving dialogue and growing together with other institutions based on the charism of St. Camillus as well, for example secular institutes and the Lay Camillian family.

In the planning of this international meeting of ours, especial attention was paid to pilgrimage (not a mere touristic trip, as one could hurriedly think and/or understand). We will visit the important places in the life of John Paul II (Krakow, Wadowice and Czestochowa) as well as the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz. This pilgrimage in reality seeks to be a spiritual experience and specifically for this reason – and this is no accident – it has been placed in the middle of our meeting and not at its end! This is an important experience and an integral part of our meeting: not only reports and discussions in the hall but also an exercise by which to learn to walk, to reflect and to pray together! For a whole generation of today's adults, and many of us here belong to this category, who live in and come from the so-called 'outskirts of the world', the charismatic figure of John Paul II has been for us a point of reference. If some of those who are present have already been on this pilgrimage, and do not want to do it again, they are completely free not to take part.

It is also important, I would go further – it is 'a good and just thing', as we proclaim in the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass, to record the 'good news' by which the Camillians have borne good witness to themselves for the world and the Church over the last twelve months! We have had at least three events which make us proud as regards the Camillian ministry of help and assistance to the wounded, the sick and the persecuted in dramatic areas of the frontier between life and death. One of these episode comes from Central Africa (the Central African Republic). I am referring to the life witness of two young African Camillians to whom was given, at the end of the celebration of our jubilee, the prestigious Alison de Forges Prize for the defence of human rights by an international organisation – Human Rights Watch. They saved the lives of over 1,500 Muslims, above all children, sick women and disabled people. The great resonance that this fact had in the mass media, and above all in the mass media of the 'secular world', is interesting (see the text that I wrote that you have in your folders entitled 'The Drama and Witness of Young Camillian Missionary Heroes' which was published in *Camilliani/Camillians*, 1/2015, pp. 4-10 of the Italian edition and pp.11-17 of the English edition). We will also see an interview produced by the international TV channel CNN. The only arm that these young Camillians had against violent murderers was their faith and the Camillian cassock with its red cross! So much publicity for the Camillians and free publicity at that!

Another area where the Camillian ministry has been present with its dissemination and consequences in the mass media is the work of the Camillian Task Force which was present during the epidemic of Ebola in western Africa where it struck three countries: Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea and Liberia. The Camillian Task Force is still present and at work in Sierra Leone. Fr. Aris Miranda, the Consultor for Ministry, is coordinating the initiatives of this task force. After the recent earthquake which shook Napal on 25 April of this year and in particular its capital city Kathmandu, and all the surrounding areas, causing thousands of dead and wounded, with a loss of human lives and great material destruction, through the Camillian Task Force Central and the Camillian Task Force India important humanitarian initiatives were taken to care for the victims of this earthquake, together with other Catholic institutions such as Caritas India and Caritas Internationalis.

Starting with a strong request that had already emerged in the General Chapter about the need for a greater presence of the Superior General amongst our religious brothers and the communities of the Order and the achievement of greater learning about each other *in loco*, during this first year we have tried to be more present through 'fraternal visits' in many areas of the Camillian world. We need to rediscover and live the *theology of encounter*, that is to say to leave (to engage in a personal exodus) in order to encounter the other, above all going towards the existential and geographical outskirts of human life, according to the recommendations of Pope Francis. In this sense, our programme of fraternal visits has been very intense, covering practically two-thirds of the Camillian world.

During this first year of pastoral ministry, we have visited our religious brothers in various Provinces, Vice-Provinces and religious communities:

1. In *South-East Asia*, our religious brothers of the Province of **Thailand** and of the Delegation of **Vietnam**, the Superior General (24 September-4 October 2014) and the General Consultor Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon (17-27 February 2015);
2. in *western Africa* (French-speaking countries), our religious brothers of the Vice-Province of **Benin-Togo** (10-14 December 2014) and the Vice-Province of **Burkina Faso** (first the Superior General and the Vicar General Fr. Laurent Zoungrana (14-19 December 2014) and then the Vicar General together with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana and the General Financial Administrator Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla on the occasion of the recent general assembly of the Vice-Province (held on 15-25 April 2015);
3. our religious brothers of the Province of the **Philippines**, the Superior General and the General Consultor for Ministry Fr. Aris Miranda (26 January-6 February 2015) and the Delegation of **Taiwan** (8-11 February 2015); Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon animated a course of spiritual exercises for our Italian-speaking religious brothers in Taiwan on 1-11 April 2015;
4. the Superior General visited our religious brothers of the Province of **Austria** (Austria and Hungary) on 17-23 February 2015;
5. in the **Province of Sicily and Naples** (San Giorgio a Cremano) the Superior General and Br. José Ignacio took part in the general assembly of the Province to discuss economic questions (9-10 March 2015) after a previous meeting of the whole of the Provincial Council (November 2014); Fr. Pessini twice met our religious brothers of the community of Macchia di Monte S. Angelo (places connected with the conversion of St. Camillus, Manfredonia and San Giovanni Rotondo), on 25-27 February 2015 and 8-10 May 2015;
6. in Latin America Fr. Pessini visited the Delegation of **Colombia-Ecuador** on three occasions; the Superior General was in **Bogota**: a) during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Camillians in Colombia; b) on the occasion of the International Congress for the Humanisation of Health Care at our pastoral centre. This congress was organised together with the CELAM (the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conference) (October 2014) and Fr. Leocir offered two papers; and c) in Quito in Ecuador on 27-30 April 2015;
7. in **India**, the Superior General and the General Consultor met the Camillian religious on 16-27 April 2015.

Then there were the *informal fraternal* visits: a) in **Mexico** (June 2014), in **Brazil**, to the Delegation of **Argentina**, in **Chile** and in **Bolivia**; b) in **Ireland** and in **Italy** (meetings with the Provincial Councils of the three Provinces of Italy: in **Capriate, Rome** and **Naples**) and then a meeting at the generalate house between the Central Government with all its members and the three Provincial Superiors of the three Provinces of Italy. In **Italy**, usually at weekends, the Superior General together with the General Secretary Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, met our religious brothers of the Camillian communities of **Capriate** (Milan); **Venice and Bologna** (13-15 March 2015) and **Turin**.

In the immediate future we have planned the following fraternal visits: a) the Superior General and Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, on 3-12 July 2015 will meet our religious brothers of the Province of **Ireland**; b) in the Vice-Province of Peru (Lima), the Superior General and Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla will make a visit on 19-30 August 2015. In a short time, we will draw up in harmony with the Provincials, Vice-Provincials and Delegates a complete programme so that by the middle of next year (2016) we will be able to complete these fraternal visits, meeting all the Camillians in the world.

I cannot end this introductory note without expressing my gratitude first of all for the effective organisation of the deliberations and planning of this meeting, with information on visas, the drawing up of letters extending invitations, communications, the drawing up of the programme, and many other activities that have been engaged in by our secretaries: the General Secretary together with the Provincial Secretary of the Province of Poland, Fr. Benek.

I wish everyone fruitful work: we are walking towards the future with hope! At this point our deliberations become prayer as we humbly beseech the Lord to guide and support us.

May St. Camillus our father founder protect us and may the Holy Spirit illumine us with the gift of wisdom in the face of the questions and challenges that are in front of us! We ask to discern and act with prudence, wisdom, serenity and prophetic boldness for the good of our Order of St. Camillus, according to the style that characterised the choices of Jesus and St. Camillus. May Mary, our Lady of health, help us to increasingly value life and health, educating us in an integral development, evangelising and providing care with Samaritan to those who in their lives are experiencing the difficult season of suffering and illness, as our Holy Father Camillus did!

Fraternally.