



*Il Superiore Generale*  
*Superior General*

**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL  
TO OUR RELIGIOUS BROTHERS OF THE ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE**  
*Fraternal Visit, 3-12 July 2015*

***Dear Fr. Stephen Foster, Provincial Superior,  
Members of the Provincial Council,  
Esteemed Religious Brothers of the Anglo-Irish Province!***

Cordial greetings of peace and a warm thanks for the fraternal welcome and for the time that you gave me and Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, a General Consultor, during the days of our stay amongst you on the occasion of our fraternal visit!

The Superior General had already visited Ireland during the month of November last year for an informal meeting with the whole of the Province on the occasion of the fraternal visit and the visit of friendship for Fr. Frank Monks, a former Superior General, who was facing up to a difficult moment for health reasons, given that he was having a surgical operation at a hospital in Dublin. Fr. Gianfranco spent three months with you, eighteen years ago, trying to learn the bases of the English language. These details greatly facilitated our relationships during the fraternal visit: we met each other not as foreigners but as *religious brothers*.

We want to begin this message, which opens our dialogue with you, with a poem that is known to you and which you also hold dear!

***TREES*** *By Joyce Kilmer*

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.

A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray.

A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair.

Upon whose bosom snow has lain,  
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,  
***But only God can make a tree.***

At the beginning of the avenue that leads to the Nursing Centre and to the house of the Camillian community, two important symbols are located of the pilgrimage of the heart of St. Camillus to that Camillian place. A commemorative plaque which was a part of the original Hannon Mill, which bears a picture of St. Camillus, contains the following words: ‘Commemorating the visit of the heart of St. Camillus to Killucan. 9th -11<sup>th</sup> July 2010. “Preach the Gospel – heal the sick”. “The kiss of the sun for pardon. The song of the bird for mirth. One is closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth”’. Another symbol is a tree. It was planted to commemorate the pilgrimage of the relic of the heart of St. Camillus at the time of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the arrival of the Camillians in Killucan. At its roots is a small commemorative plaque which was placed there by the residents of the Nursing Centre: ‘This tree was planted by the residents of St. Camillus Nursing Centre to commemorate the visit of the heart of St. Camillus to Killucan from the 9th – 14th July 2010. “Only God can make a tree”’. The last verse reads ‘only God can make a tree’. This is the last verse of a famous Irish poem entitled ‘Trees’ by Joyce Kilmer and it can also be used as an epigraph for this message at the end of our fraternal visit.

Many of you observed that the pilgrimage of the relic of the heart of St. Camillus in Ireland, both in Dublin and in Killucan, was a great success with the general public. In the small, rural and beautiful Killucan more than 47,000 people came from the whole of the area to pray in front of the heart of St. Camillus. There was also an extraordinary coverage on the part of the mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) of this event which made the Camillians increasingly known about in Ireland. ‘It was certainly one of the most important events in the seventy-five years of history of our community’ (O’Brien, J. and Connaughton, E. *A Life of Camillus de Lellis: 1550-1614: A Man for our Times*, Dublin, 2014, p. 63).

‘Only God can create a tree’ is a curious phrase because St. Camillus used it as well and with the same meaning: ‘The time will come when this little plant will spread throughout the world’. Furthermore, this small plant lives opposite the elegant and well-kept fence that holds the mortal remains of many of our religious brothers, beginning with those of Fr. Terence O’Rourke who was a member of the Camillian Province of France and was the founder and the first Provincial Superior of your Province: in 1935, with a group of Irish Camillian religious, he settled in the former residence of Hannon Mill, near to the town of Killucan, in the diocese of Meath.

We are celebrating the *Year of Consecrated Life*: our religious lives can be conceived of as a tree that needs to be looked after, which at times suffers from being slowed down and from tensions (floods and drought; freezing cold and blazing heat): but it is only God who can make it bear fruit!

For the celebration of this year Pope Francis has invited us ‘to look at the past with gratitude... to live the present with passion...to embrace the future with hope’ (*Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People*, nn. 1-3). We want to place this message to all of you within this context.

It is important to learn about certain important facts regarding your history in Ireland. Like everything else it began...Looking to the past with gratitude, it is interesting to observe that there was an Irish consecrated man amongst the first twenty-five religious who professed together with St. Camillus in Rome on 8 December 1591. His name was John Baudingh and he came from Galway. In 1911 the Camillian Province of France began a new community in Moyne Park in Galway and it was active until 1922, when its members went back to France. Then there was Killucan.

When they arrived in Ireland the Camillians had two goals. First of all, they created a kind of home assistance service with long journeys by bicycle to bring corporal and spiritual assistance to the sick. Most of these religious were qualified nurses...then they built the health centre and the unit for palliative care, beginning in the early 1970s (before that there was a school) the work that we now know as the Nursing Centre, with 57 resident elderly patients and 60 employees who are involved in activity that demonstrates an authentic Camillian spirit.

On Sunday 5 July we offered up our thanks to the Lord in the very beautiful chapel of the Nursing Centre for the fifty years of priesthood of Fr. Frank Monks and Fr. Tom O'Connor, whose personal biographies, passion for the Camillian charism and Camillian spirituality, and generous dedication to the life and the growth of the Order, need no introduction. But it is important to remember that these two religious are very well known inside the Order given that they were Provincial Superiors and members of the General Consulta. Fr. Frank was also the Superior General of the Camillian Order from 2001 to 2007. In the booklet of the celebration we can read: 'Fr. Tom and Fr. Frank want to recognise that during these fifty years the Lord has never forgotten them. Perhaps we forgot about Him but He has never forgotten about us. And we are happy to continue the battle...One may imagine that one could say that fifty years ago we decided in a grandiose way to convert the world, and now we are happy if we help a little. We believe that we are all instruments in the hands of God, and what is important is not what we say but what God says to other people through us'.

This celebration offered us an extraordinary vision of the Camillian presence, above all in Killucan and its surrounding areas. This was a propitious opportunity to learn close at hand about the healthy and healing intertwining of the active presence of Camillian religious; the intense human and qualified activity that those who work there offer to the elderly residents; the involving presence of volunteers who every day dedicate themselves to the animation of the elderly, and in a particular way of the members of the Lay Camillian Family; and the widespread appreciation that the local Church (bishops, priests, the faithful...) feel for what is being done there.

The friendship and the sincere cooperation that is daily offered in that place is that much more extraordinary because of the increasingly heavy criticism that ever greater parts of Irish society direct towards the Church and religious life in general after the dramatic scandals which over recent years have shaken the foundations of the life and above all the credibility of the 'institutional' Church, and through osmosis also the Christian communities of your country.

It is certainly true that the daily lives of our religious brothers who live in Killucan are truly intertwined in a dual way with the world of the Nursing Centre: fraternal and professional presence, a supply of dialogue and support, spiritual animation, the human and professional formation of the workers, and involvement in the surrounding local area, in a sober environment but one which is very much looked after and of great beauty and which has a family atmosphere.

The other ministerial field in which you are involved is spiritual and pastoral assistance in various large hospitals in Dublin, where there is a notable tradition of the presence of religious, and in the more distant health-care pole of Waterford. This ministerial activity is made possible above all thanks to the generous and competent presence of seven religious brothers of the Vice-Province of India, some of whom have been engaged in this activity for about seven years.

When meeting the Provincial Council we were able to perceive and share your joy and satisfaction at the renewed flowering of the mission in Uganda, in harmony with the two religious brothers of the Vice-Province of India. The recent temporary religious profession of a young man and the solemn blessing of



the seminary are seeds that seem to announce a future of hope and of growth in the Camillian charism in this country as well. Could one not think of a revitalisation of the Province from this outlying part of the Province? Your presence in Australia was also important until recently even though at the present time you have only one religious there: this is a special situation that you are seeking to attend to and to follow with concern.

This rapid radiography of your situation as regards your communities, your charism and your ministry highlights an important movement on your part towards the sick, with the strong, sincere and convinced involvement of lay people. This strong sense of Camillian identity lived *ad-intra* and recognised *ad-extra* cannot conceal an evident critical point: the low number of religious and their ages! The most important treasure of any Province is its religious. Their numbers are necessarily of importance for the stability of a Province.

Today the Anglo-Irish Province is made up of fourteen religious with solemn vows and relies upon the presence of seven young Camillian religious from the Camillian Vice-Province of India. Following the guidelines of our Camillian Constitution, given the number of religious that you have and looking in a realistic way at this harsh reality, one has to consider the possibility that by the end of this Provincial mandate this Province will become a Delegation. 'The crisis of vocations has undoubtedly struck the Camillians very severely. We have been temporarily *saved* by the help that has been offered by our young and enthusiastic India religious brothers. But I am convinced that this is not the solution while we struggle to find a better one...I am really worried about the future when I meet Camillians, whether religious or lay, who no longer burn with enthusiasm about this gift entrusted to us by Camillus. The Camillian charism is a gift for the community and not only for the Camillians. The sick will always be with us'. This is what our former Superior General Fr. Frank Monks wrote to the members of your Province (cf. the booklet, *St. Camillus 400 Years on and Still Relevant*, 2014, pp. 12- 13).

In my way of seeing things after a week amongst you, the presence of religious brothers from the Vice-Province of India seems to me to much more than external cooperation: the seven Indian religious are in all senses supporting columns of the Anglo-Irish Province itself. Their presence is a very strong and significant expression of hospital pastoral care (chaplancies) in seven hospitals in Dublin. A question that is by now clear is raised about them and this relates to their 'effective' rather than 'decorative' membership of your Province. And this raises a question that is by now inevitable and which can no longer be delayed regarding the by now immediate future and the very survival of this religious Province.

How are we preparing for this with a new journey of existence, in the search for a new vision, which will be developed by this Province in the future? We want to offer the following points for our analysis, after listening at a community and individual level to practically all the Irish and Indian Camillian religious. What is, and what makes, a Province? According to our Constitution, a Province is constituted in order to help the Order 'achieve a more efficient government and to meet the needs of our ministry more effectively according to the particular social and local circumstances' (art. 92). In addition, the minimum conditions for the erection of a Province are the following: 1) a sufficient number of religious and of houses; 2) economic autonomy; and 3) an activity involving apostolate and sufficiently developed formation (cf. art. 93). These coordinates that I would like to be employed to direct your attention and your decisions for the future are many in number.

I believe that the first step is that of a real and greater concrete involvement of a number of religious brothers of the Vice-province of India in the dynamics of decision-making of your Province. A sense of belonging is not 'distilled water kept in a sealed bottle'. It grows and it is measured within the difficulties of history and real and personal and communal relationships. A sense of belonging to a Province is not

measured only on the basis of a registry: it is a very sensitive question and it needs constant care and attention. Staring with the conversations that we had, the need emerges for an Indian Camillian to be co-opted onto the Provincial Council, as was proposed during our meeting with the Provincial Council as well. In addition to this concrete sign of integration into the realities of the Anglo-Irish Province, I believe that it is necessary to draw up a written agreement of cooperation between the Anglo-Irish Province and the Vice-Province of India in which are defined in a clear way the terms of this cooperation: the rights and duties of the religious who are involved; mutual responsibilities; and the use of the active and passive voice where a religious lives and works. An agreement on cooperation is urgently needed in order to assure a long and lasting relationship of serenity with both the religious entities involved. A small committee made up of two members from both sides (the Provincial Superiors and members of the Provincial Councils, for example) can begin to study this concrete possibility with a view to practical and operational decisions.

We were very much struck by the fact that of the seven young Indian religious brothers who live and work in Ireland, six are favourable to exercising their active and passive voices not in India but in your Anglo-Irish Province, even though their tie of belonging will always be with India.

We perceived in a clear way that the Irish Camillians are offering the best of their generosity in order to help these young religious to live together fraternally and to carry out their ministry in the most complete and competent way possible. Many of these young religious observed that this question has been discussed by now for seven years and hitherto nothing has been decided on this matter because of the decision in the negative of the Vice-Province of India. Obviously, this decision in the negative, which was not accompanied by adequate explanations about the reasons for the 'no' to the exercise of the active and passive voice in the Anglo-Irish Province, and was supported only by the requirement of the exercise of the vow of obedience without taking into consideration the feelings of these young religious, has created complex prospects for the future, as regards, as well, a mature and lasting relationship. This question – in our view – should be discussed once again.

When listening to these young voices, the wish clearly emerged that their sense of belonging to the Anglo-Irish Province should develop beyond mere ministerial work directed towards support for, and financial cooperation with, the mother Province. While they work abroad, they continue to be members of the mother Province. It is important for us to avoid the harsh experience of those who sail in the sea of ministerial life and have the feeling that they have their 'feet in two different boats'!

Communication is one of our priorities, together with transparency in the economic field and in pastoral care of vocations and formation, for our Order, starting specifically with the *Camillian Project for the Revitalisation of our Camillian Consecrated Life* which was approved at the last extraordinary General Chapter of the Order celebrated in Ariccia (RM) in June 2014, for the whole of the duration of this general government (2014- 2020). We have said and repeated on a number of occasions that without communication it is impossible to construct communion and community. In living far from their mother Province, many of these young religious had the feeling that they were excluded from the decision-making process about the Vice-Province of India acquiring the *status* of being a Province. We found the absence of enthusiasm in these young religious about this change that this mother Province will undergo on 2 February 2016 very strange! We believe that with openness to the good of everyone, and with serenity and wisdom, those religious brothers of ours who today have the responsibilities of leadership in both these Provinces, in a fraternal and dialogic spirit, can reach an agreement in terms of 'living together' and 'cooperation' that can overcome these tensions that generate such a real feeling of anxiety.

I would also like to thank you for the visit to the Mater Hospital which is near to the house of the Province in Dublin. There I went to the Department for Pastoral Care and was able to see the programme of clinical pastoral education which is organised and accompanied by a lay woman, Myriam Massabo, who is a medical doctor and has specific training as a supervisor of clinical pastoral education and has lived and cooperated in a very close way with the Camillians for many years. We had an interesting morning of dialogue and exchange of ideas with the students of the course and we discovered that it was specifically the Camillians who introduced clinical pastoral care into Ireland.

We are also grateful for the presence and the friendship of Anita Ennis, another lay woman and a member of the Camillian Task Force and the Lay Camillian Family. She accompanied us when visiting the Mary Aikenhead Heritage Centre and the grave where this woman religious is buried in Dublin. Mary Aikenhead was born in Cork in 1787 and died in 1858 at Our Lady's Mount Hospice in Harold's Cross, Dublin. She was the founder of the religious Institute of the Sisters of Charity and is seen throughout the world as the pioneer of palliative care. The Saint Joseph Hospice in Hackney, London, belongs to the Sisters of Charity and it began its activities in the year 1904. In this place of care, Cicely Saunders (1918-2005) – the most famous doctor involved in palliative care of our time – trained in palliative care before inaugurating the famous Saint Christopher's Hospice in 1987, in Sidehan, London. There is a profound resemblance here to the Camillians in history, given that we were known as the *fathers of a good death*.

A special expression of thanks goes to Anita Ennis who was our guide as far as Wexford, which is on the west coast of Ireland, where I was able to meet the family relatives of Fr. Leonard Martin, my dear Irish friend, who is now dead. He was a Redemptoris priest, a moral theologian, and a missionary in Brazil in the cities of Fortaleza and Sao Paulo. Fr. Leonard died suddenly because of heart problems at the age of 53, on 16 March 2004, in Fortaleza. Following the express wishes of his mother, his body was taken back to Ireland, to the town of his birth in Wexford, and was buried in the local cemetery in the tomb of his family. Given that I was not able to be present at the funeral liturgy, I was finally able to finish this 'incomplete work' in my heart! Eleven years later, on his grave, with his family relatives, I was able to say adieu to my dear friend. This meeting was a very profound and thrilling moment for his brother and his sister as well. 'It is incredible! You have never forgotten him, after all these years'...was what they said again and again! Finally I was able to say *adieu* to my friend!

Together with Fr. Gianfranco, we express our sincere gratitude for the wonderful hospitality and for the friendship that you offered to us during our visit to the three Camillian communities (the house of the Provincial Superior, the community of Blackrock in Dublin and the community of Killucan). We really felt at home!

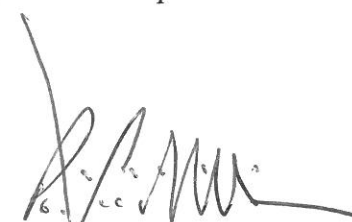
May God guide you and always keep you healthy and happy in your lives to serve those most in need, like Good Samaritans in the world of health and health care, through the intercession and inspiration of our great Father Camillus, whose triduum and solemn feast day (12 July 2015) we had the providential opportunity to celebrate as a worthy conclusion to our fraternal visit!

Fraternally,

Rome, 21 July 2015



Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon  
Secretary General



Fr. LEOCIR PESSINI  
Superior General