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**MESSAGE of the SUPERIOR GENERAL  
to the CAMILLIAN DELEGATION of BOLIVIA  
SANTA CRUZ DE LA SIERRA  
11-13 January 2016**

*Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ...I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.*

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 49

*I am counting on you "to wake up the world", since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: "Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way." This is the priority that is needed right now: "to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy" (29 November 2013).*

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to Consecrated People*

**Rev. Fr. Geraldo Bogoni, MI,**

Superior of the 'St. Camillus' Community of Santa Cruz, Bolivia

**Rev. Fr. Provincial Superior Fr. Antonio Mendes Freitas, MI,**

the Camillian Province of Brazil

Dearest Fr. Geraldo, greetings and peace in the Lord of our lives!

With great joy I was able to spend the beginning of 2016 with you. For the second time as Superior General I was able to observe the missionary work of the Province of Brazil which in the year 2015 celebrated its fifteenth anniversary (2000-2015).

The first visit took place on 31 July to 4 August 2014 and was a very informal and fraternal encounter; this time, instead, it had a more pastoral and canonical character. I took advantage of this journey to make a fraternal visit to the two communities of religious who work with you: the '*Misioneras Franciscanas del Verbo Encarnado*', who are engaged in pastoral activity at a parish level, and the Handmaidens of the Incarnation, a religious community founded by Fr. Fiocchi, an Italian Camillian.

**The Presence of the General Government and the Priorities of the Camillian Order (the six-Year Period 2014-2020)**

The general government of the Order visited this missionary community in previous years on two occasions. The Superior General Fr. Frank Monks came on 2 November 2005 and Fr. Jesus Maria Ruiz Irigoyen, the Vicar General of the Order, came on 20 October 2011. I feel very near to the initiatives of the mission of the Province of Brazil because as a member of the Provincial Council of the Camillian Province of Brazil I was with the Provincial Superiors of that time when we visited the ecclesiastical authorities of the archdiocese of Santa Cruz in order to define the concrete aspects of cooperation and the beginning of the mission. Subsequently as Provincial Superior (2010-2014), and in other circumstances, I made pastoral visits to you.

During the meeting with the Delegation, and at various individual meetings, we had an opportunity to present, and comment upon, the priorities that the Order chose for the six-year period of 2014-2020 in the context of the Camillian Project for the revitalisation of consecrated life, which was approved at the last Extraordinary General Chapter of June 2014 (held in Ariccia/Roma): a. economics – the reorganisation of the economic context starting with the generalate house; b.

formation and the promotion of vocations – our only hope for a future existence; and c. communication – without this one cannot construct a community that lives in fraternity and in communion.

In historical terms, we are going through an ecclesial moment which is rich in extraordinary opportunities for spiritual and pastoral growth, to be lived as a ‘surprise of the Spirit’. For the first time in history we have a Pope from Latin America, Francis, a world leader acknowledged both by Catholics and by other religions, who with courage defends the dignity of existence and being, in particular of the humblest of the earth (the poor, the sick, refugees, the victims of violence, etc.).

We celebrated the Year of Consecrated Life (2015) and now we are celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy (2016).

During the Year of Consecrated Life we worked employing a historical approach to our religious existence, looking at the past with an attitude of gratitude; living the present with compassion and as Camillians serving the last with Samaritan compassion; and embracing the future with hope.

With this approach I am writing this message to you, calling your attention to the people and events who built the Camillian mission of Brazil in Bolivia. To know the history of how this mission was begun means to be aware of our missionary identity as Camillians. Remembering the past is also a service that we render to the other Camillian religious of our Order who do not know about this reality – once it is known about they can feel a part of the community itself, united spiritually to our missionary religious.

I will offer some dates in order to place our Camillian presence in this country in its context. Bolivia has a population of 10.2 inhabitants (2012) and is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. The majority of the population is made up of indigenous people, 38% are Bolivians, 30.7% are *Quechuas*, 25.2% are *Aymaras*, 2.2% are *Chiquitanos*, 1.5% are *Guaraníes*, with others making up 2.4%. A majority of the population are Christians – 91.8% – with the Catholics making up 85.3%. There are three official languages: Spanish, *Quíchua* and *Aymará*, as well a large number of native languages.

### **Remembering with Gratitude the First Religious of the Mission**

During these fifteen years of the presence of Camillians in the land of Bolivia, there have been six religious in this country: the pioneers were Fr. Geraldo Bogoni and Fr. Luiz Gemelli. Fr. Geraldo was present from the outset, first as Superior of the community and then as parish priest of the Parish of *Espíritu Santo*. Fr. Luiz was the first parish priest (from 19/04/2000 to 3/09/2003). Fr. Mateo Butista, who belongs to the Province of Spain, remained with this community for thirteen years (18/03/2002-23/12/2015); Fr. Marcelo Valentin de Oliveira was in Bolivia for five years (from 2006 to 18/01/2011) and was ordained a priest in the Cathedral Santa Cruz with the laying on of hands of Cardinal Julio Terrazas in 2007; and Fr. Ariston dos Santos Barros was present for two years (17/10/2013 – 16/12/2014).

This pastoral visit took place at a moment of important renewal for the community, with the departure and the arrival of new members. After thirteen years of work in Bolivia, Fr. Mateo Bautista will return to the Camillian community of Buenos Aires (Argentina), and two new religious from Brazil will arrive between the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016: Fr. Jose Wilson Corra da Silva and the religious Marcelo de Miranda. In this way, we will add three religious to the community as prescribed by our Constitution. For a number of years the community had the presence of only two religious.

### **How did the Camillian Mission Begin in Bolivia?**

The presence of the Camillians in Bolivia is due to the express wish of Cardinal Julio Terrazas CsrR (who died on 8 December 2015). He wrote to the then Superior General Fr. Angelo Brusco in 1997, requesting the presence of a Camillian community in Santa Cruz. This letter reached the

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hands of Fr. Brusco through the Auxiliary Bishop, Msgr. Tito Solari. The Father General then wrote to Fr. Geraldo Bogoni, the Superior of the Province of Brazil, requesting that this invitation be attended to by the Camillians in Brazil. At the beginning of 1998, Fr. Geraldo visited Santa Cruz to collect information and learn about local realities and the real possibility of bringing a Camillian presence to that city so that he could then inform the Provincial Chapter about the situation. The Provincial Chapter approved the idea but not the immediate implementation of the project. It concluded that the decision should be taken immediately after the election of the new Provincial which was envisaged for May of the same year.

Our presence in Santa Cruz began with the establishment of a course in pastoral care in health for the pastoral workers of the archdiocese. And thus our Provincial Superior, Fr. Velocino Zortea, together with two councillors, Fr. Geraldo Gogoni and myself, went to Santa Cruz to meet Cardinal Julio Terraz and discuss with him the concrete possibility of beginning the activity of the mission.

The first stages were characterised above all else by journeys in order to have greater contact with the local situation. We received the help of the *Handmaidens of the Incarnation*, a religious congregation founded in Italy by Fr. Fiocchi, a Camillian religious. At the beginning of our Camillian experience in Bolivia we were guests at the house of these women religious, who are especially linked to the Camillians through Fr. Angelo Brusco and Fr. Francisco Alvarez, who have always been their pastoral and spiritual fraternal guides, through preaching during spiritual courses and retreats as well.

Fr. Angelo Brusco once again requested the Province of Brazil to facilitate the institution of the mission. He once said: 'Please, before Easter of this year, you should begin the mission in Bolivia'. I remember these words very well: they were spoken by him during a meeting of the Provincial Council.

Finally, the first two religious arrived in Santa Cruz: *Fr. Geraldo Bogoni and Fr. Luiz Gemelli*. It was on the eve of Palm Sunday 2000 and they were guests at the house of the Parish of the *Divino Espíritu Santo* (Barrio Chacarilla).

The resistance to having a mission outside Brazil, a mission *ad gentes*, was due in part to a mentality which is still today deeply rooted in the Province of Brazil. According to this mentality, Brazil, because it is a continental country, already has the possibility of creating missions without going outside the country. There is no need to leave the country to be missionaries.

Formerly having a geographical approach, today the Church is opening up to an ecclesial missionary approach where geographical boundaries in a globalised world are no longer the decisive and final criterion for the creation of a mission. Where needs of the Church, of the Order and of the Camillian charism are present, there we are in a 'land of mission'.

From this point of view, every Province cannot be an island isolated from its context. Instead, it must be a faithful expression of the dynamic of the Camillian charism. The Order must always come first, always, above all personal and institutional interests. When we profess we become an integral part of a Province, Vice-Province or Delegation, and we profess to an Order. Let us remember the contents of the formula of our religious profession!

The first Camillians arrived in Santa Cruz and settled in the semi-*Parroquia del Divino Espíritu Santo* which was then transformed into a parish in the complete sense on 12 May 2000. In that area

roads with asphalt did not exist. Indeed the roads were full of holes and when it rained it was very difficult to drive down them. The drains were open and the terrain in front of the church was practically an open rubbish tip. At the beginning, Fr. Gemelli mobilised the parish community and worked a great deal to improve the living conditions of the neighbourhood through the creation of a drainage and sewerage system. Today the neighbourhood has been completely transformed and has excellent infrastructures and better living conditions. In front of the Matriz Church we have a very fine market surrounded by a large quantity of plants. This market was inaugurated on 10 December 2009 with the name '*Mercado San Camilo*'. The possibility exists of placing a statue in the centre of the square bearing the name of our Founder Saint.

The area covered by the Parish of the *Divino Espíritu Santo* is not very great. It does not have secondary chapels but it does have two hospitals where Camillians provide pastoral service. There are about 30,000 people in the parish. The current parish priest, Fr. Geraldo Bogoni, is greatly esteemed by the local people, by the bishop and by the local clergy. Ever since his arrival in Santa Cruz he has cooperated in providing formation to the future priests of the local diocesan seminary, both as regards human formation and as regards the psychological orientations of candidates for the priesthood.

The Camillian mission in Bolivia began its activities with three objectives, as our Delegate Fr. Geraldo pointed out: 1. To create a parish (the request of the Cardinal); 2. To increase the development of pastoral care in health in the archdiocese; 3) to attend to the promotion of vocations, thinking in the future to increase the number of local Camillian vocations. Hitherto we have had only three young seminarians who reached the novitiate. However, they withdrew along the way. Perseverance is a difficult and critical question.

In the field of pastoral care in health, Fr. Mateo Bautista was for six years head of the coordination of this form of pastoral care for the archdiocese.

### **Which Future do we Need? Which Future Should we Build and Embrace with Hope?**

During our meeting we asked what the future of the mission should be. If the mission is seen as a burden which has to be carried, then it has no future!

We spoke, discussed and dialogued about how there is a great deal of accommodation and how the missionary spirit is absent, principally in the new generations of our religious in the Church, the Order and the Province. This is an approach that is the opposite of that proposed at the present time by the Church in Latin America which, instead, emphasises the concept that we are all 'missionary disciples' (Aparecida 2007). Above all it is an approach which distances us from the repeated appeals of Pope Francis who invites us to 'go out and meet people in the geographical and existential outskirts of the human heart'. How can we overcome this situation, change mentality and move towards a real pastoral conversion, redeeming the prophecy of our choice of lives as consecrated Camillians? The frequent changes as regards the religious, some of which are necessary, together with the small number of religious who are ready to convert their hearts and embrace the noble missionary cause in order to achieve a 'personal outward going exodus' (Pope Francis), both run the risk of conditioning our immediate future.

And what should we say about ourselves? A moment of meditation and serious reflection is needed on situation.

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With the departure of Fr. Mateo Bautista from the community and the arrival of new religious, there is now a need to re-programme and redefine clearly what our objectives are for our Camillian mission in Santa Cruz. We observe here as well a sense of historical justice, of the great work that Father Mateo Bautista has performed in Bolivia, with his numerous writings, courses and workshops on health and health care.

His activities made St. Camillus and Camillian religious known about in Bolivia. He demonstrated how strong leadership produces cooperation both with the mass media and with Bolivian businessmen and how a strong policy in the field of health and health care has been able to promote fund raising campaigns for the reform of public health and to buy equipment for hospitals, as well as to provide support for the institutions which look after children, people in need, sick people and the elderly.

We must acknowledge that we are face to face with wonderful work which provoked great respect in the eyes of civil society. But unfortunately this great amount of work was not carried out in harmony with the local Church. Specifically for this reason, Archbishop Msgr. Sergio Galimberti requested that this cooperation be interrupted, interacting with the local and Provincial Superiors and in the last resort also with me. We greatly regret this sad episode from which a lesson must be drawn.

In this mission, if we want to continue our activity as religious we cannot act in an autonomous way, not being in harmony with the Church! 'Consecrated life is a gift to the Church, is born in the Church, and grows in the Church. It is totally directed towards the Church' (*Card. J.M. Bergoglio, en su intervención en el Sínodo sobre la Vida Consagrada y su misión en la Iglesia y en el mundo. 13.10.1994*).

As Camillians we are a part of the Church with a specific and specialised ecclesial charism. We cannot act against ourselves.

During this pastoral visit we felt the need to promote serious discernment and planning as regards the pathway to follow from now on. We also spoke about the need to return to certain prospects that were abandoned, for example cooperation with the archdiocese of Santa Cruz in the field of pastoral care in health and taking responsibility for the formation of workers in pastoral care in health and of volunteers who visit sick people, in this offering courses of human, pastoral and spiritual formation.

Another aspect is the promotion of the Lay Camillian Family and pastoral care for young people, with special attention being paid to the promotion of vocations. To ensure that these priorities are implemented, the new religious of the missionary community will be called upon to accompany this new stage in our presence in Santa Cruz with greater care.

At the end of these thoughts of mine, I would like to take this opportunity thank you for your fraternal welcome and for the frank and direct dialogue that we had. In Bolivia, as Camillians we are a humble sign but one that is very truthful and faithful to the Camillian charism. We do not have works but we are a significant presence.

On behalf of the Camillian Order I thank you for all the good you have done, for your dedication and pastoral zeal, and for the good that you will do in the future.

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May St. Camillus our Father, Founder and inspiration continue to inspire us creatively during the journey of Camillian service in this country, caring for the health of the people and engaging in a Samaritan experience as regards the sick, 'Our lords and masters', as St. Camillus taught us!

Fraternally,  
***Fr. Leocir Pessini***  
*Superior General of the Camillians*