

**MESSAGE of the SUPERIOR GENERAL
to the DELEGATION of COLOMBIA-ECUADOR**

18 - 27 January 2016

‘I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. “Go into all the world”; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. *Mk* 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People*

‘Don’t be closed in on yourselves, don’t be stifled by petty squabbles, don’t remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love’

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People*

Esteemed **Fr. Juan Pablo Jaimes Villamizar, MI**

The Provincial-Delegate of Colombia-Ecuador

Rev. **Fr. Vittorio Paleari, MI**

The Provincial Superior of the Province of North Italy

Dear Camillian religious brothers of the Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador!

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

Over recent years I have had numerous opportunities to be with you, at least once a year, visiting Colombia, and Bogota in particular, taking part as a member of the meetings of the animation group for pastoral care in health of CELAM (the Bishops’ Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean). This is the reason why I know you and why I feel very near to you.

As Superior General of the Order of Camillians I have been to Bogota twice: on 26 July 2014, during the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the Camillian Delegation in this Latin American country, and from 31 September to 1 October 2014 when I took part in the Second International Congress for the Humanisation of Health Care – an event promoted by our Camillian Centre for Humanisation of Health Care, by CELAM, and by the Department of Justice and Solidarity. On that occasion I gave two papers, on ‘Human Dignity, Ethics and Bioethics’ and on ‘The Spirituality and Art of Care’.

As Superior General of the Order I also twice visited our Camillian religious brothers who live in Ecuador. The first time was during the (pastoral/canonical) fraternal visit of 28-29 March 2015, and the second was on 20-23 October of the same year, when I took part in the Second International Congress on Palliative Care organised by the *Hospice San Camilo* and by the Ecuadorean Foundation for Palliative Care (*FECUPAL*).

During my pastoral visit of 18-27 January 2016, during our community and individual meetings, and in meetings with the Delegate and the Councillors of the Delegation, I had an opportunity to present and comment upon the priorities that the Order chose for the current 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 held in June 2014 (Ariccia/Rome): 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 does not 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 the Catholic world 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 reflected with a historical perspective on 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 Colombia. Remembering historical facts 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, more united spiritually to our religious who live and work in Latin American countries.

Some Information about Colombia and Ecuador

I will begin with a rapid survey of the nation of Colombia in order to help those who do not know this country, so as to have some basic information about it. This country has 47.6m inhabitants (2012). The population is composed as follows: 84.1% are whites of mixed ancestry; 10.3% are of African origins; 2.5% belong to other categories (statistics from the census of the year 2005). The official language is Spanish; 95.7% of the population of Colombia is Christian. The capital city is *Santa Fé de Bogotá* (Bogota) and this city at the present time has 8,499,820 inhabitants. The second largest city is Medellin with 3,593,821 inhabitants.

CELAM, the Bishop’s Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean, and CONFER, the Conference of Religious of Latin America, have their head offices in Bogota. Medellin has been

very much known in the Church since 1968 when it hosted the Second Conference of CELAM which tried to implement the innovations of the Second Vatican Council in the continent of Latin America and in the Caribbean.

Ecuador, a country that shares a border with Colombia, has 14.9m inhabitants (2012); its capital is Quito and this is a city which has 1,846,000 inhabitants. The population is composed as follows: 55% are of European-Indian origins; 25% are Indians; 10% are Iberian Europeans; and 10% Afro-Americans. The official language is Spanish but Quechua and many indigenous languages are also spoken. 97.1% of the population is Christian (91% are Catholics). In the year 2015 Pope Francis paid a visit to the country and this was his second apostolic voyage in Latin America, a voyage which also envisaged a visit to Bolivia and Paraguay. These three nations have the largest indigenous populations in Latin America.

The Past: Some Historical Facts about the Camillian Presence in Colombia

In 2014, when the Order of the Camillians celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Camillus, the Camillian Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Camillians in this country. The first Camillians arrived in Bogota in 3 July 1964. The pioneers of this missionary experience were Fr. Emilio Stenico, Fr. Renzo Roccabruna and Fr. Silvestro Caresia, who were joined after a month by Fr. Pietro Merlo. Starting with these three religious, I would like to remember all those Camillians who have come from Italy to Colombia, all those who are already in the *House of the Father*, all those who returned to Italy and all those who are continuing their lives in the Delegation.

In providing an account of the birth of the Delegation, of help to us is the description made by Fr. Virgilio Grandi. During the course of history, the Camillians were already to be found in Colombia in the years 1766-1821, in Popayan, during an epoch that shaped the future of the nation of Colombia. During this epoch they were called the *Padres de la Buena Muerte* because of the devotion they displayed towards those who were nearing the end of their lives, in homes and in hospitals. The pioneers of this historical moment were Fr. José Manuel Castellanos, Fr. Antonio Aldazával, and Br. Manuel Sánchez.

In 1766 Popayan had about 60,000 inhabitants. For this reason, the city was erected into a diocese in 1546 by Pope Paul II. In this city Fr. José Beltran Caicedo, a doctor in theology, struck by the charism and the zeal of the *sons* of St. Camillus (who had been canonised four years previously), in 1746 supported the project to create a Camillian foundation in Popayan with the goal of helping those who were most seriously ill. In 1756 he made a formal request to open a community in Popayan to the Vice-Provincial Superior of the Camillians in Lima, making over to them a religious house and other possessions. The Province accepted the proposal and sent out the first three religious – two priests and a lay brother. Father Caicedo left Lima ‘on foot in July 1765 and reached Popayan almost a year later, in June 1766’. Father Caicedo died because of an accident at the beginning of the year 1761 during the organisation of the ecclesiastical negotiations about the arrival of the Camillians in Colombia. He was greatly devoted to St. Camillus: before dying he left to the new Camillian foundation a bequest of money, a religious house and various properties.

This rich ecclesiastical benefactor, according to an inquiry carried out after his death, had donated three properties – *Quilcacé, Malvasá and Potilia*, as well as the house of *Pomasque* and

the mines of *Chajaya and Botijas*. The agricultural estate, on which the mines were to be found, was about 57km from Popayan and was traversed by a river called the Quilacé: the estate was an important economic support for the community. 2,280 cows grazed on the estate; there were two stables for 138 horses, four mules and a donkey; as well as 93 pack horses, 11 mares and 27 mules. It was valued at about 13.400 *pesos*. 'Everything else (the part near to the mines of Chajaya and Botijas, the chapels, the shops, the banana plantations and the ownership of 109 *negroes* from Africa) was valued at 41,665 pesos'.

What remains today of this past? The only trace is the name *Calle de San Camilo* given to the old road that led from the religious house to the church. At Quilcacé there is still a reference to the Camillians: all the descendants of the black slaves have the surname of *Caravly* or *Camilo*. This is certainly due to the fact that priests, when they baptised or celebrated the weddings of people who did not have a family name, chose Caravaly, an African name, or Camilo, the name of our founder. The only trace that remains of the Camillians is the coat of arms of the Order in relief placed at the foot of the altar dedicated to St. Peter in the chapel of Quilcacé. The Camillians lived in Popayan for more than fifty years. With the death of Fr. Pedro González, which took place in 1821, the presence of the Camillians in Colombia came to an end. They were greatly esteemed and loved by the population, above all because of their commitment to the poor. The then Governor of Popayan, in a letter addressed to the Camillian Vice-Provincial of Lima of 13 March 1789, spoke about them in the following way: 'The Institute of the *Padres de la Buena Muerte de este Colegio de San Camilo*, is so very commendable as regards its service that I cannot praise enough or sufficiently its usefulness; everyone should support their existence, given that everyone needs help during the last moments of their lives. The Procurator General has insisted that all the members of the Republic should give support to this religious community which has taught us the experience of charity towards the dying poor, the dying, being near everywhere to those who suffer in order to comfort them and dry their tears. We must thank the Lord for having given us the honour of the presence of these heroes of charity'.

St. Camillus, during his epoch, decided that every religious community should keep a book in which to list the sick people helped by his *sons*. This was called the *golden book of charity*. In this book were listed the day, the month and the hour of the death of each person who had been cared for, his or her name, his or her social status, where he or she lived, the religious who had cared for him or her and for how many days they had provided this service. One of these books still exists in Popayan and in it are listed 42 years of activity: '2.966 people were cared for during the hour of their deaths'. Today, as well, pastoral ministry at the side of patients near the ends of their lives has become an important challenge for humanity. As early as that time these Camillians used, and were experts in, *palliative care*, helping people who were dying. Taking very seriously those who have preceded us, this ministry is still at the centre of our charism!

The Camillians in Colombia Today

At the present time, the Camillian Delegation of Colombia-Ecuador has 28 religious with perpetual vows. 24 religious live in Colombia (14 religious with perpetual vows and 10 with temporary vows who attend theology courses), 3 in Ecuador and one in Italy. At the present time, one of the principal concerns is the question of the perseverance on their pathways of the young

Camillian religious. Over the last ten years, 14 religious have abandoned the Order (some joined Colombian dioceses, others requested a return to lay status).

The Camillians of this Delegation are sub-divided into six communities of which three are in Bagota: San Camillo (1964), San Pedro Claver (1989) and San José (1994), the seat of the Delegation. The other three Camillian communities are: the *Salus Infirmorum* community in Medellin (1965), *Senhor da Divina Misericórdia* in Cali (2002) and *Beato Enrico Rebuschini* community in Quito, Ecuador (1998). In Barranquilla (1977) there is a community that was initially made up of Dutch Camillian religious and which at the present time is under the jurisdiction of the Province of Germany. In this community live Fr. Cyrillo Swine, who is Dutch, and two consecrated lay women: Maria Poulisse, from Holland, and Emilia Navarro, from Colombia.

At the level of Camillian ministry, the Delegation has promoted a series of initiatives which range from the classic ones that are specific to the history of the Camillians (caring for sick people in their homes, spiritual assistance in various hospitals and health-care institutions, and animation in hospital parishes) to *activities in existential and geographical outskirts*, as they are called by our Pope Francis. In Bagota there is the *Centro de Humanização e Pastoral da Saúde*. In Quito in Ecuador, the *Hospice San Camilo* coordinated by Fr. Alberto Raedalli, offers a model of assistance and care which is a model for the whole of the continent of Latin America.

Bagota also has the *Centro de Formação integral São Camilo*. This is located in the outskirts in a neighbourhood called *Juan Ray* and it has 1,300 young students who follow professional courses in cooperation with other state agencies. This centre began its activities in the year 1984 because of the heroic dedication and the very many years of work of Fr. Dino De Zan (1946-2013), a medical doctor and Italian Camillian priest who died suddenly on 28 July 2013. Fr. Dino always observed to visitors that the goal of the centre was to 'produce good Christians and honest citizens'. On the plaque placed above the entrance to the refectory, where today 300 meals are served every day to people in need, there is an engraving of the face of Fr. Dino with the following words: 'He bore witness to the route by which we can be transformed into good Christians and honest citizens'. His Italian friends of the community of Osigo (Treviso), the town where he was born, recently published a book in memory of Fr. Dino. Its title is *Una vita per i fratelli*: ('A Life for his Brethren'). It will shortly also be published in Spanish. Almost three years have passed since the death of Fr. Dino and you religious of the Delegation have taken on with responsibility and courage the management of this work. Supported by the cooperation of lay people, you are running this centre with professionalism and a Camillian spirit despite the *prophets of doom*, who for that matter exist everywhere...

I would like to repeat to you an observation that was made to all the religious of the Delegation by Fr. Vittorio Paleari, the Provincial Superior of the Province of North Italy, and which was quoted in the letter addressed to you of 13 August 2015. We must go beyond the attitude which sees and defines these works and other facts of the Delegation – which are concerned not only with social assistance and the promotion of human life, care for elderly people and the disabled, but also education in health – as not being 'Camillian works'. We cannot see these activities as 'not being Camillian' and see them as such only because of a *kind concession*.

We must move beyond the approach of interpreting and living our charism solely and exclusively in terms of *sick people in their beds*. The principal institutions that engage in this innovation very often are not appreciated and understood by our religious brothers. The *Samaritan*

dimension to care for sick people must always be at the centre of things but at the same time we must act aiming at the promotion of life and health and the prevention of illness. Not to cultivate this approach, above all else in developing countries and ones that are especially poor, where public/state agencies do not engage in any initiatives of this kind, would be an unacceptable failure. Direct care always remains the clearest and most immediate testimony to Camillian *Samaritan* solidarity, but we cannot neglect prevention, that is to say taking care of people with preventive measures so that they do not fall sick.

The Lay Camillian Family has demonstrated great vitality with its voluntary and free service for the sick in sixteen cities throughout the whole of Colombia, with about two hundred operational members. It can rely upon the support of the management of the *Centro Camiliano de Humanização e Pastoral da Saúde* of Bogota, where formation meetings and annual meetings are organised. The first president of the International Lay Camillian Family was Signora Izabel Caldeiron, a lady of Colombian nationality, and still today she works with this organisation, accompanying courses in pastoral care in health at this centre for formation.

Camillian Ministry: Formation for Pastoral Care in Health and Humanisation

The *Centro Camilliano di Umanizzazione e di Pastorale della Salute* of Bogota began its work in 1981 and today can boast more than thirty years of activity in the field of pastoral care in health and the humanisation of health. It has become a fundamental point reference in this area not only in Colombia but also in the whole of the continent of Latin America. It has very well organised institutions, indeed ones that are worthy of a developed country, and is managed with great zeal and with extraordinary care thank to the valuable role of its director, Fr. Adriano Tarraran and the general coordinator, Signora Iazabel Caldeiron. The Camillians through the activities of Fr. Adriano Tarraran, who is involved in the coordination of pastoral care in health of the archdiocese of Bogota, in the national Bishops' Conference and at an international level in the initiatives of the group for the animation of the sector of justice and solidarity of CELAM – the Bishop's Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean, whose head offices are in Bogota – have developed over the years a notable visibility, respect and credibility within the Church and in society as a whole, in particular as regards the world of health and health care.

I feel a part of this history as well, having been involved personally in the projects for pastoral care in health of the CELAM ever since the year 1994. I also took part in the second Latin American and Caribbean meeting on pastoral care in health which was held in Quito. At that moment a team working for, and supporting, the CELAM came into existence which was so effective that the bishops themselves designated the Camillian centre in Bogota the principal point of support for CELAM. During the twenty-two years of this journey hundreds of courses, seminars and workshops on the humanisation of health have been organised, as well as on the organisation of pastoral care in health, help relationships, ethics and bioethics, in Colombia and in other countries.

A historical achievement that deserves to be noted, something that was the outcome of cooperation with CELAM, was the creation of a guide for pastoral care in health for all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Its title is 'Missionary Disciples in the World of Health – a Guide for Pastoral Care in Latin America and the Caribbean'. This has been translated into many languages, in addition to Spanish and Portuguese. Without any doubt, this guide was the result of a long and persevering work which required a great deal of dedication through a series of

meetings that were held in various countries and regions and which gradually developed and produced its fruits. *Praise be to God!*

During this pastoral visit I met a group of lay volunteers/consultants who work at the centre and contribute their professional expertise to various initiatives: humanisation (humanising to humanise ourselves); pastoral care in health; pastoral care for elderly people; the accompanying of elderly people and their families; spiritual support and animation in health-care institutions; and animation of the Lay Camillian Family, of the Centre for Listening and the Centre for Spirituality.

An important point of force is the cooperation of the *Centro di Umanizzaizone* with the Camillian Delegation through the offer of continuous formation meetings, conferences, courses, retreats and other activities which involve religious and seminarians. There is the prospect of a very attractive project which aims at transforming the centre itself into an institution of a university character with the organisation of courses of higher education in the field of health and health care.

A serious concern that has existed for some time concerns the very future of this *centre*, that is to say the leadership itself of this institution. The current director, Fr. Adriano Tarraran, has on a number of occasions raised this question. The Delegation should reflect on this subject and carefully assess the most justifiable solutions, identifying a young Camillian who could cultivate special dedication in the pastoral field and be gradually placed within this work so that he can understand its dynamics and thus be able to assure its continuity and future development. Because of its strategic importance and its history of pastoral services in the field of health and health care, in the Church and in society, it would be an inadmissible historical irresponsibility for us not to be concerned about the future and the legacy of this centre.

What Future can we Construct with Hope? The Future is not the Outcome of Chance

Without the presence of young men who embrace our charism, every Camillian reality of ours runs the risk of growing old: this is the inevitable law of the processes of life and it does not allow of any exception! I have followed from near to hand the questions that concern you with regard to formation and the promotion of vocations and I took on board your concerns about our presence in the future in the country starting with the papers that were given at the assembly that you held in the year 2015, as well as the recommendations that were made after the pastoral/canonical visit that was made by the Provincial Superior, Fr. Vittorio Paleari, together with his councillors Fr. Bruno Nespoli and Fr. Lorenzo Testa, at the end of November 2015. In addition, I personally listened to almost all our young men who are receiving formation.

I would like to call to your attention the last fourteen religious who abandoned Camillian religious life: they were all young perpetually professed or who had recently been ordained priests. This development caused intense suffering in many of you, as well as a sense of crisis of confidence in the future. Even greater is the concern as regards works that require professional competence and management. *The religious are not there*: this is the cry that I heard most frequently. Even though in the near future there will be religious ready to help you, the cooperation of lay people remains fundamental. The secret will be to provide them with formation in line with our Camillian values. Some of them are already offering witness to the Camillian charism which is more intense than that of many Camillian religious!

The questions are many in number. However, rather than pointing fingers we must grow together in order to reinvent ourselves, learning from our mistakes and successes. In reality, to invest so much and to gather so little can only raise some questions. I believe that the latest reviews of the process underway, undertaken in terms of a new reconfiguration of the pathway of formation, concern about the formation of those who provide formation, a renewed pathway of growth to achieve emotional maturity, and integration into Camillian ministry, are all salutary. May God grant that we can discern better, and support in a more intense way, the perseverance of these young men so that they are more coherent! Pope Francis has warned us that formation is ‘work for craftsmen and not for the police’ and thus we must be very careful not to create ‘little monsters’! Our witness to coherence and faithfulness to the values of consecrated life is without doubt an important motivation for the young men who turn to us. In this sense, I am very worried about the fact that I heard some of you say that the ‘fault does not lie with those who go away but with those who stay’. We cannot be and live always one against another – we must be and live for each other! May God help us to take on with joy the responsibility of our vocation so as to live it with joy in the brotherhood of Samaritan service.

Let us now speak about the future and about the current work of the Camillians in the city of Barranquilla which has been engaged in for years by Fr. Cyril Swine (who is Dutch) and by two consecrated lay women. This is a community which is today canonically linked to the Province of Germany and thus it does not belong to the Camillian Delegation of Colombia, although they are contiguous geographically, culturally and linguistically. The Delegation has set in motion a series of initiatives involving cooperation, with the sending out of students to engage in pastoral, religious and community experience. In this case, as well, with the passing of the years, the decrease in forces, and now with the illness of our beloved Fr. Cyrillo, we will have another challenge to meet. Both this ministerial reality and that of *Juan Rey* require the cooperation of specialised religious. Naturally enough, we need the cooperation of impassioned and competent lay people. However, we must be ready, otherwise we will run the risk of losing these valuable human and social resources and opportunities, and ones involving professional training as well, which do good to those who live in the *outskirts*, as Pope Francis has often emphasised. It is certainly the case that there is a need for dialogue and an exchange of views between the major Superiors of the Provinces and the Delegations involved in the process. If we do not act now, at this moment, we will certainly run the risk of losing the support of the local Church and/or also the public administration which possesses various plots of land on which we have built for our ministerial works: for taking care of the disabled, of elderly people, for our medical centre, for the first aid centre and for the centres for professional training for the education of young people.

In addition, another challenge which is growing in importance and urgency also has to be addressed and that the question of the economic sustainability of the Delegation, in particular of the two houses for formation, given the decrease in the resources transferred from the mother Province of North Italy – this is a process that is taking place slowly. A creative and responsible search for economic self-sustainability is the responsibility of everyone. We need to take seriously the duty of communion and the sharing of the possessions that are available to us.

Let us not be swept away by anxieties and fears about the future because of the defection of a number of young religious. We have concrete hopes anchored in ten young professed religious who at the present time are studying theology. It may be necessary to reduce the expansion of ministerial and community activities, as your Provincial Superior himself emphasised. We must concentrate, be

prepared at a deep level, and achieve deeper and more involving levels of formation in the area of pastoral, ecclesial and professional competence, through the awards of doctorates as well. What is certain is that if we base ourselves on improvisation and amateurism we will have no future in any sector of human activity.

Dear brothers, I will end these reflections of mine in the form of a message by encouraging you to embrace fraternity: be happy to serve as Camillians in a Samaritan way; be courageous in the construction of a promising future! You are not alone, we are walking together as an *Order*. Profoundly grateful for the wonderful and fraternal welcome and for all the good that you do in the context in which you live, I greet you, praying for the protection of our Father Founder, St. Camillus!

Fraternally,

Bogota, 28 January 2016

Fr. Leocir Pessini

Superior General