

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CAMILLIAN PROVINCE OF ROME

*Pastoral Visit
5-13 June 2016*

'Only love is able to see what is concealed: we are invited to this wisdom of the heart which never separates love of God from love of others, and particularly for the poor, the last, the 'flesh of Christ', the face of the crucified Lord. A coherent Christian lives encounter with the attention of the heart, and for this reason side by side with professional competence and planning a formation of the heart is required, faith becomes operational in love (cf. Gal 5:6): 'the programme of a Christian – the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus – in a heart that sees. This heart sees where there is need for love and acts as a consequence. Obviously, to the spontaneity of the individual must be added, when charitable activity is taken on by the Church as a community initiative, planning, foresight, and cooperation with other institutions as well'.

(Contemplate. To Consecrated Men and Women on the Trail of Beauty, n. 59)

'Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!'
(Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, n. 15)

Dearest Fr. Emilio Blasi,
Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Rome

Dear Provincial Councillors
Albino Scalfino, Giovanni Aquaro, Sergio Palumbo, Antonio Marzano,

Religious brothers of the Province of Rome,

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

On 5-13 June 2016, I had an opportunity to visit you in fraternity, together with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, the Vicar General of the Order. To be with you and amongst you was an opportunity of great joy for us, rich in experiences to achieve increasingly better mutual knowledge about each other.

We began the visit by meeting the Provincial Council in *Villa Sacra Famiglia* in the afternoon of 5 June. At that meeting, the Provincial Superior described the status of the Province. It is made up of 30 religious and draws upon the cooperation of other religious from the Province of Brazil (1), the Province of Poland (3), the Vice-Province of Benin-Togo (1), and the Vice-Province of Burkina Faso (5+3 students). In the houses of formation there are two novices in Bucchianico and two temporary professed in Rome, to whom one should add the hospitality given to the students of the Province of Sicily and Naples (4), and we may also remember the temporary professed of the Delegation of Chile. The animation of vocations engaged in above all through the 'Camillian Missions' holds up the possibility of the entrance of other young men into the Provincial Camillian family. The presence of young men involved in ministry and in formation demonstrates that you are not *sterile* but still *fertile*: during upcoming Holy Masses you will also celebrate the priestly ordination of the Camillian deacon Antonio Zinni. *May God be blessed!*

You are distributed between ten communities, of which one is in Chile. I had an opportunity to meet our religious brothers of the Camillian community of Chile in the recent past – on 6-8 August 2014 and 14-15 January 2016. In recent days, with Fr. Laurent we concentrated on visiting your communities in Italy: on Monday, 6 June we were at the Villa Sacra Famiglia (Rome); on Tuesday, 7 June at St. John's

Hospital (Rome); on Wednesday, 8 June at St. Camillus Hospital (Rome); on Thursday, 9 June at the St. Camillus Sanctuary and the Nicola d'Onofrio Centre for Spirituality (Bucchianico); on Friday, 10 June at Villa Immacolata (S. Martino al Cimino); on Saturday, 11 June at the Camillian Studentate (Monte Mario – Rome); on Sunday, 12 June, in the morning at the St. Camillus Parish (Roma) and in the afternoon at the E. Litta Village (Grottaferrata). The final meeting with the Province, followed by a celebration of the Eucharist and fraternal agape, took place on Monday 13 June at Villa Sacra Famiglia (Rome). We may remember two other important events that formed a part of the fraternal visit to the communities of the Province of Rome: at St. Camillus Hospital, with the opening of the Holy Door for the Jubilee of Mercy by Msgr. Lorenzo Leuzzi, the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Rome, and at the parish basilica of St. Camillus, with the solemn celebration of the hundred and tenth anniversary of its foundation.

You are involved in providing care to the sick in hospital chaplaincies (2) and health-care and socio/health-care institutions (4) which you own. You are also involved in providing pastoral care at a parish level in three parishes (2 in Italy and 1 in Chile). You also accompany in their activities involving animation certain lay associations such as *The Spring* and *The Flame of Charity*, associations which work in hospitals and parishes etc.

You are also involved in the teaching and formation of young people. The raising of funds and aid for missions is coordinated by a very active secretariat. Here one should highlight the missionary role of the Province which established the foundation of the Vice-Province of Burkina Faso and the Delegation of China, of which you can be proud. As regards your ministerial activities, your cooperation with Camillians from other Provinces, with diocesan priests and with lay people, is to be appreciated.

As regards your works/institutions, faced with the general crisis which spares nothing and no one, you chose to entrust the management of some works to experts and to rent other institutions with the aim of serving those most in need, always following the spirit of the Camillian charism. Here I would like to quote the summary of the deliberations of the last assembly of the Union of Superiors General which was held in Rome on 25-27 May 2016 and whose theme was: 'Consecrated Life: Radical in Prophecy'. One reads in this document: 'The work by the groups has brought out a great variety of problems which mark the complexity of this dimension of religious life, a complexity in relation to which we do not feel very prepared. A shared general observation concerns the fact that religious can no longer ignore or delegate economic problems and must have a basic minimal training. More diversified is the belief about the advisability of drawing upon lay skills. Even though these seem by now to be indispensable, it appears to be wise not to ever delegate the whole of the management of the possessions of one's institute and to carry out regular checks. Transparency. The groups lay emphasis on the need to learn to live transparency and to account for economic management from the beginning of religious life. This favours a mentality of openness and sincerity. Transparency necessarily requires intercommunication between the different members of a Congregation and the respective (general, Provincial and local) councils. The valuing and the competence of various economic committees fosters correctness in the management of possessions. Accounts, budgets and financial reports are very important for transparency'.

In our meetings, the dynamic was not the same everywhere. At the final meeting, we reminded you of the salient points of the 'Camillian Project' which was approved at the last General Chapter. In it we can identify three priorities which should be addressed during the current six-year period: *economics, the animation of vocations and formation, and communication*.

Economics must not be an 'act of faith': rigour and transparency are requested, as we are taught by the above-mentioned document of the Superior Generals. As regards the animation of vocations and formation, let us remember that on it depend our present and our future. From communication is born communion and a feeling of belonging to our Order grows.

We also evoked the 'phenomenon' of the magisterium and the person of Pope Francis who has offered us the Year of Consecrated Life (2015) and the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016): two events that are especially inspiring for Camillian religious, basing our religious consecration as we do on the charism of mercy.

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata*, Pope John Paul II offered the following exhortation to consecrated people: 'You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount,

but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things' (n. 110). In taking up and deepening this quotation, Pope Francis outlined the history of every institute and every consecrated person, made up of the past, the present and the future, inviting us: 'to look to the past with gratitude...to live the present with passion [and for we Camillians to serve with Samaritan compassion]...and to embrace the future with hope'.

To live this gratitude, we will go over with you some of the important stages of the history of your Province. It is difficult to separate the beginnings of the history of the Province of Rome from the beginnings of the whole of the Order. But we will focus on the recent 'history' of the Province of Rome. This information is important above all for those Camillians of the new generations who live in Africa, in Asia or in Latin America and do not yet know about the history of the Camillians in Rome.

Some Important Historical Events of the Province of Rome

With the contribution of Fr. Giuseppe Cinà, let us go over the important features of the history of the Province over the last 50-60 years, after the Second Vatican Council (1959-1965).

The transfer of the house of formation to Rome was of decisive importance for the future of the Province. For the *studentate* it meant a notable increase in its cultural level because the young 'professed' could attend theological courses at the Gregorian University. For a short period after the Second World War the Jesuits also opened in Rome a 'classical lyceum' for religious. For a few years our students attended this institute which was located in the old buildings of the Gregorian University in Via del Seminario (Rome). This was a fruitful period for the formation of our young candidates given the quality of the Jesuits and the commitment that they demanded of the students. These were the years 1949-1954...Unfortunately this season lasted for a short time because the 'crisis of vocations' soon began. There then exploded the 'crisis' of religious life and seminaries, 'secularisation', and the crisis of Christian faith in Western countries.

The Second Vatican Council had generated great expectations...Then the climate that typified 1968 exploded: the year of the protests by the young. Very few young men entered seminaries and religious institutes. In contrary fashion, many religious chose to abandon religious life, even when they were no longer young. This was the end of an epoch: 'modernity' was advancing, with its charge of secularism and deChristianisation. Still today, in our post-modern world, we are immersed in this: perhaps we do not sufficiently realise what its impact on consecrated life has been and still is today.

Some Important Pastoral Activities of the Province of Rome

1. Parishes – rectories

Ever since the 1970s, the *St. Camillus Parish of Rome*, which is located in a very densely populated neighbourhood (in that epoch it had 20/25,000 inhabitants before declining rapidly from the 1970s onwards), has stood out. It has always had a rather middle-class profile and – although this has been declining – also an aristocratic one (connected with what remained of the Savoy monarchy). Its activity has been intense and creative, appreciated by the Vicariate and the clergy of Rome as well. The lack of internal and external spaces for parish activities and works is due to the strong resistance that the Camillians felt in accepting parish ministry. This parish was wanted by St. Pius X – who took on the costs of the construction of the whole of the complex – even though it remained the property of the Holy See. The community, made up on average of 8-10 religious priests and 3-4 religious brothers, has always been very active. Ever since the immediate post-war period, there have not failed to be vocations for the Camillians or the seminary of the diocese.

The *Parish of Florence* is located in the centre of the city but there are few residents. The parish is active and directed above all towards the ministry of confession/reconciliation and it is helped in this by its proximity to the neighbourhood market.

In *Viterbo* the Camillians managed a small parish which then became a rectory because of the low number of inhabitants.

The St. Camillus Sanctuary of Bucchianico with its adjoining parish. The ability of the local community to adapt to the pathway of transformation of the population of this vast territory is worthy of appreciation. There are many vocations to consecrated life, both of the Camillians and of other male and female Congregations.

At Bucchianico the *Nicola D'Onofrio Centre for Spirituality* is also active. This was initially conceived as a minor seminary but it later became a centre for formation for young people with a state school inside it. For some years it has also housed the novitiate for the Province of Rome and the Province of Sicily and Naples. At the present time, this institution is going through a stage of reorganisation and adaptation to the laws that apply to institutions that receive the public.

2. Hospital chaplaincies

In some of these institutions pastoral activities acquired during the post-war years an increasingly incisive presence. We will point to only some of them.

The Camillians were called to the '*Carlo Forlanini*' Sanatorium (a work of social care) which had room for about 3,000 admissions. The Camillians made up a substantial community of about 8-10 religious. Given the kind of pathology involved (TB – tuberculosis), the stay of patients inside the institution was for a number of years. For some of them it even became permanent. Our religious organised ministerial activity as though it was a 'village parish'. There was a large number of patients, to which was added a substantial number of health-care personnel, including the presence of a significant number of women religious of the *Sisters of Mercy*, originally founded in Verona.

Various Catholic associations such as Catholic Action, male and female scouts groups, and the Guard of Honour of the Sacred Heart arose around the ordinary ministry of visits to patients.

Activities of a social character were also organised: works for patients discharged from the sanatorium but still in need of social help and reintegration into the world of work. For sons and daughters with a disposition to TB, the Camillians organised help and formation centres. A religious institute for girls and/or women who were sick but wanted to consecrate themselves to the Lord and were impeded from entering other religious Congregations because of their illness also came into existence: the *Institute of the Handmaidens of the Incarnation*, which was founded by the Camillian Fr. Primo Fiocchi.

In other hospitals of Rome (St. John's Hospital, the St. Camillus Hospital and other lesser ones from which we later withdrew: St. James' Hospital, the Maraini Hospital, St. Phillip's Hospital, the CTO in Garbatella) and in Florence (the CTO Hospital), the Camillians were the first to activate, in response to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, *pastoral councils* which involved representatives of various categories of health-care workers, representatives of the patients, and the representatives of the volunteers: the objective was to draw up projects for the evangelisation of hospital centres and for patients and their family relatives.

Other initiatives have been our *role in schools for nurses*, with the offer of courses on health-care ethics but also other disciplines – if a state title was available – such as psychology and pedagogics of the nursing profession, and the organisation along health-care lines of *conferences, seminars, and study days* on bioethics and the human sciences.

At the *city hospital of Chieti* an association founded by the Camillian Fr. Gaetano De Sanctis called *The Source*, which draws inspiration from our founder St. Camillus de Lellis, has been active.

3. The 'Works Owned' by the Province

Villa Immacolata – S. Martino al Cimino (VT)

The first work of the Province of Rome of this historical period was *Villa Immacolata* in S. Martino al Cimino (Viterbo). It came into being in the 1950 and was fostered by the interest of some of our religious of the St. Camillus Parish of Rome. This were the post-war years where works to prevent TB-tuberculosis were needed. On the whole, the state institute of *social welfare* dealt with this. What was required was to take in girls and boys who were predisposed to the illness. Our religious opened this institute near to the current *Villa Immacolata*, in an area called '*Buon Respiro*', and they rented a building that already existed. In the meantime, the Province began the building works for an edifice which was larger and corresponded more to the goals in mind.

This new health-care institution also had the function of being a gymnasium for our religious brothers and for some years for the young priests who were going through their year of pastoral care as a preparation for their active participation in ministry. The Province obtained notable benefits from this and finally obtained economic resources for the maintenance of its own houses of formation. It also turned out to be a valuable contribution towards financial support for the Camillian mission in Burkina Faso which had been established 1966.

Loreto – the Medical-Psycho-Pedagogic Institute

Following the advice of the Superior General of the time (Fr. Karl Mansfeld), in 1962 the official opening took place of the **St. Camillus Medical-Psycho-Pedagogic Institute**. In a short time it became necessary to expand the centre which in 1967-69 had two hundred beds, with the creation of special elementary and secondary schools and the beginning of work in protected laboratories. This initiative lasted for only a few years. Faced with new health-care, political and social approaches, state welfare established that these minors could not be institutionalised in private spaces but, rather, they had to be integrated into the social fabric.

The St. Camillus Village in Sassari

Even before the institute for disabled people in Loreto, the Province of Rome had managed to obtain from the state the resources that were needed to build a social and health-care institution in Sardinia. A very large village was built which at the outset provided for the formation of young people of the local area and their professional training for employment. This centre, which was well built and also equipped with suitable laboratories and professional instructors, functioned well and offered tens of young people professional training and an opportunity to find a job. A paediatrics department was then opened in agreement with the city hospital of Sassari. This institution became huge and was difficult to manage. Various other problems provoked the economic crisis of this centre and led in the late 1970s to it being handed over to the regional government of Sardinia.

The Eugenio Litta Village (Grottaferrata) and the Villa Sacra Famiglia (Rome)

The nursing home of *Villa Sacra Famiglia* (Rome) at the present time entrusts its management to an external company. The local Camillian community, like the Province of Rome, has its legal seat in this home. The community accommodates Camillian religious who come to Rome both from Italy and from abroad.

The *Eugenio Litta* Village is an institution that is entirely dedicated to receiving young mentally handicapped people (about eighty in all): the local Camillian community, working with the Daughters of St. Camillus, is involved in accompanying and caring for these young guests.

4. Three Elements of the Identity of your Province

In these very brief pages of historical descriptions, it seems to us that one can highlight three very representative elements of the identity of your Province.

The mission in *Burkina Faso*

Next October (2016), we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the presence of the Camillians in Burkina Faso: the first Camillians arrived in that country in October 1966 immediately after the end of the Second Vatican Council and this was the direct result of the decision of the Province taken in the context of that Church event. The foundation, promoted by the Provincial Superior of the time (Fr. Andrea Cardone) and planned at various meetings of the Province of Rome, was wanted by almost all the religious of the Province and there were a large number of ‘requests’ to take part. And the fact that it was wanted by the Province was – and is still is! – confirmed by the impetus that it generated in various communities which acted in various ways to support it and foster its development.

The *Camillianum*

The story of the *Camillianum* began in October 1984 immediately after the publication of the apostolic letter *Salvifici doloris* of St. John Paul II (11 February 1984). Its establishment was preceded by frequent meetings of the Province in order to have as much agreement on the project as possible and the decision was the outcome of the shared responsibility of the Province of Rome.

The *Camillianum* officially began its academic activities in 1987 during the government of Fr. Calisto Vendrame. Initially it was entrusted to the *Teresianum* Pontifical Faculty of Theology. Its creation as a body of the Order was decided at one of the annual meetings of the General Consulta with the major Superiors of the Order (Mira Flores, Spain).

The origins of this initiative can also be traced back to a meeting of the General Consulta of 1976. The Superior General, Fr. Enrico Damming, called a meeting of all of the delegates of the various Provinces to draw up a *project for formation in pastoral care in health* in order to develop specific skills and expertise in this sector of evangelisation and thereby to adapt to modern times the exercise of our Camillian ministry, starting with the great interest that the subject of health had – and increasingly continues to have! – for contemporary society and culture.

The Servant of God *Nicola D’Onofrio* (1943-1964)

In the story of this young Camillian, amply narrated first by the Superior General of the time and then increasingly developed and enriched by Fr. Ruffini Felice – but also by non-Camillian scholars such as the Jesuit Fr. Giandomenico Mucci and Don Gaetano Meaolo – we can perceive a luminous event which should still be reflected upon in to order to understand the plurality of meanings that this brief existence contains.

Here is a recent rich and glorious history which spurs us to thank God for the good that has been achieved. This is a history on which you are invited to base yourselves in order ‘to live the present with passion’ as Pope Francis said, and as I would say, to ‘live the present with passion and Samaritan compassion’. This is a matter of listening ‘attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life... The question we have to ask ourselves during this Year is if and how we too are open to being challenged by the Gospel... the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make... Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives... Living the present with passion means becoming “experts in communion”, “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design”... we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters... a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who

inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. *Jn* 17:21). Live the *mysticism of encounter*, which entails “the ability to hear, to listen to other people; the ability to seek together ways and means”. Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three divine Persons (cf. 1 *Jn* 4:8), the model for all interpersonal relationships’ (Pope Francis, ‘Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People in the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life’, I, 29).

Living the present with passion, becoming experts in communion and serving with Samaritan compassion, in a special way during this Jubilee of Mercy, calls above all on us Camillians who have received as a gift from the Church by way of St. Camillus, the outcome of divine mercy, the charism of merciful love towards the sick. Like our founder St. Camillus, we, too, are the beneficiaries of the mercy of God, and following the example and the teaching of the merciful Christ, we are called by God to help the sick and to teach others how to serve them (Const. 8). We are called to bear witness to merciful love with passion and Samaritan compassion, living the enthusiasm of the Good Samaritan or the good Shepherd in our lives and in the various activities of the Province and opening ourselves to the action of the Spirit. As St. Camillus said: ‘First each one should ask for the grace of the Lord that he be given maternal affection towards his neighbour so that he can serve them with all charity of the soul and of the body’ (cf. *Ordini e modi che si hanno da tenere nelli Hospitali in servire li poveri infermi*, XVII).

The Pope invites us to embrace the future with hope. In our *Camillian Project*, as well, it is emphasised that ‘our open trust in the future, and even before this our tenacious commitment in the present, spring from an act of faith in the ongoing contemporary relevance of the Camillian charism. Faith moves mountains (Mt 17:20) and hope pushes towards increasingly high goals and makes us walk towards summits’ (cf. *Camillian Project, second part*). ‘This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 *Tim* 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (*Lk* 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us’ (Pope Francis, ‘Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of consecrated Life’, I, 39). A spiritual life engaged and lived in the Spirit and in Truth will nourish your, and our, hope.

Some Recommendations

We would like to end with some observations and recommendations to be read and thought about aiming at the goal of growth given the certain challenges that you will have to face.

a. In your Province we noticed *serenity in your community life and ministerial activities as a whole*. But one must be prudent and vigilant to ensure that this serenity is not a sign of stagnation but, rather, a sign of trust in God in whom one can confide to carry out every day His will in simplicity and joy. To this end, spaces and time of prayer and encounter between religious should be preserved: these will be fruitful times and ways for discerning the will of God and walking together bearing the burdens of each other (cf. Gal 6:2).

b. At a *vocational level*, we had the pleasant surprise of seeing in your Province young religious involved in ministry and the houses of formation. We repeat the point: ‘you are not sterile!’ We also observed serene cooperation in the formation of young men between you and the Province of Sicily and Naples – this is cooperation that takes practical form with the presence in the studentate both of young candidates in formation and of two religious providing formation who come from your Vice-Provinces (Burkina Faso and Benin-Togo). For this cooperation in formation to be more productive, we recommend that the two Provincial Superiors, together with those providing formation, should meet more often during the year – at the beginning of the year to discuss planning; half way through to assess the performance of the programme; and at the end of the year to monitor together the way the academic year and the project for formation have gone.

c. As regards *economics and works*, it seems to us that you have found a possible operational pathway, with a new style of management, through the cooperation of more expert lay people. This cooperation is certainly not without its concerns. In many religious a feeling of charismatic loss has been generated, increasing in your works the perception of a business. We invite you not to lose from sight the preservation of the identity and the values of the Camillian charism. We realise that we cannot go on without lay people but we have to coordinate them otherwise it is they who will coordinate us. In terms of delegations and proxies to be entrusted to religious or lay administrators, we observe and we recommend that these cannot, and must not, go beyond the mandates that allow them. We also emphasise the importance of essential and periodic information for the whole of the Province, for all of the religious, in the most transparent form possible.

d. The challenge of *communication* is important and should be addressed. We remind you that there is no communion without communication. One of the first and simplest forms of communication we recommend to you is to share with the religious the decisions of the Provincial Council (with the exception of news that requires greater privacy).

e. Our presence in *Bucchianico*, the town where our holy father Camillus was born, should be attended to, and strengthened, in order to offer in an increasingly better way to the Camillian Family, to sick people and to the many faithful who are devoted to St. Camillus, programmes and stimuli to go on pilgrimages to those places, offering to them a specific catechesis and formation. You have a historical responsibility towards this place: its promotion and its visibility in the mass media depend in large measure on you. It is a good thing to know that the *Nicola d'Onofrio* Centre for Spirituality is about to be renewed to offer a more dignified welcome to those who wish to stay in Bucchianico.

f. We have understood that substantially speaking you are the initiators of the *International Institute for the Theology of Pastoral care in Health (the Camillianum)*. With great generosity you provided for its creation and its work, offering the buildings and the physical structure for its activities as well. On behalf of the whole of the Order, we express our heartfelt thanks to you.

To end, together with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, I thank you for the preparation of this visit of ours, for the time that you dedicated to us, for the active participation in the community meetings and the personal meetings, and for the very fine fraternal welcome that we enjoyed in your communities.

May the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mercy and Health of the Sick, and St. Camillus de Lellis the founder and protector of our Order, intercede for you so that you may be able to journey in authentic witness to the charism of merciful love!

Fraternally,

Berlin, 21 June 2016

Memorial of St. Aloysius Gonzaga SJ. – saint of charity

Fr. Leocir PESSINI
Superior General

Fr. Laurent ZOUNGRANA
Vicar General