

Dear Camillian Major Superiors of the region of the Americas,

Esteemed Camillian religious brothers and sisters taking part in the Latin American meeting on ongoing formation,

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

It is with great joy that I greet all of you as you take part in the Latin American meeting on ongoing formation (San Paolo, 27-30 June 2016), just as I also greet with cordiality the Camillian Major Superiors (Provincials, Vice-Provincials and Delegates) of the region of the Americas. I cannot be present amongst you because I am making a pastoral visit to our religious of the Camillian communities of Spain. However, I wish to make myself spiritually present amongst you through this message of encouragement as well.

The subject to be explored, reflected upon and prayed about at this meeting springs from the experience of mercy, in the furrow of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy indicted by Pope Francis (2015-2016). For we Camillians, and all those who are inspired by St. Camillus, this subject is central to our charism, to our spirituality and to the exercise of our ministry. St. Camillus was also the 'subject' of divine mercy (cf. Constitution, n. 8) and from him we have inherited the 'charism of mercy towards the sick'.

In a world and in the context of a society in which the process of globalisation is increasingly advancing, which becomes increasingly cold and indifferent towards the most vulnerable and the poorest people of society, the charity and mercy of the Christian community and consecrated people has become for these men and women hope in their lives, a life-giving breath. They are the chosen of Jesus and St. Camillus. The secular and civil world is convinced that implementing the duty of philanthropy offers it the right to be able to sleep soundly, in the belief that it has done everything that could be done at the level of help and support for others.

For us, however, such philanthropic action is too small a choice: it is no longer sufficient to be only 'humanitarian' and obey the law... We need to go beyond this: we must not forget that precisely in the name of the law those men who were seen as most religious (Pharisees, scribes...) decided to eliminate Jesus himself!

It is specifically for this reason that formation and in-depth exploration in this direction are so important today. We have to go to the roots of our Christian and Camillian identity (according to the Bible and the tradition of the Church): we can nourish our ministry and our choices in the complex world of health and health care at these sources. And, lastly, we are called to nurture our social responsibilities as well – at a personal, community and institutional level – through actions of mercy, with works of mercy. In this sense, it is advisable to ask ourselves how we are bearing witness to the merciful face of God, making it more visible in our lives, in the style of our communities, parishes and health-care institutions.

I hope that the Major Superiors, who have already met officially five times (1. Lima - 2010; 2. Madrid - 2011; 3. Bogotá - 2014; 4. Lima - 2015; 5. San Paolo - 2016), will have the fertile support of the Spirit of God so that they can be illumined by the gift of wisdom and intelligence in planning the future pathways of the Camillians in the Americas as well as concrete initiatives that can strengthen and give new meaning to our presence in these continents.

We are already engaging in valuable initiatives involving cooperation. The most successful is in the sector of the animation of vocations and formation. This year, in September, in Buenos Aires, there will be a tenth meeting of this area – ten years of journeying together.

In other sectors, in the context of spirituality, Camillian ministry, centres for humanisation and ministry in the world of health and health care, and institutes for professional formation in the field of health and health care, we can still improve with joint actions, so as to strengthen our presence and activity in the Church and society.

It is certainly the case that in recent years the belief has grown amongst us that because we are few in number (there are about 235 religious with perpetual vows in the Americas), alone and dispersed, without coordination and joint planning we do not have a future, both in America and in every other part of the world where we are present. Our Camillian project for the revitalisation of consecrated life (2014-2020) encourages us on this journey of greater unity and leads us to an approach of a new reorganisation in terms of governance in the Camillian geography of America.

We hope and pray that this meeting will be able to bring a little light so that we can journey in this direction. We are aware that this is a long process, but we have to realise that the world has changed a great deal, and what happened thirty years ago, for example in terms of European aid for Latin America, is no longer practicable today. After colonialism and paternalism, of a religious character as well, have been abandoned, we must necessarily learn to ‘walk on our own legs’, concretely working for our own sustainability, without resorting to aid from abroad.

Moments of encounter are always moments of *Kairos* (the grace of God) in our lives: they nourish our hope, deepen our faith, and strengthen our friendships and our ties of fraternity. Being together and meeting each other is already a great grace! To love one’s family means to learn to communicate frequently. This is one of the fundamental needs of human beings: meeting and communicating with others.

Before ending this message, I would like to thank Fr. Enrique Gonzalez, the Vice-Provincial of the Vice-Province of Peru and the coordinator of Camillian ministry for the Americas, and Fr. Luciano Ramponi, the secretary of these pan-American meetings of the Camillian Major Superiors and head of communications for this event, for the efforts that they have made and for their role in the preparations for and the planning of this meeting.

We cordially thank the hosts – the Camillian Province of Brazil – in the person of the Provincial Superior, Fr. Antonio Mendes, and all of the Provincial council: I thank them with esteem on behalf of the general government for the welcome that they have given to our religious from Latin America and North America.

Fraternally in St. Camillus, our source of inspiration, father and protector!

*Rome, 12 June 2016*

**Fr. Leocir Pessini**

***Superior General***