

**Message of the Superior General
to our Religious Brothers of the Camillian Community of Berlin
The Province of Poland
Fraternal Visit 19-21 June 2016**

***‘How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God’s people to live in harmony!’
Psalm 133***

***‘The prophecy of consecrated life must be expressed in community life. Today community witness seems to be absent; one needs to pass from individual prophecy to community prophecy. Communion in community makes visible the prophecy of fraternity. It is important to emphasise the importance of the community dimension of prophecy; it is the group more than the individual that must be prophetic in religious life. The prophecy of fraternity is highlighted best in international communities that live an intercultural experience. This is community and fraternity open to others: the laity, families, young people, other religions’
(Prophecy in Consecrated Life. Document of the Union of Superior Generals, 25-27 May 2016)***

***Rev. Fr. Arkadiusz Nowak,
Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Poland,
Esteemed Fr. Henryk Sosna, Fr. Krystian Respondek and Br. Wacław Mroz,***

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

On 19-21 June of this year, with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, I engaged in a fraternal visit to the community of Polish Camillian religious who live in Berlin (Germany). I had already had the joy of meeting the Camillians in Poland the previous year (12-23 May 2015), before the annual meeting with the major Superiors of the Order that we celebrated in Warsaw. Together with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana I had already visited (on 8-11 March of this year) the Camillian community that lives and works in Fianarantsoa in Madagascar. On 9-11 December of this year I expect to also meet our religious of your religious Province who live in Lourdes in France.

Beginning this letter, we wish to express to you our gratitude for the welcome and the fraternity that you bestowed upon us during the days that we spent together in your Camillian community in Berlin.

I believe that a small historical note is important to understand in the most suitable way the current presence of the Camillians in the city of Berlin. The first Camillians from Germany arrived in Berlin in 1914 in response to an invitation of Msgr. Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943), the dean of the chapter of the cathedral of Berlin who was proclaimed Blessed by Pope John Paul II on 23 June 1996 and who can be venerated by the faithful in the crypt of the same cathedral.

Because of a lack of religious, in order to continue Camillian pastoral work in that city the religious of the Province of Germany in 1984 requested for their works in Berlin the support and the presence of their Polish religious brothers, although they continued their ownership of the institutions involved.

Today the pastoral activities of the Camillians are focused on pastoral care in three hospitals of the city, a nursing home for forty elderly people (whose management is entrusted to *Caritas*), and pastoral ministry in a parish and in another two churches. With the deep

demographic change affecting Catholics in the region with the arrival of many migrants, the diocese of Berlin is also changing its pastoral and ecclesial organisation, with a projected strong reduction in the number of parishes by the year 2020 from the current 105 parishes to an estimated 30, whose presence will be developed through *pastoral units*.

On our arrival, in front of the facade of our parish church, we were welcomed by the calm serenity of a simple but well-off neighbourhood, with the pleasant scent of limes in flower accompanied by a relaxing tonality of intense green in the surrounding vegetation and the joyous shouting of children who played in the nearby park: there could not have been a better introduction and more fraternal welcome to being amongst you! These were the same feelings that we experienced with you in your community over the following days!

Your community is made up of only three religious who with ‘fraternal lightness’ place themselves directly and respectfully in the ordinary dynamics of religious community life. This is attested to by the scene of a religious who was carefully preparing the lunch for the community – a simple and tasty lunch – while the other two religious prepared the dining room, indicating with fine candles and a white tablecloth with the fragrance of being newly washed the presence of ‘guests’ who were not to be treated with reverent detachment but with a sense of ‘family’, with an expression of gratitude by those who awaited this visit.

The same feeling of serenity which arose from your welcome was experienced by us in the liturgical celebration of community prayers and the Eucharist (in which attention to details in the sacristy denoted a taste for the ‘beautiful’ not for itself but for God and neighbour), in the meetings of the community, in the afternoon walks that we went on, and in the visits to the places of your Camillian ministry. The perception that we had is that each one of you three, in engaging in your personal and practical daily affairs, brings with him also the witness of the rest of the community!

During our community meeting I had an opportunity to describe to you the progress made by our Order as regards the commitments requested by the last General Chapters (May 2013 and June 2014) to implement the revitalisation of our Camillian consecrated lives in line with our *Camillian Project* (2014-2020), with three priorities highlighted as needs of the Order: a) economics – starting with the financial accounts of the generalate house which should be attended to with increasing transparency; b) the promotion of vocations and initial and ongoing formation – this is the field which can assure the prospect of our existence in the future; and c) communication – improving communication at the level of the Order, Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations. Without communication it is impossible to speak about communion and fraternal life.

We also commented on the extremely favourable ecclesial context and the charismatic leadership of Pope Francis, the principal moral leader of humanity. He is a Jesuit religious and knows well the interior complexities, the shadows and the lights of religious life. In this context, the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life (2015) was a valuable opportunity for growth in faith and the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016) has been an important stimulus for us Camillians, who have received from God, through St. Camillus, *the charism of mercy*.

In Berlin – a city that was marked by the division generated by the ‘Wall’ and then revitalised by its ‘fall’ – you continue to be a sign of unity in the Order and a *bridge* between two Camillian Provinces (that of Germany and that of Poland): you received from our German religious brothers the heritage of the St. Camillus Parish and the old people’s home, as well as spiritual assistance in a number of hospitals of the city and assistance and accompanying for sick people in their homes. This valuable witness would have disappeared – with your presence it is experiencing a renewed and appreciated vitality! This small sign that you have made and

taken upon yourselves with a great sense of responsibility could be a stimulus to organising renewed cooperation with other Provinces in Europe as well, Provinces that are experiencing signs of vocational frailty, the precariousness of their own works, the old age of their members...

We appreciated the fact that Fr. Arkadiusz Nowak, the Provincial Superior of Poland, came to the community of Berlin during our visit. Language barriers were overcome thanks to the happy mediation of Fr. Krzysztof Trebski who translated, with some 'creative' additions, from Polish into Italian.

May God bless you and may our Founder Father St. Camillus protect you and may the Holy Spirit always inspire you to serve with Samaritan compassion! May you be able to walk towards the future, with the necessary prophetic courage, living as a community, a valuable summary of, and qualified witness to, the presence of the Camillian charism in Berlin!

Rome, 30 June 2016

Memorial of the first martyrs of the Church of Rome

Fr. Leocir PESSINI
Superior General