

## A Fraternal Message of the Father General to the Camillian Delegation of Australia on the Occasion of his Pastoral Visit

*September 5-14, 2016*

### **WITNESSING THE MERCY OF GOD TOWARDS THE SICK IN THE OCEANIA**

*“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” (Vita Consecrata, No. 110). Let’s look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope”*

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO ALL  
CONSECrated PEOPLE ON THE OCCASION OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

*Dear Fr. Rolando J. Fernandez,*

*Provincial Superior of the Philippine Province*

*Dear Fr. Diosdado Haber,*

*Delegate Superior of the Australian Delegation*

*Dear Confreres,*

*Fr. Marcelo “Bong” Pamintuan, Fr. Giulio Ghezzi, Fr. Remegio “Regie” Jamorabon, Fr. Domingo “Meng” Barawid and Bro. Eric Perret*

Health and Peace in the Risen Lord of our Life!

It was indeed an immense joy to myself, Fr. Leo Pessini, as General Superior and for Fr. Aris Miranda, the General Consultor for Ministry to be with you during this fraternal, pastoral and canonical visit from September 5-14, 2016.

This letter bears our fraternal message and appreciation emanating from our hearts after meeting you personally, formally and informally in your community and in the place of your ministry in several hospitals where you are providing pastoral care in the Diocese of Parramatta, in the State of New South Wales.

The long-awaited pastoral visit to this Delegation is finally accomplished on September 14, 2016 on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. We originally scheduled this visit last November 17, 2015 right after our visit in the Delegation of Indonesia. However, due to a volcanic eruption that affected Bali airport where we were supposed to fly out to Sydney, we got stranded. And so we resumed this long journey on September 4, 2016. I was flying from Sao Paulo while Aris was flying from Rome. It took almost 24 hours to reach this beautiful and serene continent but we were refreshed by the Spring in the east coast of Australia (New South Wales) and the joyous spirit in your community. For the record, this pastoral visit has completed our visit to the Philippine Province (January 26 – February 7, 2015) and its Delegations, namely, Taiwan (February 8–12, 2015), Indonesia (November 7-16, 2015), Australia (September 5-14, 2016).

### ***Looking with gratitude at our history (past) in this part of the world***

*All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to the Consecrated People, no. 1)*

The Camillians in their utmost desire to spread the gospel of mercy to the sick began a new journey towards the lands of the Pacific called Australia. This is the fifth continent that the Camillians landed for a mission. On September 1963, the first two Camillians from the Anglo-Irish Province – Fr. John Cleary, superior of the new foundation (+1977) and Fr. Sean Bredin (+2015) – arrived in Perth and was welcomed by Bishop Myles McKeon who had known the Camillians in Killucan since 1947. In the Diocese of Perth, they were assigned as parish priests (Carlisle and Maida Vale) and chaplains of hospitals (Subiaco). In 1972, they opened the first nursing home (36 bed facility) of the Camillians in Forrestfield. By this time, there were already eleven Irish Camillians working in the diocese of Perth. Fourteen years after, the first and only Australian vocation made his first profession of vows in 1977 – Bro. Eric Perrett (from Queensland). At present because of his fragile health condition, he is living in a private nursing home (St. Hedwig Village) close to the community house and our confreres are visiting him regularly. Fr. Aris and I, had visited him too. This marked a phenomenal growth of the Anglo Irish Province's mission and vocations.

Fr. Tom O'Connor said, "Needless to say that the sick were the primary concern of the newly arrived Camillians and they concentrated their ministry on the care of the sick in the hospitals and private homes. Because of the shortage of priest, Archbishop Prendiville asked the new community to undertake the care of the newly formed parish of Carlisle. In the meantime the ministry to the house-bound and the elderly grew in general grew rapidly and as the Camillian spirit became known, the demands on the energies of the first Camillians increased." (*Camillians in Australia, in Camillians Today, p. 95*). In this direction, trying to respond to the needs of the growing ageing population in that area, with the help of the generous donations of friends of the Camillians and the Health Department, a piece of land was purchased and a nursing home (Mount St. Camillus Nursing Home) was constructed at Forrestfield. The newly built 36 bed facility was officially opened in May 1972, and this was considered as an important landmark in the development of the Order in Australia.

In Perth, the Camillians took the pastoral care ministry of three parishes: Holy Name Church, in Carlisle (1969), Maida Vale (1970) and at St. Aloysius Church in Shenton Park (1980). They also took care of 6 chaplaincies in the healthcare facilities in the area and services in 3 nursing homes. However, in 1985 the Province has decided to pull out their ministry in the nursing home and entrusted it to a Catholic lay organization known as the Southern Cross Homes Inc. This decision was provoked by the following factors: "a) the limited number of religious available for the mission, b) increased government control and difficulty of trying to make ends meet under the system of deficit finance c) the possibility of keeping the nursing under Catholic lay control, and d) the prospect of taking charge of the city parish of Subiaco and the prospect of working in the area of chaplaincy at the St. John of God Hospital in Subiaco and other major hospitals." (*Report, Fr. Sean Bredin, MI, November 1996, p. 2*).

With these difficulties and new challenges, the Anglo-Irish province immediately sought help from the then Far East Vice Province (presently the Philippine Province) in 1988. As Fr. Giovanni Rizzi (former vice provincial superior) estimated that it will take about ten years before he could send religious from the vice province to Australia. The first group of religious (3) arrived in 1998 headed by Fr. Giulio Ghezzi then followed by another group of two. Then, in 2002 another batch of religious (3) from the then Indian delegation arrived to replace the religious of the Philippine province who then moved and opened a new community in Parramatta. However, a year later, the Indian confreres were recalled to India. In the meantime, the Philippine province had settled themselves at the Sacred Heart Presbytery of the Diocese of Parramatta.

Nonetheless, the seed that has been sown has rooted and sprouted. The Camillian presence in this vast continent is shaping. Fr. Sean Bredin, the regional superior of the Delegation, affirmed that “the Camillian presence in Perth, over the past 33 years has made a significant contribution to the local church in the areas of parish ministry and health care. Despite the difficulties experienced, Camillian presence has been appreciated by the Church and the community at large and has provided a visible witness to the Camillian charism and spirit inherited from its Founder, St. Camillus. Camillians will be needed in the future to work with the local church and the laity, to ensure that there will always be a viable Catholic presence in health care and the values and commitments of true health influence the provision of all health services.” (*Report, Fr. Sean Bredin, MI, November 1996, p. 3*). In a span of 33 years, 20 members of the Camillian Anglo Irish province were able to render a true witnessing of the gospel of mercy to the sick in Western Australia at the Archdiocese of Perth.

### ***The New Foundation at New South Wales (Diocese of Parramatta)***

In 2002, the Philippine province had opened a new community in Westmead, NSW. On August 2002, two Filipino Camillians landed in Sydney. They were welcomed by Fr. Robert McGuckin, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Parramatta. The Camillians took charge of the parish of the Sacred Heart (2002-2015) and the hospital chaplaincy at Westmead Hospital, Children’s Hospital, Cumberland Hospital and Nepean Hospital. Later, two of the religious of the Philippine province who were in Perth had joined the Westmead community (the first residence) located at the presbytery of the Sacred Heart parish. By 2007, the Philippine Province has finally moved out of Perth and settled in the Diocese of Parramatta in a new house provided by the diocese at Wentworthville (the second residence). From 1998, eleven confreres from the Philippine province have been assigned and placed in charge of a parish and hospital chaplaincies in the dioceses of Perth and Parramatta. Thus, from the very beginning of the Camillian mission to Australia up to the present, a total of 31 Camillian religious have been ministering in this continent in a span of 53 years.

At present the Camillians are focusing themselves on the hospital chaplaincy ministry at Westmead, one of the largest teaching and research hospital of Australia, The Children’s hospital, Cumberland hospital for Mental Health, Blacktown hospital and Mt. Druitt hospital. It is quite interesting to note that the hospital chaplaincy ministry in Australia is ecumenical (other Christian faiths) and inter-faith (Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, etc.) in nature. While each one administers their own members though not exclusively for their pastoral-spiritual needs, you agreed among yourselves to have a common place for worship, a single room for everybody.

While each one has its own offices which coordinate their respective pastoral care programs and activities, you have a common place where you can freely interact with each other as chaplains in a formal and informal way. This is an act of recognition of the riches of pastoral care ministry to the sick which cuts across different faiths and cultures of patients and at the same time the desire of the chaplains to share each one's unique approach to different situations and needs of the sick. Here, is a wealth of experience of pastoral care ministry to the sick that needs to be communicated.

Fr. Aris and I, were delighted to hear the sincere appreciations of the patients, healthcare workers, and colleagues to your ministry. We feel elated to hear from some of your colleagues in the chaplaincy who are non Camillians acclaiming with honesty saying "I'm a chaplain with a Camillian heart." Certainly, it was your dedication and concern to the patients that draws their attention, appreciation and identification. A healthcare worker from Westmead hospital told us during a casual visit to her family saying, "perhaps you (Camillians) are not aware of how much help, love and healing that you have rendered and shared to these suffering people." She continued, "your prayers made miracles in the hospital." The lady then was referring to a story of a newly born baby who had a congenital heart complication in which chances to live is almost nil but when one of you on duty offered a mass for her, she survived from the heart surgery and she is now two years old; growing healthy. Not to mention in details, how many parishioners remarked the big difference that you did in their lives as once you've ministered to them. No wonder that your presence in the diocese is highly regarded by the bishop and its clergy.

Needless to say, that the Church in Australia is in dire need of "pastors" especially to those who will look after the spiritual needs of the sick and the faithful. Australia's population is ageing as a result of sustained low fertility and increasing life expectancy. On the other hand, the significant change of immigration policies over the years have encouraged migrants, mostly Catholics, from neighboring countries and Europe to come and give life to the Church. These conditions generate new challenges in the Australian society not only in terms of socio-economic aspect but also spiritual. The encounters of different cultures could somehow generate tensions both external and internal which will have a benign impact on their health and well-being. Migrants who are mostly embedded with their own religious-spiritual culture came into contact with a rapidly growing secular culture. As heralds of God's mercy, you have a great task ahead where your physical and spiritual presence is mostly sought by these people.

Another interesting development that we have noticed is the gradual growth of the Lay Camillian Family (LCF) in Parramatta since you started it in 2014. The few that we have met during this visit has left a positive impression of their desire and commitment to know, learn and share the spirit and spirituality of the Camillians in taking care of the sick particularly in the hospitals. We were amazed by the multi-ethnic composition of the members of the LCF – Australians, Colombian, Filipinos, Japanese and Croatian. What is most interesting is the formation that is given to them. Aside from the studies on the life and spirituality of St. Camillus, they invest themselves in undergoing formal training on pastoral health care. They have a sincere desire to be true ministers of the sick by making their services according to the standard and done professionally. They don't simply take this as a mere volunteer work or making use of their free time wisely but as a ministry.

Finally, you didn't limit yourselves within the confines of the hospitals and healthcare facilities. You extend some spiritual services to the chaplaincy ministry with the Filipino migrant communities and to an Italian community within the diocese. Australia is a multi-ethnic society. It attracts overseas migration due to its distinct favorable conditions for work and job placement. This phenomenon poses both its positive and negative impact into the church and the society at large. While some think migrants are a threat to their security, no one can deny that they are also great resources and riches. In a secularized society, they played a vital role in sustaining our efforts to evangelization through their life-witnessing, dedication and thirst for the divine. In this aspect, they are in need of proper guidance and accompaniment. And you are taking this with great responsibility and personal investment of your time and talents. We have heard that the migrants composed the 75% of the Catholics in Australia and among the two biggest groups are the Italians and the Filipinos.

While Australia upholds by law the freedom of religion, the believers are showing "a relaxed attitude towards institutional religion and scepticism towards its more austere expressions." ((*Graeme Innes AM, Race Discrimination Commissioner*). Australians are becoming decreasingly Christian; attendances in worship services across all denominations are generally falling, and many are now claiming to have no religion. Further, the commissioner said: "This does not necessarily mean that we are less religious. Many Australians continue to have a sense of the spiritual, or they express their faith privately, or outside of institutional settings." Speaking about the challenges for parish renewal, Cardinal Wuerl said, "The secularism experience in my part of the western world is a cultural tsunami. It is against this background, this diminished experience of faith that Pope Francis calls us to the new evangelisation to go-out and don't stay wrapped up in yourselves. As we go forward, we are going to have a wonderful time of renewal in the Church. (*Media Release 2.9.16 Australian Catholic Bishop Conference*). These are emerging issues in the Church of Australia that is calling our attention and discernment in the near future.

***Embracing the future with hope: facing with serenity and courage the challenges and grabbing seriously the opportunities of growth and innovation***

Misconception and misunderstanding of the nature of mission and the true character of a missionary is looming in our time. Coming from the southern hemisphere where most of the countries are recipient of Catholic missionaries, it is common to think before that to be a missionary means to be sent to the least developed or developing countries mostly in the south where the first proclamation of Christ to non-Christians became the primary goal (*ad gentes*). We always associate missionaries with Europeans. However, in this last millennium, a reversal of the situation is becoming evident. Growing number of missionaries are now coming from the south going to the north and we called this epoch the new evangelization, i.e., the call to reach out to Catholics and others who have been become distant to the faith because of secularization. Unfortunately, this inspired movement of new missionaries to the north is seen often from the economic standpoint rather from the spiritual-pastoral point of view. This type of attitude relegates to the background the essentials and meaning of mission.

Some of you lament for the lack of support and appreciation of this noble mission precisely because of this misconception and the existing condition of the Province whose number of vocations begins to dwindle which is a common issue across the world. Here are some of these

new challenges and at the same time its built-in opportunities. We are inviting the Provinces, Delegations and all confreres to reflect and to draw out our response.

1. “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” (Matt. 9, 37-38). Jesus made this appeal to his listeners and was moved with pity when he saw how many of them were troubled and abandoned. Of about 24 million population in Australia, 25% are Catholics and this is increasing due to the constant flow of migrants. There are about 1,300 healthcare facilities and 2,800 nursing homes for seniors both private and public nationwide. Needless to say, that pastoral care services is on demand in this country. I have heard that several dioceses are also requesting for our presence. This situation is a sign of the times that we need to engage into a deeper assessment and action. In this aspect, an active participation of the Provincial administration is “*sine qua non*” in order to arrive at a more pastoral and impact driven decision.

To guide us in our discernment, we need to refer to our Camillian Project in our desire to revitalize our structure. “In this situation we must avoid closure or folding in on ourselves in order to defend specific and local interests; avoid the temptation to reduce consecrated life only to certain fields, within specific spatial or temporal sectors, being nostalgic about the past; and commit ourselves to an openness of the Order to the global perspectives of the Church, international dimensions, and requests that come from the new sensitivity brought by lay people.” (*Camillian Project, No. 3, second part*)

2. There is a growing interest and appreciation of the lay faithful to our charism and ministry. The specific character of our charism and the way we assume and live with it is highly appreciated because of the evident pastoral needs of the sick people in and outside of the healthcare facilities. It is a form of hunger and thirst for the consoling and healing presence of God in the midst of suffering and difficulties. This ministry gives also a sense of fulfillment and meaning to those lay volunteers in the chaplaincy ministry. We could sense the enthusiasm and eagerness to learn of these faithful particularly among the members of the Lay Camillian Family. Invest your talents in taking care of the desire of St. Camillus “to have a hundred arms in order to do more for the sick”. We really encourage you to pursue this mission with the lay Christian people and lay Camillian Family. Maybe in the future the Camilian charism will remain present in places even in the absence of the Camillian religious, and this might generate a new seed of vocations.

“Lay people are a valuable resource given that they can act in an effective way in the process of the revitalization of the Order. Their presence must not be interpreted only in replacement terms, as substitutes for religious who are not present for age reasons or because of the number of the various functions at the level of service within works or in ministry in general, although it is necessary to listen above all to their need for fraternal welcoming and sharing our charism and spirituality. Our communities must remain open so that lay people can offer their competent contribution in fields that have not hitherto been very much shared, such as social communications, the promotion of vocations, and initial and ongoing formation.” (*Camillian Project, No. 3,1*)

3. The government and the church institutions are very supportive of this kind of services or ministry. Investment in this field is evident, and thus, financial and material support is ensured. Not being opportunistic but realistic, we are in the best position to develop, augment and sustain this ministry here and abroad.

4. The distinctive and dynamic character of chaplaincy ministry here in Australia – ecumenical and interfaith – can be a great contribution to the “science” or theology of pastoral health care. It is a privileged place of research and studies of pastoral health theology in the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. We encourage you to write down your experience, studies, analysis and reflection so that it will become a valuable and productive experience, not only for incoming confreres who will be doing this ministry in your area, but also for all those Camillians who find themselves in a similar cultural condition in different countries where the Order is present in the world.


5. Regarding the new appeals of the general governance to engage in innovations to our ministry of witnessing the mercy of God to those who are most suffering, we encourage you to organize, develop, and establish the Camillian Disaster Service International (CADIS), the humanitarian foundation of the Order into a legal organization. Asia-Pacific is the new frontier of natural and man-made disasters which is creating huge impact to the most vulnerable and impoverished sectors in the Asian region at large. Knowing of Australia’s sincere commitment to the humanitarian mission, it is an opportune time to establish CADIS Australia whose main task is to engage in the resource mobilization (human, material and financial) activities in order to support humanitarian care projects in Asia.

6. On the other hand, aware of our own limitations both physical and spiritual, do not forget to take care of yourself. We have to learn from our past wherein the increasing response to the pastoral needs became incommensurate to the prevailing strength and capacities; it consumed much the individual self, which resulted to departures, illnesses and burnouts of the religious. Do not compromise community life, which is the tangible source of strength, mutual support, fraternity and spiritual relief.

Finally, we would like to express our heartiest and deepest appreciation and gratitude for such a wonderful experience of being together, and sharing our hopes and concerns of the present and future of our Order, the Philippine Province and the Australian Delegation. Thank you for your generosity and hospitality.

We pray that God in this creative mercy born on the holy cross, and in Saint Camillus, our Father and Founder, may always protect and bless you with good health, harmonious and sensible living in unity as a community, with enthusiasm, passion and joy to the present moment of your lives, and serving the sick and the health care field at large with a Samaritan compassion.

*Sydney, Australia, September 14, 2016*  
*Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross*



**Fr. Leocir Pessini, MI**  
*General Superior*

**Fr. Aris Miranda, MI**  
*General Consultor for Ministry*

***Current Members of the Australian Delegation and Ministries***

1. Fr. Diosdado Haber – delegate superior and chaplain of Blacktown Hospital
2. Fr. Marcelo “Bong” Pamintuan – economo and chaplain of Westmead Hospital, Children’s Hospital and Cumberland Hospital
3. Fr. Giulio Ghezzi – chaplain of the Italian community in Marayong
4. Fr. Remegio “Regie” Jamorabon - chaplain of Mount Druitt Hospital
5. Fr. Domingo “Meng” Barawid – chaplain of Westmead Hospital, Children’s Hospital and Cumberland Hospital
6. Bro. Eric Perret – a resident of St. Hedwig Village nursing home (Blacktown, NSW)