

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CAMILLIAN DELEGATION OF HAITI

Pastoral Visit
28 November -5 December 2016

'it remains a priority of the Church to keep herself dynamically in a state of 'moving outwards', to bear witness at a concrete level to divine mercy, making herself a 'field hospital' for marginalised people who live in every existential, socio-economic, health-care, environmental and geographical fringe of the world'.

Pope Francis, *Message to those taking part in the International Congress of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers (11 November 2016).*

'Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope born of faith in the Risen Lord. True, we are often sorely tested, but we must never lose our certainty of the Lord's love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction'.

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter **Misericordia et misera**. At the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, n. 13.*

'All of us need consolation because no one is spared suffering, pain and misunderstanding. How much pain can be caused by a spiteful remark born of envy, jealousy or anger! What great suffering is caused by the experience of betrayal, violence and abandonment! How much sorrow in the face of the death of a loved one! And yet God is never far from us at these moments of sadness and trouble. A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger... all these things express God's closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters'.

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter **Misericordia et misera**. At the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, n. 13.*

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Delegate of the Camillian Delegation of Haiti

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

From 28 November to 5 December 2016 I went on a fraternal and pastoral (canonical) visit to the Camillian Delegation of Haiti. Two of us performed this pastoral service of the general government: I myself, as Superior General of the Order, and Fr. Joaquim Paulo Cipriano, as Provincial Councillor of the Province of North Italy. This was the first time that I visited this nation and the Camillians who live in it. Fr. Cyprian has had a number of opportunities to visit Haiti. He knows the Camillian religious who provide service in your country very well given that he was Provincial Superior of the former Province of Piedmont, which is now a part of the Province of North Italy.

His fraternal and cordial company was of great help in the translations from French into Italian and Portuguese. During this visit, we were kindly reminded that a long time had passed since a Superior General had visited the Camillians of Haiti. The last Superior General to make such a visit was Fr. Frank A. Monks, in the year 2003. This was followed by the then Vicar General, Fr. Paolo Guarise, in the year 2012 (a pastoral visit).

We had a very intense week of work, with individual and community meetings, and took part in the daily lives of our religious. We went to the mission of Port-au-Prince and visited all of your various activities and initiatives for the development of health and care for health:

- The *Foyer-St. Camillus Hospital* which is made up of a polyclinic, a general hospital with about a hundred beds, and has various medical specialisations.
- The *Foyer-Bethleem* with an area for disabled children who have been abandoned by their families whom the women Ministers of the Sick look after with great care. At the present time, there are 32 children in this institution but there is a project to gradually increase the supply of care so as to reach the figure of 100.
- The church dedicated to *Our Lady of Health* which has an enormous red cross on the top of the roof and where we had the joy of celebrating the Sunday Eucharist (on 4 December), together with the faithful of that area who attend this Christian community.
- There is also a service for the treatment and prevention of cholera in cooperation with the local health-care authorities.

We visited the community of the women Ministers of the Sick who work with our Camillian mission; we also met the lay leaders who help in the church dedicated to Our Lady of Health. In addition, we had a meeting with our seminarians (3 in number) and with the members of the Lay Camillian Family which has a group of 35 people.

We also went to Jeremy, a town that is about 125 kilometres from the capital where the Camillians have a certain number of activities for human promotion, health care and evangelisation. Fr. Robert Daudier, the Superior of the Delegation, and Fr. Jean-Louis Roudy accompanied us during this trip of about seven hours, which also offered us an opportunity to look at the mountain region of Haiti. We stayed in Jeremy on 1-3 December with Fr. Massimo Miraglio, a Camillian religious who lives and works there. We witnessed the destruction that the hurricane Matthew (October 2016) left behind it in the whole of the region, including the damage caused to the Camillian mission where the roof was lifted off the hospital, which was still under construction, and also off the house of the community.

As I have done in the other Messages, my model is to present at the outset some information on the realities and context of this country (geography, culture, history and politics, ecclesial realities) in which Camillians are present and are engaged in pastoral work. In this way, a Camillian who lives in another continent, in Africa or Asia, has a greater opportunity to understand Haiti. My Message is divided into five parts: 1. The history, culture, geography and politics of Haiti; 2. how the Camillians came to this country, (and in remembering this past we express our gratitude to the pioneers of this mission); 3. the witness of the missionaries; 4. the Camillians who are involved in human promotion and evangelisation today; and 5. the challenges that we have to address to as to be able 'embrace this future with hope'.

1. Towards Knowing about Haiti: some Historical, Geographical, Cultural and Political Information

Creole is the official language of the country, together with French. Geographically, Haiti is on the western part of the island of *Hispaniola* which was discovered in the year 1492 by Christopher Columbus (Spain). With its 27,750 square kilometres, Haiti is on the second largest island of the archipelago of the Greater Antilles, from which it is separated by a stretch of sea that is only eighty kilometres in length. The eastern part of the island is the Dominican Republic with its splendid capital, Santo Domingo.

The western part of the island, that is to say Haiti, was ceded to France by Spain in 1697. In the eighteenth century it was the most prosperous French colony in the Americas thanks to the exportation of sugar, cocoa and coffee. One should not be amazed, therefore, if there is a certain pride in this past which is still well expressed in the number plates of Haitian cars: this nation is defined as the *Perle des Antilles* (the Pearl of the Antilles). Today we have before us a society that is profoundly unequal and unjust. There are the new rich, a small Haitian elite – 3% of the population has almost 80% of the resources of the nation. They live in town, in very beautiful palaces, surrounded by security walls, and rather than dealing with the needs of the poor they seek to look after their own interests.

Port-au-Prince is the capital city of Haiti. It was born as a former French colony and was populated by the descendants of slaves. Haiti was the first country of Latin America to declare its independence (in 1804) thank to the role of Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803). Louverture was the son of slaves who came from Benin. He himself was a slave and organised the ‘black’ revolt which was supported by the French revolutionaries. He died shortly after the country’s much sought-after independence. The airport of the capital is dedicated to this revolutionary who was a native of Haiti.

The indigenous population on the island at the time of the discovery of the Americas (1492) disappeared immediately after the arrival of the Spaniards. In the seventeenth century, under the rule of the French, the slave trade began, with black slaves from Benin and Togo (Africa). The predominant religion is Christianity and 95.3% of the Christians are Catholics. But there is also a strong syncretism and a great influence of rites and cults that derive from the ancestors of the population, in particular the rite of voodoo which was brought to Haiti by former slaves and exercises a major influence on the population, above all amongst the simplest and poorest people.

About 80% of the population practises both Christian and voodoo rites. The religious rituals of voodoo are celebrated on special occasions such as births, marriages and deaths in order to obtain help and comfort, with the invocation of spirits of nature who are called *Loa*. People’s relationships with these spirits, whether they are good or bad, are of fundamental importance.

These voodoo rituals – which are mixed with African beliefs and Catholic rites – began in the second half of the seventeenth century when the first contingents of slaves from central Africa landed in Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic). They rapidly became a socially organised religion and became a factor that worked for the unity of people. In the voodoo sanctuaries, ceremonies are engaged in to honour divinities (*Loa*) and these are guided by the *Houngans* (priests) and by the *Mambo* (priestesses). During these rites, the participants (or some of them) go into a trance and personify the divinities that are prayed to and worshipped.

Voodoo is not only this. There are also many rites of black magic. In these rites, a belief in zombies or the living dead is expressed. Black and white magic, rites, and practices for the curing of illnesses create around the *Mambo* and the *Houngans* an authentic climate of terror in the simplest people. These ministers of the voodoo cult have great power over the population and a notable sociological power as well, indeed to such an extent that the former President of the Republic of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to win the support of these figures declared voodoo the religion of the State.

During the little more than two hundred years that they have existed as a republic, the people of Haiti have rarely had periods of peace. Fifty-four heads of state have followed one another down the years and many of them turned out to be dictators. The most tragic period was that of the dictator Francois Duvalier, popularly known as *Papa Doc*, who was elected for the first time in the year 1957 and in 1964 proclaimed himself president for life. After his death in 1971, his son Jean-Claude Duvalier (*Baby Doc*) took over the leadership of the country. In July 1985 he was appointed president for life but popular discontent was enormous and he had to leave the country in May 1986. In 1986, the Haitians drew up and approved a new Constitution that envisaged a mandate for the president that lasted five years. In 1991, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, an ex-Salesian priest, becoming the spokesman for the poorest parts of the population, won the presidential elections. However, his government did not

last long. A military junta took power in 1994 with a coup d'état. Aristide later returned to power but, a weakened figure, he was not able to deal with the needs of the population.

The revolutionary dream of Toussaint Louverture, who wanted to create an independent republic governed by former black slaves, became in fact an unending nightmare. A very precarious form of republic was organised which was far from meeting the legitimate needs for social justice in Haitian society. As if this situation of constant political instability, humiliating poverty and widespread social violence were not enough, the country is still afflicted by disasters caused by nature and has frequent earthquakes and hurricanes.

The earthquake of 12 January 2010 (which struck at 16.53) was the worst recorded earthquake of the last two hundred years, with a magnitude of 7.3 on the Richter scale. The statistics on the people who died or were wounded, and the material losses that were caused, are rough ones, but it is estimated that 316,000 people lost their lives, 350,000 people were wounded and needed urgent medical care, and more than 1.5 million persons were left without their already poor homes, with incalculable material losses. About 80% of the buildings in Port-au-Prince were gravely damaged or completely destroyed. About 800,000 people continue to live in simple tents in precarious conditions, without light, water or sewerage, and this is not to mention the fear and insecurity that has afflicted the population because of violence.

Msgr. Joseph Serge Miot, the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, was also killed in this tragedy, together with many seminarians and priests. Haiti was isolated from the rest of the world for a certain period of time because all of the communications systems were gravely damaged. Thanks to international humanitarian agencies, the United Nations, NGOs, religious organisations and many countries that offered solidarity during this enormous tragedy, many people were saved.

As if the earthquake of 2010 were not enough, less than a decade later, on 4 October 2016, the fury of the hurricane Matthew was unleashed. This meteorological event of unprecedented violence devastated the region of Jeremie (which is in the southern part of Haiti, a region that has about 900,000 inhabitants), causing over a thousand deaths, the destruction of crops, and making thousands of people homeless: the population lost everything and now needs to begin all over again. But how can this reconstruction take place in a situation of poverty that is truly endemic? We are here faced with an unprecedented humanitarian tragedy.

Without international solidarity and humanitarian aid, without instruction, health and employment, it is unlikely that this small country in the Caribbean, with its population of about ten million inhabitants (2014), will have a promising future.

95% of the population is composed of the descendants of African slaves and the current situation of unemployment is an authentic tragedy because two-thirds of this population does not have work, or, whatever the case, engages in some modest activity in the 'underground' economy. Over 1.3 million people of this population live in the capital city. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world (*Human Development Index (HDI) Report 2014 – 0,483 Pnud*), together with the Central African Republic. Rather than developing a globalisation of solidarity, we are deepening the ditch of the globalisation of inequality and indifference.

2. The Arrival of the Camillians in Haiti

The first contacts of the Camillians with this island in the Caribbean began in November 1994 when the then member of the General Consulta, Br. Joaquim Camara, the Superior General, Fr. Angelo Brusco (1989-2001), the cleric Massimo Miraglio, and Fr. Antonio Menegon went to Haiti to learn about, and study, the prospects for the beginning of a new Camillian mission.

They immediately encountered a difficult and politically complicated reality. These were the months after the fall of the military dictatorship and the assumption of power by President Jean-

Bertrand Aristide. On 7 September 1995, the Provincial Superior of the Province of Piedmont and his council approved the creation of a mission in Haiti. On 20 September 1995, the first three Camillian missionaries arrived: Fr. Adolfo Porro, Fr. Serge Mercet, and Massimo Miraglio. Down the years, the following Camillians from Italy have been a part of this mission: Fr. Mario Ramello, Fr. Piero Montagna, Fr. Gianfranco Lovera, and Fr. Crescenzo Mazzella. Fr. Marius Soussago, from Burkina Faso, lived in this mission for two years.

Almost all of these pioneering missionaries have returned to their homelands. At the present time only Fr. Massimo Miraglio, who lives and works in Jeremy, which is about 125km from the capital, is still in Haiti.

The first Camillian missionaries, with the help of some religious of the Conference of Religious of Haiti (with the mediation of Sr. Jeannette Fanfan), found accommodation by renting a house inside the property of a religious house of missionaries of the Immaculate Mary. They introduced themselves to Msgr. Joseph Lafontant, the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, who received them officially into his diocese, inviting them immediately to take responsibility for pastoral service as chaplains in the *Hospital São Francisco de Sales* which was owned by the diocese.

Over the next months, the country began a state of great social and political instability which became very dangerous with the approach of the political elections, with thefts, arson, murders and other kinds of violence. The Camillians themselves were stopped on more than one occasion in the street to be searched and questioned.

At the end of November, the Camillians began activity involving voluntary work in the home for the dying of the women Missionaries of Charity of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This house, with 150 beds, was located in one of the poorest areas of the capital (*bidonvilles*) where men and women devastated by AIDS and other diseases were welcomed to live the last days of their lives. This community had ten Indian sisters. The voluntary service provided by the first Camillian religious (from eight to thirteen hours a day) involved accompanying people who were near the end of their lives, with the sacraments, confession, communion, and anointing of the sick. But there were also other 'services' to be offered: cutting nails, beards and hair; helping patients in bath tubs and lavatories. Most of these patients died within a few days and about 90% of them were very young (between the ages of 20 and 30). At that time, there were no drugs for people with the HIV/AIDS virus and the disease was spreading dramatically, in particular among the poorest sections of the population.

The few Camillians who were present began to look for a site on the outskirts of the capital, Port-au-Prince, to build a house for disabled children, people who were HIV-positive, and abandoned people. The purchase of a property without being swindled was no easy business. Many religious Congregations were cheated by fraudsters because of the problem that it was not always legitimate and legal owners who wanted to sell.

On 28 August 1996 a site of six and a half hectares was purchased. It had abundant water, was not far from the airport, and was about half an hour from the centre of Port-au-Prince. There was already a house in this area and this was immediately adapted to be the residence of the religious community, with a chapel and other areas. At that time Fr. Antonio Menegon, the Provincial Superior of the Province of Piedmont, when visiting the Camillian mission in Haiti officially accepted the first two vocations of the Haitian Camillians. In December 1996, the general government of the Order formalised the erection of the first Camillian community in Haiti.

In January 1997, projects began to build the *Foyer Saint Camille* for the provision of health care to poor people, care for mothers and children, and help for abandoned and disabled children. On 4 November 2001 the *Foyer* was inaugurated and it has been gradually transformed into a general hospital.

I asked why to begin with this health-care project was called a '*Foyer*' and not merely a '*hospital*'. '*Foyer*' is a French word and means 'familial', 'domestic'. For we Westerners the hearth,

human warmth, is a symbol of the family that only love can express. It is near to the hearth that friends come together to share ideas, projects and dreams. The name of *Foyer Saint Camille* was chosen starting with this symbolic image.

In order to deal with the health-care emergencies of the population of Haiti, other rooms and areas are being built in order to provide maternity and paediatric care and to help disabled and abandoned children. There are many children who are abandoned by their families and they are left in the street because their families cannot look after them or because they are rejected because they are disabled. Disability is seen as a shame for a family, a divine curse, a form of diabolical possession, according to local beliefs that are nurtured by priests of the voodoo religion as well.

With the passing of the years, a residence for the religious and seminarians, with an adjoining chapel, was also created. The work of the mission was growing and needed greater resources, instruments and spaces. On 10 July 2003, inside this Camillian property, the church dedicated to *Our Lady of Health* was finally inaugurated and people from the local area now attend it.

The arrival of the women Ministers of the Sick in 2001 constituted an important source of strength and support for the Camillian mission. They established a community in that place and work together with the male Camillians and every day take part in the morning Eucharist together. They work principally with disabled children and adults (cf. *Missione Salute. Haiti, Angeli Neri* 3/2004, 18-23).

3. Some Testimonies to the Faith and Service of our Missionaries

An experience of Fr. Cipriano and Fr. Massimo illustrates the extreme poverty in which ample strata of the population of Haiti lives: 'I went through the dramatic experience of burying a girl in the garbage dump of the city given that for poor people there is no place in the cemetery. The girl died of malnutrition and because of liver problems. With a van, we went to the house of her family to collect her coffin; then with her father and her uncle we went to the garbage dump of Jeremie which is where we planned to bury her. A small crowd gathered around the site, with some people who were very aggressive and wanted to stop the girl from being buried there. They began to throw stones at the family of the girl, and frightened them a lot. Father Massimo managed to calm the situation down, explaining the extreme poverty in which everyone lived, but above all the great respect for death and for funeral rites that exists in Haitian culture. Finally, after half an hour's discussion, the girl was buried in the garbage dump of Jeremie without a sign or a 'cross' that could mark her grave. If a cross had been put there, inevitably it would have been covered by the garbage that would have been put there the next day. And such is the situation in many parts of the world: there is the risk that not only will the poorest not have a place in a cemetery but also that they will not even find a place in a garbage dump' (*CAM-ON Camilliani in Azione. Notiziario delle missioni camilliane*, Piemonte, n. 2, anno XI. Supplement to: *Camilliani. Mensile di informazione e cultura*, anno XIX. *Il racconto di Padre Joaquim Cipriano. Haiti, ai margini della povertà*, 5).

One of the principal challenges is to understand Haitian culture which is so rich in humanity but also lived by a 'happy and suffering' people who during the course of their history have been a victim and have suffered a great deal because of slavery and a whole series of violent dictatorships, accompanied by forms of persecution and torture. For example, when a Haitian says 'I', this refers not only to him or her but also includes his or her family. This solidarity within the family is one of the principal values of the resistance that is specific to Haitian culture and involves this clan dynamic and the affectivity of the community, which are needed to create friendships and work in relationships with other people.

In order to construct trust in friendships, first of all ‘heart to heart’ listening and dialogue is needed. We have before us a culture of affections deeply marked by feelings. At times, this clashes with the Cartesian culture of Western culture with its intellectual and abstract schemata in which everything is rationally planned and foreseen. This is an important suggestion so that we do not fail in our missionary activity of evangelisation.

This is a people that has a great deal of trust in transcendent forces and spirits; a people marked by a syncretism between Christianity and ancestral African beliefs that is an inheritance from the times of slavery, as in the case of voodoo. This is a very religious people. However, an evangelisation with Christian values is absent. The testimony of Fr. Gianfranco Lovera, an Italian Camillian and a missionary in Haiti for many years, when faced with the devastation wrought by the earthquake of 2010, is here of interest to us. For our Western culture, it would be normal and predictable with such a catastrophe to rebel against God and ask Him: “why has this happened Lord?” The opposite would be seen as a sort of non-commendable passiveness. But in Haiti there was an acceptance of what had happened, without any calling of God into question.

Fr. Lovera tells us: ‘The response of the Haitians to this cataclysm was enthusiastic faith, proclaiming that God is God, that God is not to be criticised, that God is the Father and should be praised. They do not turn to God to ask him ‘why?’’. The auxiliary Bishop of Port-au-Prince when asked about the reaction of the Haitians to the earthquake answered: ‘We are witnessing a significant increase in faith: a new generation of young people, of lay people and of seminarians is being born’ (*CAM-ON Camilliani in Azione. Notiziario delle missioni camilliane, Madian Orizzonti – Missioni Camilliane, La Lettera di Padre Gianfranco Lovera, 7-8*).

4. The Presence of the Camillians in Haiti Today

The Camillian Delegation of Haiti today relies upon the presence of seven priests who are religious and five students of theology who are in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), continuing their formation and studies with the Camillians of that African country.

The Delegation has three Haitian religious who are abroad: Fr. Jean Bernard Besson, in Burkina Faso (Ouagadougou), Fr. Verna Cineus, in Padua, a chaplain and a doctoral student; and Fr. Erwan Jean-Francois, in Rome, a student at the Gregorian University.

The Camillian Delegation in Port-au-Prince also relies upon the presence of a community of five women Ministers of the Sick who in the main dedicate themselves to taking care of children with disabilities, many of whom have been abandoned by their own families. For this service of welcome called *Foyer Bethleem*, there is a project which envisages its expansion so that it can help about a hundred children. This is a fine example of inter-Congregational cooperation in the context of the great Camillian family between institutes that share the same charism.

Another place where the Camillians are present in Haiti is the city of Jeremie which is about 125 kilometres from the capital Port-au-Prince. Jeremie is a coastal city on the Caribbean Sea with about 50,000 inhabitants and it was razed to the ground by the hurricane Matthew. About 7-8 hours’ drive by car are needed to reach the city on a road that is perfect for a rally: bends, holes, some parts with tarmac, others being built. Furthermore, long parts of the road go through small inhabited centres where there is always an open air market on both sides of the road and this requires frequent stops and going very slowly. For a visitor to this area it is very curious to observe that this population practically ignores the sea. For example, very few people go to the beach. It is difficult to see fishing boats out at sea or boats to transport people or goods. Culturally, the sea is associated with a feeling of danger.

Only a small part of the population uses gas in their homes. The constant cutting down of trees to produce charcoal runs the risk of further compromising the already critical state of the ecosystem.

During the night it is surprising to see the starry sky, just as the city has been almost always in the dark after the typhoon. There are only a couple of luminous points: these are the energy generators in isolated parts of the city. CADIS, the organisation of the central government of the Order, which acts in situations involving disasters and emergencies, was immediately present after the devastation of this region. Anita Ennis, an Irish volunteer nurse, worked for six weeks, distributing medicines and food and having meetings with the local Lay Camillian Family.

Fr. Massimo Miraglio has worked in Jeremie since 2006 when he began the first novitiate in Haiti. This had its original headquarters in a building of the minor seminary of the diocese that was later purchased by the Camillians. The novitiate was located there in the years 2006-2008. A hospital is currently being built on this site for grave skin injuries (a health need of the local population), with a capacity of about thirty beds. This is a project whose cost is about 1.7m euros, even though to reach its full activation and operation, overall about 2.5m euros will be needed. In addition, there is a care centre for poor and sick people that provides medicines and food for those most in need. It is to be observed that in this Haitian context the proclaiming of the Gospel must always begin with human promotion, otherwise it would remain just empty words. Preaching the Gospel always remains the priority, but this should be done bearing witness by feeding the hungry and providing medicines to the poorest patients, who cannot afford them.

The hurricane *Matthew* in the month of October 2016 caused grave damage to the buildings of the hospital and the local community. The tops of each of them were carried away; the solar panels that provided energy to the house of the community and the hospital were totally damaged; and some parts of the fence of the property were partly destroyed. In this region there is also a travelling clinical service made up of 'mobile clinics' which serves the people of the remotest villages, with the supply of medical products to sick people in need. Most of these infrastructure services are provided with the generous and constant work of French and Italian volunteers.

How are these initiatives involving human promotion and evangelisation financed? Thanks to the presence and the activity of *Madian Orizzonti*, an ONLUS of Turin, the missionary expression of the Province of North Italy (originally of the former Province of Piedmont). This organisation seeks to support the Camillian mission in Port-au-Prince and Jeremie but also other projects in the country, such as the nutritional centre to help the poor and the construction of homes for the victims of the earthquake of 2010 (about sixty of these have been built). In addition, *Madian Orizzonti* also contributes to the running of the St. Camillus School whose headmaster is the Italian lay volunteer, Maurizio Barcaro. This school has 500 poor children who are helped (adopted) with the support of Italian families.

Every month *Madian Orizzonti* transfers to the Camillian mission of Haiti (the hospital, the seminary and the community) from 20,000 to 25,000 American dollars. The remaining \$20,000 needed for the ordinary activities of the mission are covered by the income from the activities of the *Saint Camille* Hospital. In addition, every year tons of medical products, clothes and food are sent to Haiti in containers. The accounts of 2015 of *Madian Orizzonti* tell us that 'in 2015 seven containers left for Haiti with a total of eighty tons of medical products, food, clothes, and school material which were then distributed in the *Foyer Saint Camille* of Port-au-Prince and Jeremie for the local population. In 2014 there were nine containers with 167 tons'. All of this is the outcome of the organisation and the generosity of the Camillian community, the lay people and the benefactors in the main of Turin (cf *Madian Orizzonti. Missioni Camilliane. Bilancio Sociale 2015, Torino Madian Orizzonti Onlus 2016, 87*).

5. Some Reflections, Recommendations and Orientations to Face up to Certain Challenges and to Build a Future of Hope

At our community and individual meetings we drew attention to the Camillian Project for the revitalisation of our consecrated lives, as well as the three priorities that the extraordinary General Chapter (of June 2014) highlighted for the current general government of the Order: a) economics – the reorganisation of the generalate house and the monitoring of the Provinces that are in a state of financial difficulty. The need for transparency in financial accounting; b) the promotion of vocations and initial and ongoing formation. The updating of the handbook for formation of the Order. Here our survival or otherwise in the future is at stake if we do not have new vocations; and c) communication – without communication it is impossible to speak about communion and fraternity in our communities.

At our meetings we also spoke about the ecclesial context that we are going through today. We have three important elements that help us to deepen our Camillian identity as it emerges from the Camillian project. The election of Pope Francis: more than a ‘theologian’ he is a ‘pastor’ who invites us to be, and live, as religious and pastors with the ‘smell of sheep’. As he is a Jesuit religious, he has a very good knowledge of the lights and shadows of consecrated life today. The decision to dedicate the year 2015 to consecrated life and the indiction of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016) have been two other important events of a spiritual character.

In the letter that Pope Francis sent to all consecrated people, he referred to the post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of 1994 (n. 110), observing that *religious do not only have a glorious history to remember but, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they also have a great history to build. And he invites us to look to the past with gratitude and to live the present with passion so as to be instruments of communion – and we as Camillians to serve with Samaritan compassion – and to embrace the future with hope.*

The fine structures of the buildings and the infrastructures of this mission both in Port-au-Prince and Jeremie caught my attention and truly struck me. Looking around, it is certainly the case that the buildings of the mission are very different to the very poor homes of the surrounding population. Naturally, they are all an instrument for evangelisation and for the presence of solidarity with the poor and the sick. However, this should never be seen as a source by which to live a higher status, even though economically it may be very clear and transparent. In all of this there should be an increasing sense of gratitude towards the *mother* Province which has not spared efforts during these twenty-two years of history to create this mission and remain deeply generous in order to provide to the mission the best of everything so that it can be really at the service of the poor and the sick.

I very much appreciated your concerns about the promotion of vocations and formation as a real way of assuring your existence in the future. There are vocations in your country. As regards the promotion of vocations, after three years of moratorium the time has come to open the door to the acceptance of new candidates for Camillian religious life. At the present time, the novitiate and the study of theology take place in Burkina Faso with the Camillians of your country. This experience must be accompanied from close to hand, very carefully, and above all by listening to the young men who are involved in the process of formation.

I have the slight perception that this pathway has not worked through very well in the hearts of the young candidates. Even if those who are studying theology today in the Burkina Faso have expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to have this experience, there have been some divergences recently with the novices who were repatriated and this caused deep malaise in the Delegation because it was not able to follow the episode. Fr. Cipriano is listening to the young men who have abandoned this pathway while waiting to be able to speak, as well, with those providing formation in Burkina Faso. Dialogue and greater communication in this area are needed between all those who are

responsible for formation. Living this experience of study and life outside Haiti, in another Camillian Province which is French-speaking or otherwise, without doubt remains a challenge from the point of view of culture and customs, but it is profoundly enriching in terms of the expansion of the horizons of a person's life.

I observed that there is a request that in the future the Delegation should so organise itself that the studies of young Camillians are carried out in Haiti or in countries of Latin America: Peru and Brazil, for example. A house for formation for candidates for religious life has almost been completed near to the current buildings of the mission.

By the year 2019 this missionary Delegation will have been in existence for twenty-five years. It would be very interesting to begin the preparations for this anniversary with the new leaders of the Province, starting in the middle of 2017: addressing in a serious way an assessment of the past twenty-two years, analysing the successes and failures, and engaging in discernment about the changes that are needed. The old missionary model of providing everything (paternalistic care) to the poor, and the dynamics of imposing 'from above on those below', are no longer sustainable. More than 'acting for them' we must learn to 'act together with them'. This story of those who have money...and sending it...producing a truth and seeking to impose it from above on those below: we all know that this no longer helps anyone to grow or to transform that complex reality marked by poverty, illegality and injustice – Haitian society.

Another delicate and complex question has to be addressed: what should be done to overcome the centuries-old and reciprocal diffidence to be found in the relationship between European missionaries (whites) and native Haitians (blacks)? This is a problem that we must inevitably address and seriously think about, seated around a table, speaking to each other and looking at each other in the eyes, respecting sensibilities and differences! And very many cultural elements and factors come into play, as well as ones to do with upbringing, community membership, family background, history and politics, that have to be taken into consideration. This 'informal' discourse is rarely addressed in a meeting for formation or a community meeting. If we do not build relationships of trust, it will be difficult for Camillians to have a future in your country.

The Delegation must be formally structured in dialogue with the mother Province. The Delegate needs to have a clear idea of what his tasks and responsibilities are, and he must be helped by two councillors. He should also organise periodic meetings (preferably once a month) in order to assess the state of progress of administrative, ministerial, pastoral and educational activities.

It is urgent, necessary and indispensable that everything that exists at the level of health-care activity, investments, and resources that come from abroad, whether they are materials or funds, has a centralised coordination and all the religious should know about what is happening and what is being done! And this to achieve transparency in responsibility for accounting. In all of this, communication becomes a necessity of life in order to build a community and not to allow individualism to grow.

I will make a special recommendation about the Lay Camillian Family. There is an urgent need for you to take care, with love, of spiritual assistance for these lay people who have embraced the Camillian charism and Camillian spirituality and are a Camillian presence where there are no Camillian religious. Without the active and participating presence of lay people, our spiritual and missionary spirituality will always remain very small and limited. The Camillia charism is not the exclusive property of we religious. Instead, it is a gift of God in the Church that should be shared with the entire Christian community. I very much appreciated the meeting with the Lay Camillian Family. They truly engage in 'anonymous' Samaritan work with the least of the least, sick poor people, the chosen of Jesus.

In addition, I believe that the moment has come to include the Delegate, as well, as a participant in the annual meeting of the Provincial Superiors, Vice-Provincial Superiors, and Delegates. This would help the Delegation to grow and to open itself to other realities and other horizons of vales and

cultures, increasing the sense of belonging to the Order. This will also help in overcoming the feeling of *isolationism* that is perceived by many religious.

I make these observations as proposals for growth in the future of this Camillian Delegation. I am neither despising nor judging negatively what has been done hitherto in a heroic way. My admiration and gratitude is great as regards everything that has been done and for the many lives that have been looked after and saved down the years. I am pointing out that the times have changed, that the requirements have by now become others, and roles and responsibilities will be increasingly entrusted to you Haitian Camillians.

To end this Message, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your hospitality and welcome, and for the moments of communion and open dialogue that we had at our meetings with you in Port-au-Prince and Jeremie.

To Fr. Cipriano goes my gratitude for the valuable help that he offered me, fostering thereby getting to know you all, and engaging in encounter and dialogue with you. In him, you have an advocate because there is the trust and spontaneity of speaking about feelings of the heart and what is happening in your lives. He is certainly a Camillian who has dedicated many years to, and loves, this Camillian mission

I hope to be able to be in your midst once again, perhaps on the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of your Camillian mission. May St. Camillus – our father and source of inspiration – and Our Lady of Health, whom you venerate in the beautiful church in the entrance to the *Foyer/Hospital of St. Camillus* in Port-au-Prince, protect you always with health and the evangelical enthusiasm to construct a Camillian history in Haiti!

A history always in harmony with the chosen ones of Jesus, those who are in the existential, environmental and geographical outskirts, as our beloved Pope Francis so emphasises.

Fraternally,

Rome, 8 December 2016

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary

Fr. Leocir Pessini
Superior General