

**MESSAGE OF THE FATHER GENERAL  
TO THE RELIGIOUS OF THE PHILIPPINE  
PROVINCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
PASTORAL AND FRATERNAL VISIT**

*February 5-25, 2018*

*[...] we have to remember that we can never renew our encounter with the Lord without others; we can never leave others behind, never pass over generations, but must accompany one another daily, keeping the Lord always at the centre. For if the young are called to open new doors, the elderly hold the keys.*

*Having the Lord "in our hands" is an antidote to insular mysticism and frenetic activism, since a genuine encounter with Jesus corrects both saccharine piety and frazzled hyperactivity. Savouring the encounter with Jesus is also the remedy for the paralysis of routine, for it opens us up to the daily "havoc" of grace.*  
**Homily of Pope Francis, World Day of Consecrated Life, 2 February 2018**

***Dear Father Jose, members of the Council, and confreres,***

The pastoral visit came about from February 5-25, 2018. My visit was accompanied by one of the members of the Consulta, Aris Miranda, MI, General Consultor responsible for Ministry. I arrived in Manila on February 5 at 16:15 while Fr. Aris arrived a month ahead of schedule due to the unexpected death of his father on January 4, 2018. At the beginning of this visit, a meeting with the Provincial Council was called forth to review the program prepared by the Province, and hear their expectations of the pastoral visit. The meeting culminated with the blessing of the new Camillian Philanthropic and Health Development Office (CPHDO), a new office which will be in-charge of promoting the activities of the Province as well as for fundraising strategies. Its main function is *"to contribute in the improvement of the quality of life of the people in the communities through significant and relevant health development programs in collaboration with various stakeholders who share in the joy of putting more heart into their hands."*

This is my second time in the Philippines<sup>1</sup>, but I was surprised to discover how big is this country with over 100 million population, whose majority are Catholics, characterized by strong popular religiosity almost identical with the Latin American Catholic religiosity. I traveled by air and by land to reach the communities particularly in the upper north and the south. Despite the long journey and some extra-curricular activities in the different communities, I'm deeply amazed at the hospitality that you have accorded to me and Fr. Aris. Moreover, we could feel an atmosphere of a religious community where the members are happy and dynamic.

We often heard news about the Philippines of frequent typhoons with an average of 20 typhoons in a year because of its geographical location in the Pacific where it is very much vulnerable to typhoons that cause the loss of lives and properties. We recall especially the visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines in January 2015 particularly in Tacloban, one of the worst hit by the strongest typhoon on record Category 5 "Haiyan" locally known as Yolanda which left almost 10.000 deaths and huge property damages. The marks of destruction are still visible when I took the plane at Tacloban airport on my way to Davao.

The courageous Pope Francis despite the bad weather condition went there and celebrated the Eucharist to show and let His solidarity be felt by those affected saying to them, *"I am here to be with you"* words that left a deep imprint into the memories of the survivors.

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<sup>1</sup> The first pastoral visit to the Philippine Province occurred in 2015, from January 26-February 6 (Cf. Being a Camillian and Samaritan Today: With your heart in your hands in the existential and geographical fringe of the world of health. Rome, Generalate House, 2017, p. 33-36.

CADIS International and the CTF Philippines had organized relief, rehabilitation and resiliency programs in the island of Samar.

For the readers who are not familiar with the history of the Camillian Philippine mission, I feel the need to present some historical facts of the genesis of this mission in this Asian country. The Philippine Province was originally started by the Far East vice Province of the then Lombardy-Venetian province in 1974 when two scholastics (Ivo Anselmi and Pietro Ferri) who were then station in Taiwan while preparing themselves for the mission arrived in the Philippines. They came to the Philippines to finish their theological studies at the Loyola School of Theology (LST) and to start the formation of the aspirants in 1975 in Quezon City, the St. Camillus formation house. Not too long, in the same year, a parish community was erected in Makati upon the request of His Eminence Cardinal Sin. At first, the proposal of the Cardinal was received with cold heart by the Pioneers since a parish ministry was not considered a part of the mainstream ministry, which is health care ministry. Then the Cardinal responded with a challenge by asking them *“to make this parish into a hospital.”* Since then the first Camillian ministry in the Philippines came to its birth. On the other hand, the pioneers didn't waste their time but started promoting vocations to any dioceses in the country. They were convinced that we wouldn't be able to sustain any forms of ministry without promoting vocations and forming religious. On July 1, 2003, the Philippine Province was officially erected.

The peak of the Camillian vocation was between the period of 1980 to 2000 wherein the Province is receiving an average of 100 applicants every year during a period approximately of twenty years. At present, an unprecedented reduction of applicants is being observed. For instance, in our first visit in 2015 there were 38 postulants, but now there are only 22 which means a 43% drop in the number of admissions. The primary reason is the lack of interest of the young ones to religious life not because of *“secularization”* but because of the changing family and cultural values and the multitudes of choices that they have nowadays. Card. Tagle claimed that there is a tremendous change of values among Filipinos, that is, *“from a predominantly agricultural, rural country, we are becoming more technological, scientifically advanced. However, progress leads to a consumerist lifestyle and a growing thirst for wealth. In such a context, the role of God in our lives and the priestly function take a backstage to money.”* (Card. Luis Antonio Tagle, *“Vocations declining: 25.000 priests needed”*, AsiaNews.it, 2004)

The Philippine province is composed of three Delegations, namely, **Taiwan, Australia, and Indonesia**. However, among the three only Taiwan delegation has a full status with delegated powers as a Delegation while the other two are still maturing regarding their strength (no. of religious), ministries and financial stability. In the Philippines alone, it has eight (8) communities spread out from the north down to the south.

There are 33 solemn professed religious and 7 temporary professed members presently residing and doing their mission in the Philippines. There are other 10 members in foreign missions in Taiwan, Australia, Indonesia, Italy, and Germany. They have three novices and 22 postulants.

The primary goal of this visit is to reinforce the Province by animating their life and ministry in giving direction, guidance, and protection. Direction is the art of indicating a course to arrive at a certain destination. Guidance is the art of accompanying and coaching whenever someone is confused about the direction to observe or to follow. Protection is the art of ensuring the right direction and guidance to preserve the core values and principles of our Camillian Charism.

### ***Learning the New Things***

We were delighted to learn of the “new things” that has been happening in your Province since my last visit in February of 2015. I was impressed of how the Provincial Council made significant changes in the “missions” (or assignments, to use the term of Pope Francis) of religious in the Province. What admired most is not the new mission *per se* but the availability, readiness, and generosity of each religious and the well-thought “chemistry” of the members of each community. These two factors render in the first place the enthusiasm and joy within the community which facilitates the member to exercise his mission zealously.

I based my observations and conclusion during my first visit to the Province in 2015. In 2015, though we were not able to visit all communities but met most of you during the group meetings and the Provincial Assembly, there were indications of tension in the Province. We heard more comments, questions, complaints, and suggestions than appreciation. There is nothing unusual with these as far as the life of the Province is concerned, but I could not deny that these are expressions defined by tensions and apprehensions of some religious in the Province.

Secondly, I admired the sincerity and humility of your “shepherd” (the Provincial Superior) who accompanied us in all our visits to the communities except Davao. His presence during the community meetings did not create animosity or inhibitions on the part of the religious but an encouragement.

Thirdly, I observed how the Province and the members are involved in setting up the direction of the Province following the Chapter Resolutions that were approved in 2016. I learned that after the Chapter a series of meetings by different groups or secretariats were being conducted to come up with concrete activities or programs based on the approved specific objectives (SOs).

Fourthly, is regarding the management of the Province. There is a conscious effort to re-establish linkages and networks among institutions through the frequent visit of the one in-charged, meetings of administrators and regular reporting of finances and concerns of the respective institutions. The establishment of a new office of the *Camillian Philanthropic and Health Development* is an attempt to solidify and consolidate the advocacies of the Province into a shared vision and mission. This will also facilitate a better approach to fundraising and promotion of our ministries.

Last but not the least, is the physical infrastructure that you have in most of the communities. They are all well-kept and orderly. It demonstrates the personal responsibility of each member of the community.

### ***Some Issues and Concerns***

While a lot of new things that we have learned from this visit, there are still some issues and concerns that we would like to call your attention to overcome or arrest undesirable impacts to the Province. So, this may bring a secure journey of growth for the future of this Province.

#### **A. Formation and Vocation Promotion**

The current central government has defined three priority programs, which will be the focus of interest during its six-year term (2014-2020), namely, formation, economy, and communication. At the level of formation, we learned that some of you have undergone or will be undergoing individualized, ongoing formation activities in the Philippines or abroad. In fact, most of you have expressed their desire to revive the Camillian renewal program in Italy for English and Italian speaking Camillians.

Many years had passed since the Consulta had organized programs in Italy for the solemn professed religious as part of the ongoing formation program. This responsibility to organize an ongoing formation was delegated to the individual Provinces, Vice-Provinces, and Delegations. Unfortunately, only a few have held programs. We have only less than two years more to go before the term of the current Consulta ends (May 2020). We recognize the importance and value of re-organizing it. This will be considered in our recommendation to the next generalate.

When we came here in 2015, there was a discussion whether we need to close the college seminary due to the reforms in the education sector as mandated by the government, the dwindling number of admissions every year to the seminary and the cost of maintaining the college seminary, which is disproportionate considering the number of seminarians. We're glad to know that you have decided to continue and adjusted the program according to the reform instituted in the education sector. However, we noticed the significant challenge that you have in raising the number of vocations. In 2015, there were 38 college seminarians, and now there are only 22 of them. There are external and internal factors that affected this annual reduction of admissions. One would describe it as the result of the ongoing crisis of religious vocation; a need to employ new strategies of vocation promotion; a need for a more collaborative nature of promoting vocations among the communities of the Province. There could be several factors that we have not yet exhausted in our analysis. For instance, have we ever thought of the kind of Camillian presence that we need to project to this rapidly and constantly changing situation and condition of the society? Our presence makes us visible to the society; our relevance attracts attention to curious individuals, and our sensitivity to the present needs of the sick makes our fidelity to our charism creative. Our charism brings the "mare magnum" (vast ocean) of charity. There is a pluriformity in the realization of our charism. (cf. Cost. 10).

We are delighted to learn how much talent, time and money you invested to a certain structure to render it functional such as the pastoral center. You have organized a whole year training program intended for our religious, personnel of our healthcare institutions and others who are interested in deepening their knowledge on certain issues that matter so much about life ( pastoral care, HIV/Aids training, bioethics issues, and so on).

### **B. Camillian Ministry**

We learned that you have complied with the basic requirement of the government to assign administrators in our healthcare institutions with at least having a specialized degree in hospital administration or its equivalent. This ensures professionalism, technical competence and quality and value-based type of service. The new challenge for the province is to prepare second liners to avoid concentration of mission to a particular religious who have that specific competence for a specific type of ministry which concerns administration and management.

We were surprised to learn that in the country where the Catholics are the majority, many hospitals don't have chaplains. One of the main reasons is that in any public or private hospitals, a chaplain is not recognized as an entity in the basic organigram of the hospital and thus whoever assumes such duty is only voluntary with no compulsory remuneration. How does the bishop look at it? Is there a way that the episcopal conference could take the initiative in entering into a dialogue with the public office concerned?

It was even more surprising to hear that of the 84 dioceses in the Philippines only about 30% have the office of the pastoral health care commission while the others have just attached this ministry to their Social Action offices. Since the past four years, the Camillians have actively engaged the Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) by assigning one religious as an executive secretary of the

healthcare commission. This is a very significant move of the Province, in terms of presence and visibility of the Camillians in the ecclesial context, and engage such a kind of advocacy at the top level in order to influence and help the dioceses to understand and organize such commission that will look after the care of the sick and the health needs of the poor people.

Considering the few number of religious in the Province and the huge scope of your ministry, there is a need for collaborators. I noticed the significant growth of the Lay Camillian Family in the Province in the three major islands of the country, namely, Luzon (Metro Manila, Pangasinan, Albay), Visayas (Western Samar), and Mindanao (Davao City). Most of them are very active, hardworking and generous. Many of them are professionals and handling important responsibilities concerning their regular jobs, but they always find time dedicated in service to the sick. Furthermore, there is a need to consolidate and coordinate the various group to establish their own identity as LCF of the Philippines especially that they are located on different islands. Some groups felt they are not given attention and not being convoked during national assemblies.

### **C. Governance of the Province**

During the first visit in 2015, the atmosphere of the Province was somehow characterized by tension and dissatisfaction of some religious. I remembered in several meetings that I had with the groups of religious since I was not able to visit all the communities, there were more questions and desire for changes to the life of the Province as a whole. This year, a new breath of fresh air has come in. Those changes that we dreamed of have found the right moment to mature. However, the fulfillment of these dreams does not depend so much on the leadership but to each one of you who are called to assume the mission entrusted with joy and hope for a better world.

Your model of governance upholds an essential aspect of participation and involvement of the three Delegations (Australia, Indonesia, and Taiwan) in the life of the Province - the participation of their Delegates to the meetings of the Provincial Council once a year. Another encouraging direction that the Province is taking is the determination to achieve economic sustainability and lessen its dependency to the Taiwan Delegation.

The new breath of fresh air should also strengthen the linkage between the Consulta and the Province. One of the strategies to make it is through communication. The Consulta is trying their best to communicate the news and events from Rome as well as from the provinces and delegations. However, we were surprised to know that most of you have not read nor seen the monthly newsletter that our secretary-general is regularly sending to the provinces and delegations and published it to our website in English and Italian. There could be many ways to make this communication arrived on time in your inbox. For instance, the provincial secretary downloads the newsletter in PDF file and sends it to you via email.

Moreover, we are encouraging you also to send us news and information regarding what's happening in the Province. Communication happens only when the two or more parties on both ends communicate, otherwise, it is a monologue. Without communication, it will remain simply as a mere rhetoric romanticism which can disturb the process of building communion, community, and growth belongingness. Moreover, there is a dire need to nurture this value wherein individualism is creeping into our religious communities.

You have defined your strategies and its specific objectives for the next three years. Through the various secretariats, you have tried to design programs and activities. You have involved and convoked the religious to participate and collaborate in developing the activities. You might be overwhelmed with so many things to do. Focus on the essentials that build and promote community living.

This is your foundation, and all the rest depends so much on it. Remember that in our Constitution, the ministry is placed under the section on the life of the community. This indicates the primacy of community life over the ministry.

Before concluding this message, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Fr. Aris who warmly welcome me and the rest, despite the recent demise of his beloved father and the subsequent episode of malaria that infected him. Despite all these challenges he managed to be an excellent guide in introducing me to the people and new places that I have seen.

Heartfelt gratitude to the Father Provincial Superior Fr. Jose P. Eloja that patiently and fraternally accompanied us in all the visits to the Camillian communities, as well as to all the communities that prepared so well our visit, making me especially feeling at home.

Before these two pastoral visits, to the Camillians in the Philippines, looking at the world map searching for the Philippine archipelago, I only saw hundreds of islands and the fantastic blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. When I arrived in the Philippines, I saw happy and smiling people. I can't remember all your names, but the lovely faces and smiles, and the homy places where our Camillian confreres live and do ministry are all written in my heart. It was indeed a real blessing of God to be with you and know you all.

By the way, talking about blessing and living in a more secularized world of big cities of the western, I was impressed and touched by the way how Filipino Catholics expressed their sincere desire to be blessed by the priests. It is not enough to bless them during the Eucharist. In fact, the Eucharist does not end with the final blessing given to all, but only after when everybody will kiss the hand of the priest for a blessing. I must confess that in my 38 years of priesthood I have never blessed such huge number of people in a very short period!

May God in His fatherly mercy with the intercession of the beloved Saint Camillus help us all to live this Lenten season as truly experiencing the conversion that may lead all of us to the joyful morning of Easter? It is in the light of this Easter experience, that we will find meaning in our lives and our consecration as Camillians: to serve the Lord in the healthcare field, taking care of the sick and poor ones in a Samaritan way, as well as, helping people to take good care of their health, envisioned as our ethical human responsibility and an extraordinary gift from God.

*Fraternally,*

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General Superior

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

Rome, March 3, 2018