

**PASTORAL VISIT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL  
TO THE RELIGIOUS OF THE CAMILLIAN PROVINCE OF NORTH ITALY  
4-28 March 2018**

‘The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today’s world. Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!’, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 108-109

‘This situation of accelerated change runs the risk of complicating consecrated life, forcing it to live by emergencies and not horizons. At times it seems that consecrated life is almost completely enveloped in the management of the daily or an exercise of simple survival. Such a way of addressing reality is to the detriment of a life full of meaning and capable of prophetic witness’, *New Wineskins for New Wine*, n. 8.

***Dear Fr. Bruno Nespoli and the members of the Provincial Council,  
Esteemed Camillian confreres of the Province of North Italy!***

***Health and peace in the Lord of our Lives!***

I would like to thank Fr. Bruno Nespoli, every member of the community and the members of the Provincial Council for the kindness, hospitality, patience and honesty that they displayed towards me and Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon during the course of the recent pastoral visit to your Province (4-28 March 2018). It was a real joy for me to return to the *Italian* roots of my family of origin and to the roots of *Lombardy and Veneto* of my Camillian Province of Brazil. This was a precious opportunity for me to strengthen anew my ties of friendship with all of you after my first visit, which was of an ‘exploratory’ nature, that I engaged in together with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon over thirteen weekends in the years 2015 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> Your fraternal openness helped me to begin to understand your joys, anxieties, disappointments, challenges and hopes as regards your lives.

I visited nineteen communities, some residences, various associations of volunteers, and members of the Lay Camillian Family who work charismatically with you religious. I visited different communities, which ranged from having three members to having twenty-one. I also met some bishops of the Church’s organisation with whom you work as regards the catechesis and the promotion of the culture of ‘care and health’.

I appreciated the history of your Province and your religious communities, above all the oldest ones, as emerges from the registers of the religious and the chronicles. A succession of names and of facts, written at the outset in a splendid handwriting, which tell

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. **L. PESSINI. et al.**, *Essere camigliano e samaritano oggi: con il cuore nelle mani nelle periferie esistenziali e geografiche del mondo della salute* (Casa Generalizia – Ministri degli Infermi, Rome, 2017), pp. 55-60.

of so much faith, hope and charity poured out for decades for the benefit of the poor and the sick!

During these days I felt 'at home': I appreciated the more formal moments as I did the more informal ones of meals, personal conversations, intimate conversations, visits to the oldest confreres whom you look after – which is in particular the work of religious who are 'brothers' – in nursing homes or protected homes!

For me, this pastoral visit was an intense and privileged occasion, *a precious experience of original life* that was granted to the visitor to allow him to have a sufficiently clear and true picture of the community and the Province as well.

I had an opportunity to visit as a pilgrim the places where Pope John XXIII was born (Sotto il Monte – BG), the *good Pope*, and also where St. Pius X was born (Riese – TV); St. Anthony's Basilica of Padua; and, in the cemetery of Verona, the funeral chapel of the Camillians. At this tomb I offered up a prayer of gratitude to Fr. Alfonso Maria Andrioli (1864-1922), a Superior General of the Order (1920-1922), who while suffering from cancer agreed to a request that had been made to him and supported the new Camillian foundation in Brazil. We know this because of the testimony of Fr. Innocente Radrizzani and Fr. Eugenio Della Giacoma who were themselves leaving for Brazil. According to the testimony of Fr. Radrizzani, Fr. Andrioli expressed his joy about the new foundation in Brazil which he felt was the *will of God*: he offered up all of his suffering and his own life for the success of the mission of Brazil. This took place on 28 August 1922. Fr. Andrioli died in December of the same year. His words, which bore witness to a very strong faith, are for me a source of inspiration and meditation!

I thank you for the trust that you granted to me, a trust which I hope I will always respect and honour. I will share with you my reflections that came from the days visiting your communities that I spent together with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon. These are observations that I have drawn up as a confrere who had the good fortune of a privileged angle of vision. Take my comments as being those of one who admires and appreciates your contribution to our history but also of a man who also accepts the fact that we can always do better and believes that we religious must always aim high, given that, invariably, we will fall short of our expectations.

### **The tension of hope: the age of the religious**

I found the majority of you worried about the future of the Province because of its ageing and the lack of new members. This concern is clearly justified when one considers the composition by age of the Province which bears witness to a large band of religious who are over the ages of seventy and eighty. It is natural and positive that you are concerned about this but the repercussions of this concern are not the same for everyone. For some religious it is a source of sadness and stress, whereas for others this situation is an opportunity that stimulates their faith in God, and they are ready to ask themselves about the signs of the times.

There is an enormous difference between realism, where one faces up to a specific situation, and pessimism, which leads us easily to forget that God is with us during dark times as well. The Order is not an instrument in my hands or your hands: it belongs to Him.

Every period in the history of the Order has had to face up to specific problems and challenges. Our Order has had to find its own answers and it has done so. The Church has always been carried forward by the ‘small remnants of Israel’ who had the courage to believe and to hope even when they saw no faith around them.

I would like to comment on the choice that was made some years ago to invest significant economic and planning resources in the creation of at least two houses for the accommodation of elderly and/or sick religious. I saw that these religious are given a high level of care and the constant presence of confreres who assure that they have an opportunity to feel that they are still part of a religious community (religious celebrations, the reading of books, the comfort of a visit).

## **Feeling that you are a Province**

Some years ago you achieved the union of the Province of Piedmont and the Province of Lombardy and Veneto. It seems to me that this was not a traumatic event: the fact that many of you knew each other, a fact that had been developed during periods of shared formation, and the joint implementation of ministerial and missionary projects, certainly helped this final choice in favour of unity. Putting together elements to do with projects, ideals and organisation, without first *uniting hearts* around the same project of unity, runs the risk of compromising the future. Certainly, your pathway towards unity has been a good lesson for every attempt at union and/or amalgamation between different Provinces and other similar entities of our Order!

I encountered a great feeling of pride above all in belonging to the Province of Lombardy and Veneto. As I emphasised on a number of occasions during our conversations as well, you have a glorious history that has been written by the lives of many religious. Your spirit, dedication and work ethic have always been worthy of admiration. The Camillian Province to which I myself belong has its genesis in the life and the determination of Fr. Innocente Radrizzani and another thirty-five religious (both fathers and brothers) of your Province.

*To feel that you are a Province* also means to think of pathways, to create initiatives, and to make choices that permit increasing unity and growth in a feeling of belonging to the Province.

- The three-year project of the Province is an excellent instrument by which to coordinate and assess the initiatives at the level of communities, formation and ministry of the community and of individual religious. All the communities have been obliged by this project to describe their own pathways of life for this three-year period.<sup>2</sup> I have read the proposals of the individual communities: they are simple and realistic and do not engage in useless ideals. I would say that they are a ‘unique’ example in the whole of the Order that should be imitated in a creative way!
- Amongst the priorities that you have – rightly – identified there is the animation and promotion of ‘pastoral care for young people’. I believe that the approach that young religious dedicated to this service have adopted is especially important:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the quarterly bulletin *Come Tralci. Atti ufficiali. Progetto Provinciale 2017-2020*, n. 4, October-December 2017, pp. 359-364.

pastoral care for vocations located in the widest and most logical riverbed of encounter, proclaiming, and forming the existential realities of young people, breaking down some walls and forms of distrust and achieving synergies with other religious Institutes, with dioceses, with Church movements...

- The practice of monthly community or inter-community retreats is edifying: they constitute a special moment that edifies the spirit and re-motivates fraternal life.
- I appreciated the 'observant' life of your religious communities: common prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, and shared meals as an opportunity for dialogue and fraternal 'spurring'.
- The sharing of goods: apart from some individual cases who persevere in the personal management of income from ministry and/or pensions, I observed a great sense of participation – through the fruit of your work – in the shared activities of the community and the Province. Especial note should be made of the notable economic contribution – in line with their real capacities and their sober lifestyle – that the chaplains make to the treasury of the Province.
- Despite the fact that the age of the religious of the Province displays a ceaseless upward movement on its graph, it seems to me that I did not see amongst the majority of you a 'resignation at the level of ministry'. I met religious who were 'no longer young' but who were happy with their ministry as chaplains in the wards of public hospitals and in our health-care institutions or involved in working with parishes or other religious Institutes of the local areas.

I was also told about some ministerial 'dreams': the acceptance, in synergy with the civic, health-care and charitable institutions of the local areas, of people who are poor or have mental problems...I was presented with these projects for a diversification of ministry which envisage lighter and sustainable works for us, in which it will be possible for us to 'touch' the sick and meet the real needs of the concrete social realities that surround us.

- Very important efforts have been made, or attempts are currently being made at the level of implementation, to improve the quality of the formation of religious. I am referring here to ongoing formation, given that – given the way things really are – no young men are receiving formation: days of in-depth exploration of our ministry, fraternity, 'Camillian-cultural' excursions, and spiritual exercises in the footsteps of the tradition of our foundation and charism.
- The Camillian Centre for Formation of Verona is an excellent instrument that is offered to all the Province, but not only to the Province. The investments to create a modern institution that corresponds to contemporary needs should be accompanied by an analysis shared at a Provincial level that will guarantee its growing continuity into the future as well. From this point of view, the involvement and the leadership of a number of Camillian religious, in synergy with competent and impassioned lay co-workers, emerges as being necessary.
- In your communities I met various lay co-workers of yours, even though they have different levels of identification with your ministry: members of the Lay Camillian Family, agents and health-workers in the ministry of chaplaincies, and

groups of ‘workers’ of our works. Their interest at the level of motivation in the world of ‘health and care’ is truly moving. They must be accompanied by formation, in a motivational growth of the Camillian charism, in feeling that they belong to our institutions and...in some cases in a generational turnover.

- The ‘*sensus ecclesiae*’ seems to me to be assured by consolidated cooperation and mutual esteem in relation to the diocesan church in which you live: our religious who are chaplains, like our care-providing institutions, are especially appreciated by the bishops, some of whom I was able to meet. This, too, is a sector that is of strategic importance in allowing us to place ourselves with our charismatic specificity at the service of the Church herself.

## Pushed forwards

There is no absence of tensions, worries and challenges as regards future years.

- Hospital chaplaincies – in public hospitals – have always been an icon of your Camillian ministry. Over the next years political and health-care transformations, as well as a changed religious sensibility in Italy as a country, will impose radical changes that can already be perceived. We need a serious shared analysis about how we can organise ourselves at the level of ministry and of logistics and organisation.
- The rapid decrease in the number of religious who work in the still numerous fields of apostolate and ministry requires an awareness of the situation on two fronts:
  - The choice of ministerial realities that should be privileged on the basis of our human and professional resources, the needs of users, and the needs of the civil and ecclesial local areas.
  - Inter-Provincial cooperation with other, younger, realities of our Order: this is a phenomenon that should be planned, coordinated and shared *ad intra* and *ad extra* your communities. We should offer our young non-European religious suitable linguistic abilities, an experience of communal fraternity, and specific formation so that they can help and they can *grow by helping*.
- In a rather extensive way we discussed your serious concerns about the present situation of two of your Delegations: the Camillian presence in Kenya and that in Haiti. I invited you to continue in a decided and determined way with the choices you have made as regards questions relating to formation, communities and the management of goods. Your ‘paternity’ in relation to these by now no longer young missionary initiatives must provoke them to a change that will lead to maturity in their own processes of growth in consecrated life.
- I witnessed a widespread concern about the management of our works in all their dynamics: the handing over of some already existing works (the St. Pius X Nursing home and the health-care institution of Forte di Marmi); the ‘painful’ sale of others that is still *in itinere* (cf. Venice-Lido); and the same prospects, which

should be discussed again collectively, for other health-care works in the near future.

- I believe that the feeling of dissatisfaction that our works have generated and the frustration that their sale has produced should be understood within the logic of the close identification of works with our charism and mission that we have experienced: with the disappearance of a work it appears that the charism also disappears. I perceived in the hearts of many religious a form of *silent bereavement*. Works are always a sort of mediation, provisional instruments directed towards the practical expression of the values of our charism and mission at a specific historical moment. In the recent document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life entitled 'Economics at the Service of the Charism and Mission' we read that 'works should not be identified with mission: they constitute the way in which mission is made visible, they presuppose it but they do not end with it, nor do they define it. When this takes place...the paradoxical result is that a future is not offered to works. Works can change whereas mission remains faithful to the initial charismatic insight, embodying itself in today'.<sup>3</sup> Today we speak about the need for a creative faithfulness to the Camillian charism!
- Closely connected with the subject of the allocation of your human, professional and economic resources to the field of works of 'care', there is the question of the present and the future of the St. Camillus Foundation for Works. This body was conceived of, and organised, in recent years as an instrument by which to offer qualified skills and expertise for the management of your works. Now, after the sale of three large institutions that were responsible for about 70% of the work of the Foundation itself, this body should inevitably and proportionately be reconceived and redesigned so that it can respond in an ever better way as an instrument to the coordination and increasingly better management of the works that remain.

The very presence of Camillian religious inside it, with leading roles as well, must be the subject of attentive discernment by the Superiors of the Province. In this new approach, the relationship between the leadership of lay people and religious in particular, and with all other figures in general, must be completely revised and redesigned! We must structure relationships to be for each other and not against each other! If we are not capable of leadership in the management of these works, inevitably it will be lay people who manage us. I often heard it said: "we have become guests in our own home". We need to advance rapidly with the concrete project of working in a network, in an integrated way (*doing things together*), with periodic meetings on questions and issues relating to management; the discussion of administrative problems; and discernment as regards future pathways (strategic planning, the development of projects). The existence of a centre for the administration and coordination of all our works is very necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Economia a servizio del carisma e della missione. Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei. Orientamenti* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 2018), nn. 23, 42-44.

The painful experience of the St. Camillus Foundation for Works has offered us a lesson that we should not forget.<sup>4</sup>

- I believe that it is also necessary to create for this source of income a way of offering greater and more specific information to the religious of the community: continuous automatic communication that ‘strangles at birth’ any form of resistance and criticism on the part of individuals or individual ‘interest groups’. We should not forget that a necessary trust in the area of the material management of goods must always be felt and confirmed. The *res oeconomica* must not be transformed into a *mystery of faith*. One must always aim at achieving a good level of transparency: a capacity to give an account of the activities that have been engaged in, of the choices that have been implemented, and of the results that have been achieved. Regular and specific accounting and verified budgets are an implementation of that prudence that is necessary in the administration of income and property.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the recent document of the dicastery of the Vatican responsible for religious entitled ‘Economics at the Service of the Charism and Mission’ can turn out to be a valuable help if appreciated and studied together with all the people who work with you and are involved in your works.
- Some of the religious of your Province complained about being isolated, and to employ the words of some of them they feel like ‘little islands’. I am convinced that this problem has to be addressed. Perhaps the members of the Provincial Council should move around a bit more. Nobody should underestimate the importance of informal visits or ‘putting one’s head in’ when passing by as a sign of friendship and encouragement. On the other hand, perhaps we should have the courage to see whether it is not perhaps we ourselves who are cultivating a certain form of self-isolation. We should ask ourselves what efforts we are making to take part in functions, meetings and demonstrations organised by the Province.
- We elected a Provincial Superior and his council but our responsibilities did not end with the ballot. We must support them and try to understand their approach through dialogue. Dialogue is a good thing and it is required to overcome conflicts and construct communion. The Provincial Superior and his council try to address with all honesty those problems for which nobody is blameworthy: closures because of illness, of ageing, of a lack of vocations...

We must be careful before making judgements about questions relating to people about which we do not have ample documentation. Often Provincial Superiors have to work behind the scenes to try to understand people and their problems, trying to help them on the basis of maturity and human respect. We should have greater mutual trust.

I will end my message by extending my gratitude to each and every religious of the Province for their hospitality and kindness, for which you are rightly famous within the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. the quarterly bulletin *Come Tralci*, *Atti Officiali. Assemblea generale della provincia nord italiana. Relazione del superiore provinciale sullo stato della provincia*, n. 3, July-September 2017, pp. 14-24.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Economia a servizio del carisma e della missione. Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei. Orientamenti*, Roma, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018, 71.

Order. Special thanks go to Fr. Gianfranco, a religious of your Province who at the present time is providing service to the Order as a member of the General Consulta: he facilitated this pastoral visit, the meetings with people, and the journeys by car from one community to another, bringing me into the history and the life of your Province and your communities of religious life.

May the spirit of *St. Camillus* and devotion to *Our Lady of Health*, who have always burned with a bright flame in your Province, guide you with wisdom in the ineluctable mission of facing the future with hope and a renewed sense of unity, in line with the peace of Easter, meeting the challenges of a *kenotic* character that you have in front of your eyes at this specific moment in history!

Fraternally.

*Rome, 3 April 2018*

**Fr. Leocir PESSINI**  
*Superior General*



*Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon*  
*General Secretary*