



*Al Superiore Generale
Superior General*

**Message of Fr. Leocir Pessini,
the Superior General,
to the Camillians of the Province of Poland**

Tarnowskie Gory, 6-20 May 2018

"This Holy Spirit is incorrigible, because he never tires of being creative! Now, with the new forms of consecrated life, he is truly creative, with charisms.... It is interesting: he is the Author of Diversity, but at the same time the Creator of Unity. This is the Holy Spirit. And with this diversity of charisms and many other things, he creates the unity of the Body of Christ, and also the unity of consecrated life. And this, too, is a challenge" Pope Francis, 4 May 2018

Esteemed Miroslaw Sz wajnoch,

Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Poland,

Dear confreres of the Provincial Council and all confreres of the Province,

Health and peace in the Holy Spirit of the Lord who is fullness of life!

With great joy I returned to your land, Poland, the beloved land of our beloved and unforgettable Pope – now Saint – John Paul II, for my second pastoral visit to your Province. In addition to your fine and consolidated tradition of welcome, a very detailed programme that had been drawn up by the Provincial superior and his council made possible a visit to all the Camillian communities in your country over the space of fifteen days.

During this pastoral visit I engaged in privileged personal dialogue with each individual who wanted to meet and speak to the Superior General. These were intense days that were characterised by listening to the *hearts* of the religious, by important celebrations of the Eucharist, and by various community meetings.

In order to overcome the limitations of communication and understanding in Polish, which is a language that I do not speak, in my personal meetings with the religious the presence and assistance of the young Polish Franciscan friar, Sergiusz M. Batduga, the Superior of the Franciscan community of Katowice, was of great help. With his experience with Polish and English we were able to have true fraternal meetings in deeper dialogue according to the concerns and wishes of each individual religious. I am grateful for the trust in the person of the Superior General that was very evident at these personal meetings.

During my first pastoral visit, which took place in May 2015, I had an opportunity to visit the places connected with St. John Paul II, the concentration camp of Auschwitz, and the sanctuary of divine mercy of Saint Faustina Kowalska. This time, during a pause in my pastoral visit, I visited the concentration camp of Birkenau and the very fine port city of Danzig.

The official inauguration of the Lay Camillian Family (LCF) in Poland in the presence of about forty people in the ancient church of our hospital-religious house of Tarnowskie Gory was for me an extraordinary event. These people certainly constitute an important element for the future of the Province and there are good prospects as regards the growth of the LCF. The charism that we have received from St. Camillus does not belong to us alone: this gift that has been received should be shared with others.

In this area we must also learn to work with lay people and with volunteers who are open and sensitive to the Camillian values of our charism and our spirituality.

If we are attentive we will discover that many people that work in our institutions as employees are certainly stewards of the Camillian charisms who with accompanying and discernment can produce many fruits.

I hope that this initiative can prosper and that the number of lay people who are in harmony with our charism can increase in number. For this to happen, the support of all Polish Camillians is needed. In addition to Tarnowskie Gory, other groups of the LCF can arise in the various places where we are present and they can work in harmony with the specific values of the Camillians.

1. Pastoral Visits of the General Government of the Order to the Province of Poland

This is the second pastoral visit that the general government of the Order has made to the Camillian Province of Poland. I made the first visit on 12-17 May 2015 together with the member of the General Consulta and Secretary General, Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon. Furthermore, in Warsaw we organised the annual meeting of the major Superiors of the Order which took place at the same time, namely on 17-23 May 2015, when we were the guests of the house of the Barnabites.¹

I have also had an opportunity to visit the Delegations and the communities of the Province of Poland in other countries:

1. Italy (Rome, the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Sassia) on 8 May 2015. The Superior General visited the two Camillian religious of the Province of Poland who perform the service of chaplains in that historic hospital where St. Camillus also worked.
2. Madagascar (Fianarantsoa) on 8-12 March 2016, together with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, the member of the General Consulta responsible for formation.
3. Germany (Berlin) on 19-21 June 2016, with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, the Secretary General of the Order.
4. Georgia (Tbilisi) on 29 September-4 October 2016, with Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla, the financial administrator of the Order who is responsible for missions.
5. France (the sanctuary of Lourdes) on 9-11 December 2016, with Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, the Vicar General and the member of the General Consulta responsible for formation.

2. The Situation of the Camillians in Poland: the Religious and their Ministerial Activities

For those who do not know the realities of the Camillians in Poland and who will read this message, I will try to put into context and understand what the Camillians are doing in Poland by offering some data about the religious of the Province and the ministry that they exercise in that country.

The Camillian religious number 72: 60 are priests and 12 are brothers (10 with perpetual vows and 2 with temporary vows) and there are 7 students undergoing formation (1 in Georgia, 2 in Poland, and 4 in Madagascar-Fianarantsoa).

There are 17 communities and these are to be found in 20 different locations. There are 14 communities in Poland and 5 communities abroad: in Germany (Berlin) with 3 religious; in Georgia (Tbilisi) with 3 religious; in France (Lourdes) with 3 religious; in Madagascar (Fianarantsoa) with 5 religious; in Italy (Rome, the Hospital of the Holy Spirit with 2 religious) and in Austria (Vienna) with 1 religious.

In the fields of ministry and social assistance there are a series of activities that are developed by the following Camillian institutions:

1. Tarnowskie Gory – a hospital with 60 beds, palliative care units and emergency services.
2. Hutki and Zabrze – two nursing homes with a capacity of 70 and 120 beds respectively.

¹ L. PESSINI *et al.*, *Essere Camigliano e Samaritano Oggi: con il cuore nelle mani nelle periferie esistenziali e geografiche del mondo della salute* (Generalate House, Rome, 2016), pp. 35-40.

3. Pilchowice Zabrze and Zbrostawice – three assisted nursing homes, two of which are for people with mental disabilities. At Pilchowice there are 60 patients, at Zabrze there are 80 patients, and at Zbrostawice there are 95 patients.
4. Warsaw (Ursus) – help for people with social problems and needing social integration, for about 200 people.
5. Otwock and Piastrow, near to Warsaw – a centre for patients with HIV-AIDS and a palliative care unit.

In the field of pastoral care there are:

1. Four parishes in Tarnowskie Gory, Zabrze, Taciszow (novitiate) and Biala.
2. Pastoral service as chaplains in seven clinics/hospitals in Poland.
3. Pastoral service provided in two hospices.
4. Teachers of religion in eight elementary schools and two secondary schools.
5. Four religious are chaplains in the Province of Rome in Italy.

3. I will now highlight some Important Aspects that Emerged during this Pastoral Visit after my Meetings and Dialogue with the Religious of the Province

3.1. Concern about the future: the great concern about the absence of vocations!

This was an observation and a worry shared by everyone. Without any doubt, this is a healthy concern. It is a demonstration that we are not sterile and that we wish to go on living in the future as well. There is an awareness, which was accompanied by frequent comments to this effect, that everything has changed in Poland: the institution of the family and the political, religious and social post-Communist context. We have to reorganise ourselves so as not to lose our sensitivity to attracting new young religious in our Order. Fundamentally, a vocation is a gift, an appeal of God in the life of a person. But this gift should always be mediated and contextualised in human events and situations. We are instruments in the hands of God to welcome, direct, accompany and assess the growth of these young men.

The recent words of Pope Francis when he referred to the crisis of vocations can be a source of reflection and provocation: ‘And it is our paternity that is at stake here. Regarding this concern, rather, this haemorrhage of vocations, I have spoken to at the Plenary of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, explaining that it is the poisoned fruit of the culture of the temporary, of relativism and the dictatorship of money, which distances the young from consecrated life; alongside, certainly, the tragic reduction in births, this “demographic winter”; as well as the scandals and lukewarm witness. How many seminaries, churches and monasteries will be closed in the coming years due to a lack of vocations? God knows. It is sad to see that this land, which has for long centuries been fertile and generous in producing missionaries, nuns, priest full of apostolic zeal, is entering along with the old continent in a vocational sterility without searching for effective remedies. I believe that it searches for them but we are not managing to find them!’²

3.2. The question of communication: personal, community and Provincial needs

This question is especially delicate in your Province. Learning a language that is not Polish is a necessity for the new generations: preferably Italian or English which are the two official languages of the Order. I am very happy about the translation into Polish of the biography of St. Camillus by Father Sanzio Cicatelli and of the recent documents of our Order, amongst which the guidelines for formation and the statutes for Camillian parishes, and there is also the translation into Polish of the principal news

² Speech of the Holy Father Francis to the General Assembly of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, the New Hall of the Synod, Monday, 21 May 2018.



contained in our monthly newsletter. Without communication we cannot speak about communion, and even less can we speak of fraternity, of a sense of belonging to a community, a Province or the Order. As regards this subject, I was pleased to hear from the Provincial Superior that the Province is investing notable resources in this field.

3.3. Strengthening the feeling of *belonging* and *communion* in the Province

With the growing individualism that is invading our minds and our communities, we have to organise and live frequent and planned meetings in our communities, as well as prayer meetings and study meetings.

At a Provincial level, it would be useful to hold frequent meetings of all the religious at least once a year. This is something that is really needed in order to create moments of fraternity where subjects are discussed that are of interest to everyone. In addition, it has become necessary to plan days of ongoing formation and spiritual retreats. This is what will help you to grow in communion and in your sense of belonging to the Province and our Order.

3.4. Your Province has a great social responsibility

This broad social role of the Polish Camillians has been demonstrated by innumerable institutional initiatives in the social and hospital fields and in the role of religious involved in their management. You are taking care of those who live in the geographical, human and existential fringes – as our beloved Pope Francis often asks us to do.

This is a sector that requires a deep knowledge of causes as well as professionalism in the management of help. We cannot improvise and even more we cannot risk, because the results would be fatal. The debts, undoubtedly, would no longer be manageable!

It is true that we must trust greatly to divine providence but we must also take responsibility for what we ourselves have to do. It might be advisable, as we said during the meeting of the Provincial council, for the Province to begin to plan a sort of *ethical business* that could be a source of resources for its future sustainability, offering the resources that are needed for formation, meetings and health care for religious, amongst other needs.

At the level of professionalism, we have to work in synergy and in a network, with the central coordination of the Provincial government. As religious, nobody possesses something personally. Instead, in trust, we administer a good of the religious Province, at the service of the people of God. Our responsibility is very great. All those who are involved in the management of these works should call frequent administrative meetings, debate monthly accounts, and with absolute transparency watch over what is entrusted to them. With a certain admiration, I understood that you are very attentive to these aspects of your Province and I was happy to see that you do not have any debts! Certainly, you also do not have great reserves for great investments, but you continue to work with peace of mind, day after day. I invite you to take part in the meeting on Camillian works that is planned for 16-20 September 2019 in San Paolo, Brazil. This will be a great opportunity to exchange experiences and to learn and to help each other in the search for a *Camillian style of managing our socio-health-care works*.

4) A Meditation on Consecrated Life According to the Approach of Pope Francis

Pope Francis in his recent speech³ to those taking part in the meeting organised by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (Rome, 4 May 2018)

³ Speech of the *Holy Father Francis* to those taking part in the international meeting organised by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Paul VI Hall, Friday, 4 May 2018.



spoke about the three ‘Ps’ of consecrated life which make up the three permanent pillars of religious life: prayer, poverty and patience. Let us look in a summarising way at what the Supreme Pontiff thinks about each of these three elements, something that constitutes a meditation for all of us consecrated men.

1. ‘P’ for Prayer

Prayer is always a return to the first call... The prayer of a consecrated man or woman is a return to the Lord who invited me to be near him. A return to the One who looked me in the eye and said to me: “Come. Leave everything and come” — “But I would like to leave only half...” (we will talk about this in relation to poverty) — “No, come. Leave it all. Come”. And the joy at that moment of leaving the lot or the little we have. Each one knows what he or she has left behind: leaving mom, dad, family, career.... It is true that some seek a career “within”, and this is not good. At that moment finding the Lord who has called me to follow him closely. Every prayer is a return to this... It is the smile of the first steps... Then problems arise, so many problems that we have all had, but it is always a matter of returning to the encounter with the Lord. And in consecrated life, prayer is the air that allows that call to breathe in us; it renews that call. Without this air we cannot be good consecrated men and women... “But I am busy; I am busy; I have so many things to do...”. This is more important. Go and pray... Let us think of a consecrated woman of our time: Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa even went “in search of problems”, because she was like a problem-seeking machine... But two hours of prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament: no one could take them away from her. “Ah, the great Mother Teresa!”. Do as she did; do the same... Each one must find how to do it, where to do it... One cannot live the consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord’.

2. ‘P’ for Poverty

‘In the Constitutions, Saint Ignatius wrote this to us Jesuits...: “Poverty is the mother; it is the retaining wall of consecrated life”. It is a “mother”. Interesting: he does not say chastity, which is perhaps more closely related to motherhood, to fatherhood, no. Poverty is a mother. Without poverty there is no fruitfulness in consecrated life. And it is a “wall”; it protects you. It protects you from the spirit of worldliness, certainly. We know that the devil enters through the pockets. We all know this. And the little temptations against poverty are wounds to membership in the body of consecrated life... Without poverty we can never clearly discern what is happening in the world. Without the spirit of poverty. “Leave everything; give it to the poor”, the Lord said to that young man. And we are all that young man. “But no, father, I do not have much wealth...”. Yes, but you have something, some attachment! The Lord asks you for that: that will be “the Isaac” you must sacrifice. Naked in spirit, poor. And with this spirit of poverty the Lord protects us — he protects us! — from so many problems and from so many things that seek to destroy consecrated life. There are three steps to pass from religious consecration to religious worldliness. Yes, even religious; there is religious worldliness; many consecrated men and women are worldly. Three steps. First: money, that is, the lack of poverty. Second: vanity, which goes from the extreme of being a “peacock” to the small matters of vanity. And third: arrogance, pride. And from there, all the vices’.

3. ‘P’ for Patience

“But father, what has patience got to do with this?”. Patience is important. We usually do not speak about it, but it is very important. Looking at Jesus, patience is what Jesus had in order to get to the end of his life. When Jesus, after the Supper, goes to the Garden of Olives, we can say that at that moment, in a special way, Jesus “entered patience”. “Entering patience” is an attitude that every consecration, which goes from the small matters of community life or of the life of consecration, which each one has, in this variety that the Holy Spirit creates.... From the small matters, the forbearance, the small gestures of

smiling when I want to swear..., up to the sacrifice of self, of life. Patience. That “bearing on your shoulders” (*hypomone*) of Saint Paul: Saint Paul spoke of “bearing on your shoulders”, as a Christian virtue... Without patience, that is, without the capacity to suffer, without “entering patience”, a consecrated life cannot be sustained; it will be halfway. Without patience, for example, the internal conflicts of a congregation are understandable; they are understandable. Because they have not had the patience to abide one another, and the stronger side, not always the better side, wins; nor is the side that lost better, because it is impatient. Without patience, careerism at the General Chapters is understandable, this organizing “rope teams” beforehand ... to offer two examples... But not just patience in community life: patience before the trials of the world. Bearing the problems, the trials of the world on your shoulders. “Enter patience”, as Jesus entered patience in order to fulfil the redemption... And patience too in facing the common problems of consecrated life: let us consider the scarcity of vocations. “We do not know what to do, because we have no vocations... We have closed three houses...”... Without patience we end up with the “*ars bene moriendi*”. Patience is gone and vocations are not coming? Let us sell and hold onto the money for whatever may happen in the future. This is a signal, a signal that one is close to death: when a Congregation begins to cling to money. It lacks patience and falls prey to the second “P”, in the absence of a sense of poverty... But what about your life? Did you give up the possibility to be a father or mother of a family, to have the joy of children, grandchildren, all this, to end up like this? This “*ars bene moriendi*” is the spiritual euthanasia of a consecrated heart that cannot go on, does not have the courage to follow the Lord’.

These thoughts of Pope Francis are a healthy and serious warning for our hearts as consecrated men: we should not be afraid to subordinate ourselves in order not to face up to a ‘spiritual euthanasia’! This warning applies to all of us Camillians without any distinctions. May the Lord give us the wisdom of life and the grace to live these three ‘Ps’ authentically in our consecrated lives: prayer, poverty and patience!

Dear Polish Camillian confreres! At the end of this message, after my pastoral visit, I would like to thank you deeply for the wonderful welcome that you gave me during the days that I spent with you. Thank you for the affection, the friendship and the patience that you showed towards me, above all because I was not able to communicate with you in Polish. But this did not prevent me from feeling at home amongst you.

May St. Camillus and Our Lady of Health protect you always in your Samaritan service for wounded humanity, the poor, the sick and the suffering who look for hope, health and salvation in us!

Together, in a spirit of prayer, of detachment from material things, and of patience, let us journey towards a future of ‘hope in hope’!

Faternally.

Rome, 21 May 2018
Memorial of Mary, Mother of the Church



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