

**Greetings of Fr. Leocir Pessini – Superior General of the Camillians**  
**To Those Taking Part in the International Assembly of the**  
***Lay Camillian Family***  
*Rome, 15-21 October 2018*

On behalf of the *Order of the Camillians*, I would like to give a warm welcome to all those present at this important event of the *Lay Camillian Family* (LCF).

I wish to express special greetings of gratitude to the members of the central commission, in particular to the *President*, Mrs. *Marie-Christine Brocherieux*, and to the general spiritual assistant, *Fr. Laurent Zoungrana*, the Vicar General of the Order, who have worked intensely to implement this international meeting. The contents of the programme are very rich, dense and challenging.

The last international meeting of the LCF took place in the year 2013: after five years, it is useful and necessary to meet again. It is impossible to construct a reality of communion, or plan something together, without meeting! For this reason, this meeting has a very special meaning that is of fundamental importance for the *Lay Camillian Family*.

In our General Statutes we can read: ‘Open to cooperation with the laity and the associations of the apostolate (C 57), our Order sees the association the ‘Lay Camillian Family’ as its own work and promotes its life and activity because it is founded on the same charism, spirituality and mission. .. Each community appreciates this association, and, according to what is possible for it, contributes to its birth, to its development, and to all possible forms of cooperation’ (GS, n. 18).

In these short initial greetings I would like to refer briefly to the challenge that is in front of us as regards living an ***authentic culture of encounter***.

Pope Francis often speaks about the need for all of us *to move out of ourselves so as to engage in a personal exodus* and go towards the other, principally when he or she lives on the fringes of life, of the human heart or of the geography of the planet. Pope Francis has defined the Church as *an outward going* community. In this sense, reference has been made to the birth of a *culture of encounter*, which is a culture that arises from communication practised in terms of nearness where respect, dialogue, inclusion and cooperation with a view to achieving the good of everyone are present and which must be in the heart of the mission of the Church.

We must be the first to feel called upon to give our contribution to promote this culture, starting with small daily actions within our communities, families and apostolic works.

Communication is essential in the construction of this culture. Indeed, expressing oneself, speaking with the other and sharing with him or her one’s own life story are some of the elements that define us as human beings. In the etymology of the word ‘communication’ there is specifically the term ‘communion’. Communication has always been a search for the other and for real sharing with the other.

In this process of communication, listening is a fundamental element because the efficacy of communication itself does not depend only on what is said but also, and above all else, on how much and how one *listens*.

Communicating, even before speaking, requires knowing how to listen: ‘Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, to value, to respect and to ponder what the other person says...Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and our gifts at the service of the common good’ (Pope Francis, Message for the Fiftieth World Day of Social Communications: *Communication and Mercy: a Fruitful Encounter*, 24 January 2016).

Connected to listening there is *silence*. Indeed, one has to keep quiet to listen. When words and silence exclude each other, communication deteriorates. ‘Silence is an integral element of communication; in its absence, words rich in content cannot exist. In silence, we are better able to listen to and understand ourselves; ideas come to birth and acquire depth; we understand with greater clarity what it is we want to say and what we expect from others; and we choose how to express ourselves’ (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the Forty-Sixth World Communications Day. *Silence and Words: Path of Evangelisation*, 24 January 2012).

It is our hope that this international assembly, focused on the subject of the leading role of lay people as regards ‘Charism, Spirituality and Camillian Mission in Today’s World’ will be an authentic Pentecost.

I hope that all these Camillian lay people, like their spiritual assistants, who are from many countries of the world, with diversities as regards language, race and cultural background, will be able to encounter each other as real brothers and sisters and grow in humanity, communion, fraternity and capacity for communication (listening and silence) in order to create a culture of encounter and of holiness.

May St. Camillus and Our Lady of Health be our sources of inspiration and models!

A good meeting for all of us!