



Ministri degli Infermi - Ministers of the Infirm

Al Superiore Generale - Superior General

**LETTER OF THE FATHER GENERAL TO THE CONFRERES
OF THE CAMILLIAN PROVINCE OF THAILAND**

Dear Camillians confreres of the Thailand Province,

Health and peace in The Lord of our lives!

First of all, I would like to thank you all and express my gratitude in the name of the Provincial Fr. Paul Cherdchai Lertjitlekha of Thailand and the Delegate Fr. Joseph Phat of Vietnam, for the warm hospitality that you offered to me and for all you done for me during my first visit in the Camillian communities in your countries. I have just returned to Rome from Southeast Asia, after visiting your countries, Thailand and Vietnam. In this occasion (September 24-October 2) I had the precious chance to know face to face the Camillians, the young vocations in formation (seminarians), health care professionals, volunteers, health care institutions, clinics, nursing homes and hospices guided by our Camillian Charism. I had also the chance to greet quickly the participants of the Strategic Planning organized by the Camillian Task Force (CTF) in Bangkok under the coordination of Fr. Aris Miranda, General Consultor of the Order. On September 28-29, I and Fr. Cherdchai, the Provincial, paid a visit to the young Vietnam Camillian Delegation that is completing its ten years of existence, since the Camillians arrived in that promising land, in the capital city Ho Chi Minh.

In the morning of September 30, in Bangkok, we had the Provincial assembly participated by many Camillian religious representing all communities. I presented the program of the Order for this 6 years (**The Camillian Project – The Challenge of implementation – priorities?**) followed by a general dialogue with questions and answers by the participants. Then, we had the celebration of the Eucharist and concluded the meeting with a typical Thai lunch. I had the chance to meet almost all the Camillian religious of the Thai Province (32 religious in perpetual vows and 4 in temporary vows of Thailand; 12 religious in perpetual vows and 22 in temporary vows of the Vietnam Delegation).

During the dialogue, I was asked by my first impressions of the Thai Province that is celebrating this year 2014 its 62ndth year since the arrival of the first Camillians. I told them that I was impressed by the “*vitality and youthfulness*” of many young people looking for the Camillians in order to become Camillians. This raises one of the “three emergency priorities” of the implementation of the Camillian Project, that is, **the formation of formators and pastoral vocation**. In this area, we are playing and have the chance of rebuilding our future. The other two urgent areas that the extraordinary General Chapter of the Order- in- Ariccia (Rome) last June 16-21pointed out, was **to organize the economy/finances of the General House**

(Maddalena - Rome) and to assist the economy of the Provinces particularly those with financial difficulties. In order to accomplish this objective, the Extraordinary Chapter has decided to form a **Central Economic Commission of the Order**, composed of religious who are experts in finances and economy. This Central Commission is already formed and will have its first meeting at the end of this month of October (27-29) in Rome (General House) to deal with the urgent needs that we have and to plan its activities in the Order for the next 6 years. I would like to thank the availability of Fr. Giovanni Contarin, that in the name of the Asian Camillians will represent in this central Commission coordinated by Br. José Ignacio Santaolalla, the General Consultor responsible for the care of the economy of the Order.

Another area that we need to improve, the third “emergent issue” is **communication within the Order**. The celebrations done during the Jubilee year of the fourth centenary of the death of Saint Camillus was an excellent opportunity to make more known our Charism within the Church and the society at large. Many Provinces have created the Communication Office, and each Province, Vice-Province and Delegation, needs to nominate a person in charge of communication. In the General Government, we started to publish twice a month a newsletter entitled “**the Camillian World seen from Rome and Rome seen by the World**”. The General Secretary of the Order, Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon is in charge of the Communication Office and open to receive the news from the entire Camillian World. So, here, I invite all our confreres to share with the other Camillians who live in different parts of the world, the good that is done in our ministry, missions, health institutions, jubilee celebrations, special meetings and events, and so on. I already said several times that the only communication that is so far functioning well is about our dead ones. We do need news from the living world, specially those who are part of our journey. If there is no communication, it is difficult to talk of communion!

Summarizing what I have said so far, we, entrusted with the responsibility of the general governance of the Order at this moment, vow to implement the “three emergency priorities” within the Camillian Project of renewal of the consecrated Camillian life, namely, 1) **to reorganize our finances, starting from the General House**, 2) **to improve the formation of formators/pastoral vocation**, and 3) **the communication within the Order**.

During this Provincial assembly, I also highlighted that the year 2015, will be **the year of Consecrated life** as desired by Pope Francis, within the Catholic Church. The **Dicastery for Religious Life and Apostolic Life** is preparing a series of publications around this theme that for sure will be of help for us. So, we must study, discuss and meditate. I also remind everybody that the **Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” - the Joy of the Gospel** of Pope Francis, must be our basic reference for each one of us. The Dicastery of Consecrated Life published an interesting document entitled “**Rejoice: A letter to the consecrated men and women. A message from the teachings of Pope Francis**”. It has been promised also another reflection on “the brothers” in religious life. So, in our journey in search for the renewal of Consecrated Camillian life, we have these two lights to illumine the shadows that may appear along our journey: **The Camillian project on the renewal of the Consecrated Camillian life** (with its three emergency priorities as mentioned above) and all that is related to the Year **2015 dedicated to Consecrated life (events, special publications and messages)**.

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Even those Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations that already had made their plans for a three-year program, can be inspired and enlightened by these two major guiding references for our journey in these six years term.

Another issue that came out in the plenary discussion is about the serious attack on religious life today. We can call it the virus of “*banalization of essential values*” of our Consecrated Life. In other words, this is a subtle process of “*making things less important as they are*”. This mortal virus can destroy the values of religious life. In this way, there is nothing that compels or encourages us to observe as essential values, and pushes us to grow spiritually. Another issue that was raised is about the importance today of forming and preparing young candidates to live in “international communities”. In a more globalized world, these kind of experience will be even more necessary and frequent, and from these realities will emerge the need to be open and understand different cultures (inculturation) and the challenge to learn new languages.

All these days that I spent with you all were very intensive in terms of meeting with the religious, the people whom we served and our religious in action. By an eye and a heart of “a western visitor” like me, it caught immediately my attention the way that people greet their visitors - a very solemn, ceremonial and respectful way, the oriental way of bowing their heads forward with clasped hands praying, and giving to the visitor a special and beautifully arranged flowers to welcome the person.

I was reminded several times by many of you from this region, the Southeast Asia, that Christians are minority with 0,3% in Thailand, of a country with 57 million people. In Vietnam, the Christians are around 11% of the population of 80 million people. The Buddhist people are the majority. In Thailand, there are many magnificent Buddhist temples that resemble in some ways with the classical European cathedrals. The relation with other religions, particularly with Buddhism and other Faiths with the Catholic church which we call “*inter-religious dialogue*”, beyond “*ecumenism*” (dialogue within the various Christian churches) is lived peacefully. Even if we consider Buddhism as a “*Philosophy of life*” rather than a “*religion*”, Christianity and Buddhism have some equal values in terms of protecting, caring and respecting life (living beings, cosmic ecological life, and environment) and particularly the *practice of compassion* (Parable of Good Samaritan).

The influence of the Buddhism is visible in how Catholics attend the mass. Like in the Buddhist Temple you enter barefoot, and leave your shoes at the entrance and the same happens in the celebration of the mass. In our seminaries and religious communities, starting from the celebrant, everybody is in barefoot. Particularly in Vietnam, in the capital city Ho Chi Minh, I was really struck by the sound of the bells of the parish church breaking the silence at 4:15 AM, to awake people to attend the first mass of the day at 5 AM. In Vietnam, there are many devoted Catholics.

In my visit to the Camillian institutions (hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, hospices, etc. I was really impressed by the Camillians who hold the responsibility of running these health institutions, about their faith in the Divine Providence, especially in the facility that takes care of HIV patients and the poor sick people. Obviously, with the growing complexity in the area of health care, the Delegation will have to confront itself to the need of “professionalization”, that is, having religious specialized in administration of these facilities.

In Thailand, you have a well-equipped, organized, active and duly recognized by the State the “**St. Camillus Foundation of Thailand**” with a well-organized campaign for fundraising, to possibly offer free care to the needy people, those that Pope Francis would call those who are living in the geographical and existential periphery. They are the most needy ones of the society who received care where most of them are not Catholics: orphans, ex-lepers, HIV/AIDS patients, children with disabilities, poor elderly, abandoned dying patients in the hospices, etc. In this part of the world, these institutions are genuine expressions of our Camillian charism. Here, our charism is a strong testimony of the gospel values to the people and even to the local church with whom you as Camillians have close relationship particularly among bishops, priests and religious.

For this kind of “fraternal and pastoral visit”, I am convinced that the time expended was too short and never been enough, but at least we can have a grasp of what is essentially happening in terms of our hope, faith, challenges, difficulties, vitality and possibilities to build a bright and promising future. One of my concerns in this journey is to persevere joyfully with so much work being done. How do you take care of yourselves, in order to nurture sound relationship in the community, and taking time to rest, pray and play in order not to be “burned young”?

By concluding this short report about my first impressions on this fraternal and pastoral visit to the Thai Province, I would like thank once more our confreres for the beautiful testimony that you are giving to our Charism in this part of the planet, known as Southeast Asia.

May God, the source of our lives, through Saint Camillus and Our Lady of Health of the Sick, always protect all and each one of you in all your needs with faith and hope. Sincerely speaking I feel that this encounter with our confreres and with many people that they are taking care of made me feel that I am now more Camillian than before. I felt renewed with my commitment as Camillian and I am so grateful for this growing and touchy human, pastoral and spiritual experiences. In this visit, I got in touch more with the reality of external and contextual scenarios where you all live and do ministry. In another opportunity of encountering I’m sure, we will be journeying thru the inner scenarios of our personal lives and communities.

Let us continue and move forward with our Camillian journey with joy and hope. God blesses you all.

Fraternally yours!

*Rome - October 4, 2014
Feast of St. Francis of Assisi*

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