

**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE DELEGATION OF CAMILLIANS OF NORTH AMERICA
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS FRATERNAL VISIT**

Milwaukee 8-15 June 2015

Esteemed Fr. Pedro Tramontin, Provincial Delegate

Dear Councillors, Br. Mario Crivello and Fr. Leandro Blanco, and all our religious brothers of the Camillian Delegation of North America

‘Consecrated life is going through a dark night (cf. St. John of the Cross), a crisis, a winter. In winter, trees do not have leaves, flowers or fruit, but nature works at a deep level, at the level of roots. We are living a moment of trial; however we believe that we will come out of this purified and much stronger. We need farsightedness and a sense of responsibility to take consecrated life into our hands’

*Cardinal João Braz de Aviz,
Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of
Apostolic Life
Address to the meeting of the Superior Generals (Rome-Salesianum, 29 May
2015)*

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

During my fraternal visit to your Delegation in the week of 8-15 June 2015 I lived great joy with you. The agenda of engagements was a rather intense one: it kept me involved in personal dialogue with the religious and above all in listening. I also followed the pastoral ministry and the administrative activities connected with our Camillian institution of Milwaukee which is entirely dedicated to care and assistance for the elderly. I was able to give priority to individual meetings with each religious delegation. We shared intense moments of prayer during the celebration of the Eucharist and in the fraternal meeting with the Delegation when we discussed the current situation of the Camillian Order and the present and future prospects for the Camillians in the United States of America. I took part in a meeting of the Lay Camillian Family which deals with and supports important activities connected with the life of the Delegation. I was also invited to a meeting – which took up a whole morning – with the management of our institution: engineers and architects explained their projects for the expansion and reorganisation of our institutional complex, the *St. Camillus Campus*.

At the present time there are sixteen Camillian religious in the United States of America and they make up two canonically erected communities located within the St. Camillus Campus where the religious live in five homes. At the moment we have two religious who live outside the campus: one involved in pastoral care as a chaplain in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) and another, in the State of Georgia, who performs the role of being the parish priest in two small communities and also runs a mobile clinic which provides treatment to poor people of the region.

As I said at our meeting, for me this visit had the flavour of a 'return to my paternal home', given that in 1982, when I was still a young priest and one who had just been ordained, I left Brazil – encouraged by the Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Brazil, Fr. Dionisio L. Costenaro – to go to the United States of America and study clinical pastoral education (CPE). Since then I have always been very near to my Camillian religious brothers of the United States of America, knowing their personal and community history very well and the ups and downs in their lights and shadows, as happens in the history of all men. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the generous welcome and hospitality that they provided to us, on behalf of all our religious brothers of the Order, who down the years have benefited from the opportunity to study, and the privilege of studying and engaging in clinical pastoral education, in the United States of America, learning about a new culture and specialising in a professional sense in Camillian pastoral care and in the art of counselling. It is a privilege to be educated to address the critical situations of life in a professional way, that is to say accidents, suicides, terminal illnesses, together with ethical and bioethical formation, contributing to discussions about ethical questions in the field of health as members of ethical and bioethical committees in hospitals.

We began and ended the week of the fraternal visit with a meeting with the Provincial Delegate and the Council of the Delegation. In this dialogue that we had with all the members of the Delegation, I pointed to the three priorities that the Extraordinary General Chapter, which was held in Rome-Ariccia on 16-21 June 2014, identified for the Order for this six-year period (2014-2020) within the context of the Camillian Project for the revitalisation of our consecrated lives. 1) a reorganisation of the economic situation of the Order starting with the generalate house; 2) the formation of those providing formation, initial formation and permanent formation, and the promotion of vocations; and 3) an improvement in our communications so as to organise a specific sector in our Provinces, Vice-Provinces and/or Delegation in order to share news and information, day by day, about our lives and the lives of our communities, regarding events and facts that contribute to the writing of our Camillian history. It is our belief that without communication we cannot construct communion and fraternity. A family that loves itself, attends to this aspect with great sensitivity. Let us look at ourselves in the way that we often communicate with the people that we like, with friends and family relatives. Let us spread the news about the last meeting of the Major Superiors of the Order with the general government which was recently held in Warsaw, in Poland, on 18-23 May 2015.

Let us also remember that we are going through a privileged moment in the history of the Church, with Pope Francis, who dedicated 2015 to being the Year of Consecrated Life. In his letter of indiction – which deserves to be studied, thought about and prayed for – the Pope wrote to all religious, reminding them that we have 'a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history to be accomplished' Our universal pastor also reminds us that from this historical perspective 'we must look at the past with gratitude and live the present with passion', 'serving with the compassion of the Samaritan, the so-called existential outskirts of human life, and embrace the future with hope'. It is being the protagonists of this historic movement that makes the difference and involves us in the construction of a new world of solidarity and hope.

Consecrated life, to which we were called in a mysterious way one day, in substantial terms is made up of three key elements: a) experience of God – which involves spirituality and a life of prayer as consecrated men; b) experience of fraternity – the community; c) the mission of the charism of the foundation which for Camillians is presence in the world of health and health care, care for the sick, and involvement in prevention so that people do not fall sick. We know that your North American culture emphasises in particular individual autonomy and privacy, differently to

Latin culture where being together is privileged (a family-oriented people). Living together, in this context, constitutes a challenge for every man who conscientiously commits himself. From this point of view, the decision of the Delegation – which was agreed upon unanimously by all the religious – to create a new house where all the religious can live in a community, is very positive. Today you live in various houses on the same campus.

When we speak about our history evoking the past, we are always ready to save the roots of our Camillian identity. A green tree, if it does not have solid roots, is not able to deal with the first gusts of wind of a storm and will inevitably fall. From this point of view, it would be very important in the context of the campus of our care-providing work to create a *Camillian memorial* to commemorate the lives and the histories of all those Camillian religious who have given their lives in terms of service to the elderly and the sick of Milwaukee. As we know, our religious who have gone to the house of the Father are buried in the cemetery of Baraboo about 100km from Milwaukee, where there is no longer a Camillian presence, if not the cemetery and the chapel. In that cemetery are buried, amongst others, the former Superior General of the Order and the first Provincial of the Camillian Province of North America, Fr. Carlo Mansfeld, a Camillian of German origins, who was subsequently elected Superior General and governed the Order for eighteen years (1947-1965).

Certainly a history of ninety-two years of Camillian presence in North America cannot be cancelled! Until recently, we were very worried about the prospect of our disappearance in the United States of America. During this visit I felt very differently compared to previous years. I perceived that there is much more hope of growth through cooperation with the Camillians of other Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegation. This ‘inter-cultural’ aspect between religious who come from different cultures and realities requires greater attention to, and respect for, those differences in terms of values of which we are the bearers. The process of inculturation is a difficult one: it requires that we understand one another, that we respect each other fraternally, cooperating in a common project although living in a plural and international community.

As regards our future, it is no longer sufficient to cooperate with religious who stay only temporarily in the Delegation – ‘tourist religious’ who come and go without giving much of themselves to the community and then go back to their countries. Now there is a need for ‘permanent members’. Without a sense of belonging it is very difficult to grow and construct a promising future. For this reason, it is important to clarify canonically the situation of those religious who have hitherto been in the Delegation, so that they also respect their duties towards the community (participation, accounting for their salaries, mutual help, etc.). This is a good moment to be organised and have healthy communities so as to be able to host possible candidates who are interested in meeting the Camillians, in a climate that can help them to engage in discernment and explore their Camillian vocations as well.

An important new development in the Camillian ministry in the United States of America is the so-termed ‘weekend mission appeals’ where at weekends Camillian missions take place in various geographical areas of the United States of America. In addition to seeking to raise funds for the Camillian NGO ‘SOS Doctors’ – which works in close harmonious cooperation with the Camillian Task Force (CTF) – and to raise funds for activities connected with emergencies and disasters throughout the world, this is also a very good opportunity to bear witness to our charism in order to become more known about in the country and to meet and motivate young men as regards a possible Camillian vocation. If nobody calls or invites, it is unlikely that someone will enter. We

need to throw out nets and trust above all the *Lord of Masses*...despite the pessimism and the desert climate that we breathe in the area of vocations.

We remember with gratitude those who began this Camillian story in the land of North America: Fr. Michael Mueller, a religious of the Camillian Province of Germany, who began the activities of the Order with the establishment of the first community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1923. In the memories of all the Camillians of this first stage there is the establishment of the novitiate in Durward's Glen, Baraboo (WI), in 1935. On 12 April 1946 the Camillian Province of North America was born. With the passing of years the communities of Racine, Phoenix (Arizona) and Wittinsville (Ma) were created. Today almost everything is concentrated in Wauwatosa, in Milwaukee. In 2010 the *Province*, because of the decrease in the number of its members, went back to being a *Delegation*, with the coordination of the generalate house of the Order. Officially, since Easter 2011, it has been linked to the Camillian Province of Brazil. The existence of a strong fraternal link with the Camillians of Brazil is to be noted and this has become stronger over the years with attendance of CPE courses in Milwaukee and the role of these Brazilian Camillians in the administration of the St. Camillus Campus.

We cannot forget to thank Fr. Niversindo A. Cherubin, a member of the Central Economic Commission of the Order who in recent years, twice a year, moved from San Paolo to Milwaukee to support the administrative functioning of this Camillian work which today is probably largest work of the Order in the world. It is exclusively for the elderly and the terminally ill, and has more than 500 resident elderly people, from those who are independent to those who need health care and on to those who need complete care.

In this institution of ours, a numerous community of elderly Jesuit religious, helped by us, have lived with us since 1993 in a specific area of the campus. Today they number forty-eight religious but it is thought that their numbers will increase in the near future.

Worthy of note is the humble courage of Fr. Richard O'Donnell (former Provincial Superior, former Delegate and former Vicar General of the Order) who sought support and help from a more numerous and expert Province in the area of hospital administration in order to assure the future of this work in Milwaukee in terms of economic and financial sustainability. I followed, and took part from close at hand in, this process 'from inside the facts', given that I always accompanied Fr. Cherubin on these trips, and then as Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Brazil (2010-2014). Today we can say that this important institution has returned fully to the hands of the Camillians (2010-2014). This move was made not without concerns; however it took place without traumas or fractures that could have compromised its future. It is important for us to guide this work, and to be free from third parties! We need religious who are more expert in the management of health-care institutions in order to strengthen our leadership in this process.

In terms of humanitarian aid, it is right to highlight the work of volunteers and the role of the Lay Camillian Family. Within the context of the recent earthquake that struck Nepal, these groups have acted to organise financial resources to help aid for the victims of that disaster which struck this Asian country, supporting the direct intervention of the Camillian Task Force in that country.

The whole of the Camillian work in Milwaukee (the complex of the St. Camillus Campus) enjoys great prestige in the community because of the high quality and excellence of the service that it provides. It is seen as one of the best such institutions for elderly people in the State of Wisconsin. This year it was awarded a prize for being one of the best institutions in the health-care field (classified fifth), starting with an opinion poll carried out by the journal *Sentinel*, the largest

newspaper in the region. Amongst the reasons that lead people to come to the St. Camillus Campus to stay and to receive assistance during this stage of their lives, in addition to the excellence of the care that is offered, is its strong Catholic Christian identity. In this sense, the complex has four chapels, an effective service of spiritual assistance for the residents and the patients, with a team of professional and skilled chaplains. I would also like to emphasise the presence of a CPE programme which was duly accredited by the *American Association for Clinical Pastoral Care*. The objective of this CPE centre is to move out of isolation and to enter the network of the other CPE centres and centres for pastoral care and humanisation that the Order possesses throughout the world (Bangkok, Bangalore, Bogota, Lima, Guadalajara, Madrid and San Paolo in Brazil, amongst others). There can be no doubt that the investments in this sector of Camillian pastoral care are an example for the whole of our Order!

All the activities of the Camillians today are concentrated in the *St. Camillus Campus*. A detailed study has been drawn up for a project to improve the use of all the potentialities of the local area and to expand the *St. Camillus Campus*. This is a study that was developed together with professionals and experts in the field (administrators, architects and engineers). As regards this project, we devoted an entire morning to describing it and answering questions about it with the presence of the whole of the Camillian Delegation. The fear is that we are too few religious to deal with such a large project! With a risk of leaving behind us only ‘debts’ as a legacy to the next generation of Camillians...Prudence is required. Two stages for this project are envisaged; for the moment we are thinking only about the first stage which involves the construction of a house for the community (up to twenty religious), a residence for the Jesuits (fifty residents), where the total cost of construction will be met by the Jesuits themselves, and lastly the reorganisation of the Memory Unit (assisted residence) for people with Alzheimer’s disease (forty-eight patients). The need to enlarge the institution is explained by the fact that the market for this kind of health-care service in this region of the United States of America is highly competitive and if we do nothing we will end up by being overtaken by other centres, losing competitiveness in this service. If we do nothing in terms of improvement and updating we have already begun to lose! The Delegation met and it agreed to go forward with feasibility studies and to proceed to the first stage. The entire study will be sent to the competent organs to examine its economic feasibility and financial sustainability, and to obtain the necessary approval from the competent authorities of the Province and the central government of the Order.

At the end of this message I would like to express again my gratitude for the warm welcome and hospitality that I received. I experienced a strong sense of belonging and *felt at home* during these days that I lived with you. I am grateful to you for this fraternal care!

May God the Father, with His Spirit, illumine us and guide us in the present and in our future choices to carry on with our Camillian presence in the United States of America! May St. Camillus our Father and source of inspiration and may Mary Our Lady of Health continue to protect us so that we can always live and serve with joy and hope in our hearts.

Fraternally,

Roma, 17 June 2015

Fr. Leocir Pessini
Superior General