

**MESSAGE of the SUPERIOR GENERAL
to the CAMILLIAN COMMUNITY OF MEXICO**

Guadalajara, 12-18 February 2016

‘I ask God to bless you, and to accompany you and your families, and all those people who work in this home and try to ensure that your smiles grow day by day. May God bless each person... not only doctors but also those who provide “*kindness-therapy*” thus making the time spent here more enjoyable. This “*kindness-therapy*” is so important! So essential! Sometimes a caress can greatly help the process of healing.

Have you ever heard of the Indian Juan Diego? Or not? [The children respond: “Yes!”]. Let’s see now, all those who know him, raise your hands. When his uncle was sick, he was quite worried and distressed. Then, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him and said, “Let not your heart be disturbed or upset by anything. Am I not here with you, I who am your mother?”

We have Mary as our Mother, and so let us ask her to give us the gift of her son, Jesus’.

Pope Francis

Visit to the ‘Federico Gómez’ Children’s Hospital

Mexico City – Sunday 14 February 2016

‘In Latin America today and in the Caribbean, consecrated life is called to be the life of a disciple who loves Jesus, the way of the merciful Father, and thus profoundly mystical and with a communitarian character’ (n. 220).

Document of Aparecida

Final text of the fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean,

13-31 May 2007.

Dear ***Fr. Silvio Marinelli,***

Superior of the *Saint Mary of Guadalupe* Camillian community, Guadalajara, Mexico,

Esteemed ***Fr. Celeste Guarise*** and ***Fr. Lionello Signoratti,***

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

It was with great joy that I visited and stayed with you on 12-18 February, on a pastoral visit during the course of which we were able to get to know each other better through the sharing of important moments of fraternity, through being together in a community, through personal dialogue and through a number of ministerial activities with lay people, volunteers and the members of the Lay Camillian Family at the *Centro São Camilo de Humanização da Saúde*. This was the second time that I paid a visit to your Camillian community. The

first visit, in the month of June 2014, was a very rapid visit, and had not been preceded by very much preparation. During those days of the first visit, in my capacity as Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Brazil, I took part in the Extraordinary General Chapter of the Order in Rome. Not even in my wildest dreams could I have ever thought of being elected, or hoped to be elected, the Superior General of the Order. After my initial amazement, incredulity and surprise, many of my religious brothers who were present at that Chapter supported me and helped me to understand the truth of that reality and to declare my 'yes, trusting in the wish expressed by my religious brothers'. In this way, I took on the unusual and unexpected responsibility of being the animator of the Order of Camillians and began my mandate specifically during the celebration of the year of the fourth centenary of the death of St. Camillus (1614-2014).

I had been planning a journey to go to Mexico City (the federal district) for some months to take part in the World Congress on Bioethics, and I had envisaged paying you a visit in Guadalajara. Shortly after my election as Superior General could I have gone to Mexico and not visited my Camillian religious brothers? Within me that felt rather wrong. Despite the short period of time involved, it was very good to visit you, almost as a surprise! This second visit coincided, on the other hand, with the first visit of Pope Francis – the first Latin American Pope – to Mexico.

The attention of the whole of the Church, of the government of Mexico, of the mass media and of people in general was concentrated on the Pope who went to Mexico as a 'missionary of mercy and peace'. Pope Francis went through various regions of the national territory of Mexico and in particular he reached those 'outskirts' which experience problems and conflicts connected with the native populations, and which are seen as dangerous places because of violence and the drug trade, with a massive presence of migrants in frontier areas, above all bordering the United States of America. The Pope visited Mexico City, the capital of the country, where he met authorities of the civil community, the diplomatic corps, and the Mexican bishops. He also celebrated the Eucharist in the Basilica of Guadalupe, praying alone in front of the painting of the *Morenita*, the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas (13 February). In Ecatepec he visited the *Federico Gómez* Children's Hospital (14 February) and he met native families and communities in Chiapas (15 February). In Morelia he met young people, men and women religious, priests and seminarians (16 February). Lastly, in Ciudad Juárez, in the conflict-ridden region on the border with the United States of America (El Paso, Texas), he visited a prison complex, he met businessmen (the labour market), and he celebrated the Eucharist for hundreds of thousands of migrants, the victims of violence by drug traffickers, and in memory of those who have lost their lives in trying to cross the border in the hope of better living conditions (17 February).

With a strong, clear and prophetic message, proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and denouncing the most varied situations of injustice and the denial of the dignity of the most humble members of Mexican society, Pope Francis left behind him a sign of solidarity and affection as a Pastor in the hearts of the Mexican people that will certainly not be forgotten. I had the privilege of following from close at hand on television the whole of the voyage of the Pope in Mexico, which was shared in our community with Fr. Celeste Guarise who was convalescing at home after a surgical operation. Together, we experienced

an authentic ‘spiritual retreat’ that lasted three days, listening and being moved, engaging in vigils and praying together at celebrations of the Eucharist, listening to the messages and observing the affectionate meetings with people of the Pope who always gave priority to sick people and the disabled. It happened quite often, when listening to our beloved Pastor and being moved and touched in our hearts, that tears swelled up imperceptibly in our eyes.

I am composing this short chronicle because during our meetings in the community, or during meals, or during the celebrations of the Eucharist in which lay people, volunteers and the members of the Lay Camillian Family participated, the principal subject was precisely the presence of the Pope in Mexico.

During our community meeting, I referred to the priorities of the Order during this historical period (2014-2020). The *Project for the Revitalisation of Camillian Consecrated Life* explains the three priorities that were identified at the last Extraordinary General Chapter of the Order, which was celebrated in Ariccia (Rome) in the month of June 2014, for this six-year period (2014-2020): economics (beginning to organise the economics of the generalate house); the animation of vocations and formation (initial formation, the intermediate stage, and ongoing formation) which will assure us the prospect of existing in the future; and communication (not only communication about our deceased religious brothers which has always functioned very well but also information about, and the sharing of, fine things and achievements in our lives which generate hope).

We began our mandate in concomitance with the proclamation by Pope Francis of 2016 as the *Year of Consecrated Life*. This initiative came to an end on 2 February 2016 when the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (8 December 2015-30 November 2016) was being fully celebrated. These were an event inside the Camillian world and two ecclesial events which have helped us to explore our charismatic identity and to grow in spirituality and ministerial service in the world of health and health care, with Samaritan compassion towards those people who live in the ‘existential and geographical outskirts’, as Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us.

During this visit I had an opportunity to offer a paper on the subject of ‘The Ethics of Care for Life and Health in Vulnerable Human Lives’ for a group of volunteers of the *Salud Renal Integral Camilo de Lellis A.C.*, and a paper to the Association of Catholic Medical Doctors of Guadalajara on ‘The Quality of Care at the End of Life’. I took part in a meeting with a group of members of the Lay Camillian Family who make up ‘The Team of Pastoral Care for Camillian Vocations’ and also in a meeting with the professionals, the personnel and the volunteers who coordinate educational and care activities at the *Centro São Camilo de Humanização da Saúde*. In addition, together with the Camillian community, I made a visit to the community of the Daughters of St. Camillus who have been present in Mexico (Guadalajara) since the year 2005 and with whom we have a fine relationship of friendship and cooperation. I was able to observe the work that has been recently inaugurated (August 2015) and which is beginning to employ staff and to engage in the training of volunteers as we look forward to the initial acceptance of about thirty elderly people. Our Camillian Delegation in Mexico is walking forward while pursuing the objective of economic autonomy, that is to say not needing contributions from the mother Province. From the outset it has adopted the prospect of projects that can be self-sustaining.

In his letter addressed to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (2015), Pope Francis (quoting the post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata*) stressed that we religious do not only have a glorious history to remember and to narrate. We also, and above all else, have a great history to construct. Located fully in the flow of time and history, when searching for our past we are invited to ‘look forward with appreciation’, to ‘live with passion’ in the present – and as Camillians, I would add, to ‘serve with Samaritan compassion’ – and, lastly, to ‘embrace the future with hope’.

From this point of view, to ignore our history would be unforgivable. I mean that it would mean ignoring our roots in a religious family, not knowing about the profile of our identity and the Camillian religious charism. From this arises for me the importance of going over in the messages that I address to our communities after a pastoral visit some historical aspects of how our Camillian communities in certain countries were born and how they developed during the course of history. In this way, we gradually grow in our knowledge and awareness about our rich history in terms of the culture, of the identity and of the spirituality which our communities have offered within the panorama of global Camillian geography. We express our gratitude to our heroic pioneers who made possible the contemporary presence of the Camillians.

The Presence of the Camillians in Mexico: a Rapid Historical Survey!

In the year 1666, *Fr. Andrés Scicli* was the first Camillian religious to arrive in America. In the month of October 1666 he reached Veracruz (Mexico). He was entrusted with organising a mission on American soil, in Mexico, in order to obtain donations for the beatification of the Founder ‘and also to spread the Institute if this was possible’, and thus to spread knowledge about St. Camillus amongst this people.

In 1742 the beatification of St. Camillus took place. In Mexico, which was called *Nueva España*, at that time the wish had arisen to secure the presence of the sons of St. Camillus who could be involved in providing care to the sick and the dying. In Mexico City Signora Maria Teresa Medina Savari, the widow of Manuel Zuares Muniz, before his death (which took place on 8 March 1746) arranged in her testament, which was written to benefit her brother Felipe Cayetano Medina Savaria, a bequest of 30,000 pesos so to import from Spain the *Religión de los Agonizantes* (this is what at that time the Camillians in Spain were called) and to begin its foundation in Mexico as well.

In 1748 the various aspects of the foundation were decided upon with the help of benefactors and the authorities. The project developed in parallel with the work of about eight to twelve religious, and the foundation of the *Regular Clerics Ministers of the Dying St. Camillus de Lellis* (who was canonised in 1746) was installed in Mexico City with the title of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*. The King of Spain, Ferdinand VI, on 14 May 1755 granted the authorisation of the initial foundation which was for only four priests and one brother.

Our Arrival in Mexico City

The first Camillian religious to arrive in Mexico City, on 30 November 1755, were Fr. Diego Marin Moya, Fr. Antonio Martínez de Rota, Fr. Gregorio García Valdemora, Fr. Alfonso Arroyo and Br. Manuel Sánchez. The city had about 80,000 inhabitants at that time.

The religious house of the Camillians was inaugurated on 25 April 1756 and was about 450 yards from the central square of the cathedral and the palace of the government.

This first Camillian community was born with the title 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' as well as 'St. Camillus de Lellis'. In a short time our community was simply called by the people 'The Religious House of St. Camillus'. Fr. Marin was appointed *general commissar* by a decree of the general council of the Order, with ample power, which included 'admitting to the novitiate and to profession also those who were more than forty...authorising dispensation from some canons of the Constitution'.

Some testimonies from that time offer us an idea of the realities that existed: 'so much poverty and above all a great need for our Institute. In no part of the world is there such an abandonment of patients as here. When a priest is called to bring viaticum, he, in one action, also ministers the last rites, so as not to have to come back later. The priests do not go back to visit the sick even if they are dying and near to death. The beds are made up of palm leaves, called *tetares*, which are placed directly on the cold earth, so great is the poverty'. 'Each religious offers assistance without a break for eight hours, and on some days for sixteen or eighteen hours'.

A History Made up of Lights and Shadows!

In 1710 the Camillian community was made up of twelve religious who were priests and four religious who were brothers...there were problems between the religious, the rejection of authority, authoritarian habits, difficulties in communicating with the general council of the Order or with the Superiors of Spain...and then we come to 29 January 1793, the date on which Pope Pius VI promulgated the papal *breve* by which he erected the *Spanish Congregation of the Regular Clerics Ministers of the Sick*, implementing in this way independence from the government of Rome and the autonomy of the religious Province of Spain, the Vice-Province of Peru and the community of Mexico City.

From that moment there began a long period of lack of communication. From that point onwards we do not have data or reports or official documents relating to this period in the general archives of the Order. In the year 1800 the Camillian community had six religious who were priests and twenty-three religious who were brothers. At that historical moment the process leading up to the independence of Mexico began and this was proclaimed in 1821. Starting with this date, relations with the Camillians of the Province of Spain were also interrupted.

On various occasions the government of Mexico passed laws that limited the freedom to operate of the religious houses and contemplated the expulsion of religious, especially ones who were not Mexican...and the few Camillians that there were almost disappeared. After a certain period of peace, above all during the years 1835-1850, on 5 January 1861 the government decreed the closure of all the religious houses 'to the great pain of the people who were deeply religious'. This date marked the end of the Camillian

community in the *Religious House of St. Camillus* in Mexico which at that time could count on the presence of seven priests, two brothers and a deacon. Fr. Amadro Portela was the last Camillian of this Camillian story in the land of Mexico...He tried to maintain communications with the general council of the Order even over the years that followed. His last letter bears the date 13 June 1908. After that date there was no more news and indeed we have no information about his death (cf. P. Virgilio Grandi, *El Convento del "Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y de San Camilo". Ciudad de México (1755-1861)*, Verona 1998).

At the beginning of the New Millennium (2000) the Camillians Return to Mexico!

Almost a century after their disappearance, the Camillians returned to Mexico with the Mexican Delegation which was inaugurated in the year 2000 and canonically erected the following year, with the creation of the community of *St. Mary of Guadalupe* in the city of Guadalajara. It was the Italian Camillians of the Province of North Italy (formerly the Province of Lombardy and Veneto) who continued the Camillian tradition that had been inaugurated by the Spanish Camillians in the eighteenth century, who had built the great religious house of *Sagrado Coração e São Camilo* in Mexico City, and which ended all of its activity at the end of the nineteenth century.

During this new historical season, almost a hundred years later, the Camillians returned to Mexico. The initiators of this group were Fr. Silvio Marinelli, who arrived from Italy, and Fr. Davide Negrini, who also came from Italy and had returned to his home Province a few years previously. They settled in Guadalajara and dedicated themselves principally to the promotion of vocations, to pastoral care in health, to voluntary spiritual assistance in various hospitals, to the formation of agents of pastoral care in health throughout the national territory of Mexico, and to the spread of the Lay Camillian Family, accompanying it in its growth and training. Towards the end of the year 2005 there arrived in Mexico, from the Vice- Province of Peru, Fr. Joseph W. Altamirano Montano. His task was the coordination of the sector of the promotion of vocations. Unfortunately, this religious a few years later withdrew from the community and left the Order of Camillians.

Today the community of *St. Mary of Guadalupe* in Guadalajara is based upon the presence of Fr. Silvio Marinelli, the Superior of the Camillian Delegation in Mexico; Fr. Celeste Guarise; and Fr. Lionello Signorati who continues to live and work in Quebec (Canada)...I had an opportunity to speak with this religious brother of ours – who cannot go to Mexico because of a recent surgical operation – by Skype. At the present time there are two young men exploring their vocations: Gonçalo and David. They are living the religious experience in our community and represent a hope for Mexican Camillians!

Some Important Aspects of the Current Presence of the Camillians in Mexico

It is certainly the case that our presence in this Latin American country is a humble one – there are few of us. But it is an important presence for people and one that is appreciated by the Church. It is certainly true that if there was another religious one could form a community of three religious brothers, as envisaged by our Constitution, and if he

could be placed in the spirit of pastoral work that is already underway, and in harmony with this historical stage, he would be of great help, indeed of extremely necessary help. This would facilitate the workload of the Superior and the director of the community and of the Camillian Centre, avoiding for him the risk of burn out and assuring an improvement in his quality of life, also offering him more time for 'good and necessary' rest so as to have a healthy life, without running the risk of living in a permanent state of stress which could easily become 'distress' (this word in English means 'stress with anxiety'), which, indeed, is something that paralyses us.

I did not hear complaints, regrets or excuses about not having developed many activities or there being few religious ('If someone comes to destroy and not to help, then it is better to leave things as they are!'). Certainly the strong point of the community in Mexico is the lay people who work with it and infuse confidence. They are involved in a multiplicity of forms of activity connected with the Camillian ministry. These lay people act as agents of pastoral care in health and visit sick people in hospitals and their families. They are voluntary professionals who contribute to the activities of the Camillian Centre for the Humanisation of Health. In truth, the future of consecrated life lies with this wise and conscious choice to work with lay people. In this sense, the organisation of, the training of, and the trust placed in, lay people is something which for us is a priority and your 'Mexican' experience can be an example for many Provinces of our Order.

I was amazed in a positive way by how the Centre for the Humanisation of Health, which has a forceful vitality, functions and is organised. A large number of courses and seminars are organised and a certain number of publications are produced. Amongst the courses that are planned one can list the following: training in healing and accompanying people in mourning (120 hours); a course on how to acquire relational skills (120 hours); a course on palliative care; a basic course on the humanisation of health and pastoral care in health; a course of formation in spirituality and pastoral ministry; and self-help groups (groups to accompany people in mourning; support groups for the chronically sick; groups to provide integral support to women). Within the context of the accompanying of suffering, we have the listening centre where forty-one volunteers offer their services: they support people during critical moments of their suffering.

As regards publishing activity, there are a large number of books and pamphlets (the World Day of the Sick) on various subjects and topics of the sector of pastoral care in health and the humanisation of health and health care. Reference deserves to be made to the review *Vida y Salud* which has been published continuously for fourteen years: the present edition is number 79 (January-February 2016). One can also consult this publication on internet at the following address: www.camilos.org.mx. The *Manuale di pastorale della Salute* ('A Manual of Pastoral Care in Health', PPC Editoriale, Mexico, DF, 431pp.) was recently published. Fr. Silvio Marinelli is the author of this work.

It is also important to emphasise the Camillian presence inside the Mexican Catholic Church: our religious brothers have taken responsibility for coordinating the Consulta for Pastoral Care in Health of the Archdiocese of Guadalajara (this began ten years ago!). They are also members of the National Commission for Pastoral Care in Health of the Bishops' Conference of Mexico.

This important educational role – which also involves publishing and care – that is played by the Camillian Centre for the Humanisation of Health should certainly be more harmonised with the activities that are engaged in by other Camillian and university centres above all else in the field of health and health care in Latin America. There are few of us: working in an isolated way, we will not have a future. Where personal self-affirmation is cultivated, not only is the range of our activities limited but there is the risk that everything will die when the person concerned changes jobs or dies. What perpetuates a noble cause, thereby leaving behind a legacy for the future, is walking forward united, trying to train lay leaders to whom we can entrust with confidence our missionary activity, and planning every commitment of ours always in communion with the local Church. In Latin America and the Caribbean we walk forward in harmony with the pastoral directions of the local Church and the CELAM (the Episcopal Council of Latin America and the Caribbean). The document of the CELAM, *Discípulos Misionários no Mundo da Saúde: guia para a pastoral da saúde na América Latina e Caribe (2010)*, constitutes a valuable instrument and defines a horizon for outlook and action, and is also a pastoral point of reference that is indispensable.

When looking and walking towards the future, all the centres for formation, for humanisation, and for pastoral care in health, as well as Camillian university institutions, in Latin America and the Caribbean, have to accept the challenge of obtaining greater synergy and identifying certain priority projects that are shared by everyone, according to their points of strength and specialisation. This would be to the benefit of everyone. Thus, for example, there are many academic skills and potentialities in terms of human resources: the Camillian Centre of Bogota (courses on the humanisation of health care); the Camillian Centre of Quito with the ‘St. Camillus’ Hospice (a point of reference for palliative care); and the *São Camilo University* of San Paolo (Brazil) which constitutes an important point of reference for the study of bioethics (with cycles for doctorates and advanced post-doctorates that are recognised by the government). This process should create a network of centres for humanisation and for pastoral care in health in Latin America, and there should be a subsequent attempt to apply it to the contexts of Africa, of Asia and of Europe. I am firmly convinced that we also urgently need to think and project anew the *Camillianum*, which is about to reach thirty years of age.

To be commended as well is the cooperation in the supply of specialised bibliographies, courses and conferences on emergent current subjects which already exists today between these Camillian centres in Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Camillian Centre for Humanisation and Pastoral Care in Health in Madrid (Tres Cantos) in Spain. As regards cooperation with Portuguese-speaking centres (Brazil), we still have a long way to go if we want to overcome the language barriers and an *isolationist* mentality. In a globalised world we cannot journey on our own, isolated...we will be strong only if we know how to move together in harmony, with coordinated action that is in line with certain fundamental priorities dictated by our charism, in order to meet the emergent challenges of today’s world. Just as there are the so-named ‘doctors without frontiers’, so we must begin to speak about ‘religious without borders’ who always work sent out by Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations but act within a larger horizon which goes beyond the limits of a Province to the point of embracing the overall existential and geographical reality of our

Camillian Order. In relation to this subject as well, we have still not begun to speak seriously of the increasing need for inter-Provincial cooperation and cooperation with other expressions of the Camillian charism (female Camillian Congregations, secular Institutes, the Lay Camillian Family) and non-Camillian charisms.

Some religious, certainly when reading these observations of mine, will perhaps adjudge these thoughts the outcome of the mere romantic wishes of a dreaming idealist. I cultivate the deep belief that we need dreams. Without dreams, we are only the survivors of the mediocrity of the daily routine of our actions, feeding ourselves on nightmares, making ourselves more pessimistic and arrogant, sated solely with the limited knowledge that we already have. In the end we run the risk of being reduced to people without hope who do not live and nurture the humility to learn and do not have the wisdom to discern what is best, essential, fundamental and necessary for our lives. This was an opportunity to meet and admire our Camillian Centre of Guadalajara. It led me to think about future prospects.

At the end of these thoughts and observations of mine, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your fraternal and warm welcome, and for the care and kindness with which you attended to my personal needs; for the sunny Mexican style, with *mariachis and tequila*, that you offered me during the days that I spent with you. *Gracias!* I hope and wish for the strong and bold perseverance on their vocational pathways of our two young Camillian Mexican seminarians.

May our Father Founder St. Camillus, and the *Morenita*, Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas, who bestows her name on your Mexican community, cover you with their cloaks of protection, and before any great difficulty emerges may you feel cared for and protected! Let us trust in she who reassured *Dieguito* (San Diego): ‘Am I not here with you, I who am?’ *Amen!*

Guadalajara (Mexico), 18 February 2016

Fr. Leocir Pessini
Superior General