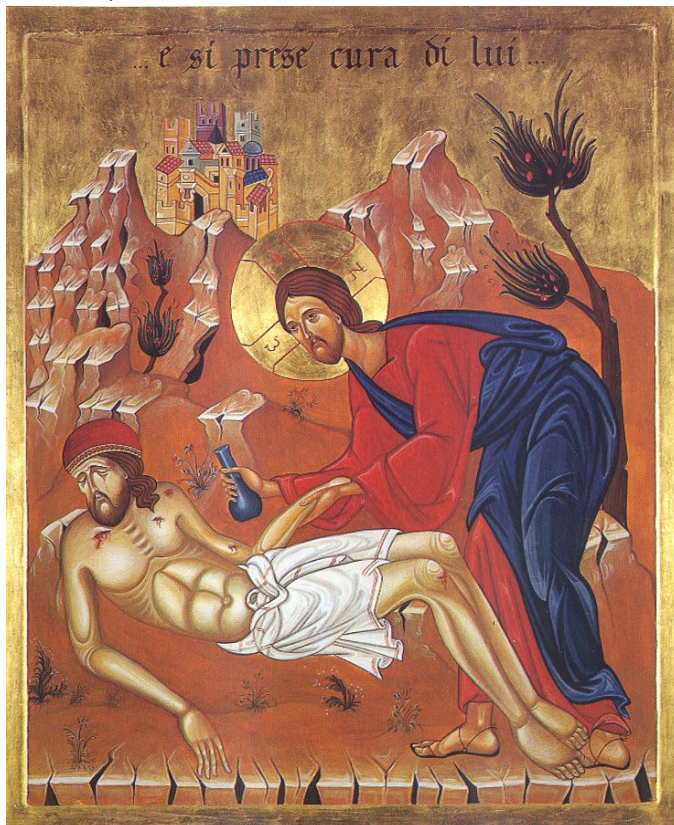




THE LAY CAMILLIAN FAMILY

A PROPOSAL ON

QUESTIONS OF FORMATION



PREFACE

We hereby offer with joy the work drawn up by Isabel and the previous central committee of the LCF

This is a 'proposal' on subjects connected with formation that is addressed in particular to those who are beginning their Camillian formation and are moving towards a role within the LCF

This is the first collection of subjects to emerge in an organised way and it suggests an itinerary of formation addressed to all the groups of our young association. This is an important event which is approached in the form of a unitary proposal to all the members of the LCF.

We are certain that this text will be welcomed, appreciated and above all used and examined not only by those who are beginning their journey but also by those who have already made their commitment and are a part of our 'family'.

We warmly thank Isabel and those who have worked with her in the production of this text and we hope and wish that those who receive it will engage in a good journey on the road of the encounter with the Lord so as to learn at

the school of St. Camillus de Lellis to live and bear witness to the love of the Lord and to serve him in every suffering person.

*Rosabianca
and the Central Committee of the
LCF*

March 2009

HANDBOOK ON FORMATION THE LAY CAMILLIAN FAMILY

Introduction

The vocation and the responsibility to be a member of the LCF requires a clear decision and a commitment on the part of every person to engage in on-going formation, whatever their mission and service.

Jesus is the teacher who personally taught his apostles and disciples and he teaches us how to do this: “come and see” (Jn 1:39) and “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). With him we can develop our potentialities and those in other people and be formed as authentic witnesses to the mercy, tenderness and love of the Lord towards the suffering.

The itinerary of formation of the LCF has its roots in the person of Jesus and in the spirituality of St. Camillus, and this is the spring for the members of the LCF: the encounter with the *merciful Christ*, learning to recognise, welcome and internalise Camillian spirituality, and to live it and to proclaim it to the sick.

Formation is a pathway of human, spiritual, apostolic and missionary maturation; it embraces various dimensions (the spiritual, the

intellectual, the sociological, the political...) which must be integrated during the process of formation, taking into account personal needs and the existing resources of each country.

To give practical expression to this formation, we propose this first handbook which contains a series of basic subjects which are addressed with the help of a number of sections which will be steadily and permanently enriched and up-dated.

Studying these subjects will help us to discern and respond in a better way to our vocation, to follow the Lord the more closely, to be more effective in the evangelisation of the world of health and health care, and to explore the goals and the spirituality of the LCF. We suggest that the sections should be studied and thought about during the period that precedes the monthly meeting involving the grass-roots group.

At every meeting connected with formation we are asked to open ourselves with trust to our friends in an approach of faith and joint responsibility.

The Lord and St. Camillus will be amongst us. The greater our approach in simplicity, communication and training, the more we will be able to enrich each other.

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CHAPTER 1

THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION TO FOLLOW THE MERCIFUL CHRIST

The Christian vocation is a response to a first call addressed to us by Jesus. It is he who takes the first initiative, not us. He comes to us: he passes, looks, calls...a disciple listens, answers and follows him. It is not the disciple who chooses Jesus but Jesus who chooses the disciple (Jn: 15:16).

To follow Jesus means to welcome the free and personal call expressed in baptism and confirmation. It is not to listen to doctrinal teachings or only to observe the commandments but is something more radical and profound.

To follow Jesus is to adhere to his person, to allow oneself to be configured by him, to enter into communion in order to live in faithfulness, being available for service to the Kingdom, directing our life project towards solidarity for our brethren, especially those who are most in need. The leading theme of this proclamation is nothing else but the commandment of love, which we try to live in all its radical character.

This communion of life with Jesus leads us to a mission.

Every call, indeed, is accompanied by a practical task and it is for 'a service'.

It is very interesting to discover the liberating mission of a sending out, which is generally expressed in the gospels with terms such as: 'treating', 'healing', 'casting out devils', 'giving back life'.

Our mission is thus to proclaim the God of life, to make the merciful love of God for men present through gestures, words and approaches involving healing.

In a world in which competitiveness, appearing and consumerism are of the utmost importance, we are called to proclaim through our lives and witness values that are profoundly gospel-based, values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty, tolerance, justice, respect for every person, transparency of heart, patience in hostile situations, and love.

This proclaiming has two requirements:

- It is an embodied proclaiming (Mk 6:30-44): it begins with the realities and situations experienced by people and it asks from us an approach of concern, of readiness to help, of openness to listening to the worries, the problems, the concerns, the sufferings and the hopes of the people that we meet, and from this listening 'taking responsibility' for these sufferings, being able to give a meaningful response, offering practical signs and gestures of

health and salvation, and transforming reality.

This requirement calls us to be attentive to the Gospel, to its words, to live permanently in a relationship with the person of Jesus, to discover him in the faces of our brethren, especially those who suffer, the poor, the sick, and the marginalised.

- To have a contemplative approach and one based on prayer. Prayer and contemplation are the basis for our proclaiming of the Lord – our apostolic task – to be an overall and true proclaiming of the Gospel. In prayer we read life in the light of the Word of the Lord and there we discover our task which is born from knowing how to look at life from the point of view of the Gospel.

Without this constant and explicit reference to the Lord and the Gospel, our proclaiming can lose the perspective to which we are called with those who suffer: Jesus asks us to unite mystics and commitment, contemplation and action.

Following the Merciful Christ

By vocation and by our life choices we are followers of the merciful Christ: he is our model, the source of our Christian mission and of

our commitment to the sick.

Mercy is a profound personal experience, an experience that has its origins in the love of God for us and in the person of Jesus. A freely-given and unconditional love that pushes us to communicate him to, and make him felt by, all those that we encounter on our journey. The love of a good and merciful Father who is always waiting for us, who welcomes us and accepts us as we are, who forgives us, knows our weaknesses, and relies upon us for his project of salvation.

To experience the merciful love of Jesus is to feel that he is looking at us, draws near to us with compassion and mercy, dresses our wounds with oil, places us with tenderness on his shoulders and takes us to the house of the Father. This belief generates a cordial mission in relation to our neighbour.

This personal experience of love, of God, teaches us to love, gives us the ability to love, to live mercy; love in contact with pain expresses itself in mercy, like a heart full of tenderness, open to human misery; and it is always the love of the Lord that detaches us from indifference and discouragement so as to involve us in his project of salvation and health.

Jesus asks us to be merciful like our Father (Lk 5:36) and with his life he clearly shows us the pathway. In the gospels we find that Jesus

is profoundly moved when faced with the pain and sufferings of men. His nearness to, and tenderness with, the sick, his understanding and defence of sinners, the weak and the abandoned, speak to us of a Jesus who is near to the poor and moved by solidarity with every human situation. For this reason, to live the life according to the spirit of mercy is to make present the love of God for our suffering brothers and sisters with approaches, gestures and words that heal. It is to proclaim that God is a God who is present and loves, who heals and who comforts.

The words of Jesus are always transmuted into mercy towards us and are expressed as healing and forgiveness. Jesus is the Lord who saves through mercy and tenderness towards the poor and the weak. Mercy is the ability to hand over something of myself to the poverty of the heart of my brother. Mercy always passes by way of an effort to change something in me so that it can help the growth of the other.

To be merciful is to know how to read beyond external appearances, to know how to penetrate to the depths the heart of a person without judging him or her or condemning him or her but, instead, understanding him or her, accepting him or her and loving him or her as he is.

To be merciful is to go beyond the overly

narrow perspective of rules and regulations, to know how to defend and place a person above laws. It is to know how to perceive the image of God in every human being although that image is deformed and disfigured by a situation of illness, weakness and sin.

To be merciful is to listen to the cry of the oppressed, the worry of those who suffer, of those who are alone and abandoned; it is to listen to those who have nobody. It is to know how to understand what the Spirit suggests to us as regards every person and in every situation in order to recreate life from the same settings that make men suffer: work, home, health, illness and love.

Mercy does not use eloquence. Instead, it uses humility in service; it does not make a din, it does not shout, it does not break the bent reed, it does not put a flickering lamp (Is 42:1-4). Mercy strengthens weak knees.

Mercy adopts only the style of solidarity, it has no other word than that of service, of humility, of dedication to people who are excluded and marginalised by pain and illness. Mercy is the source of fullness of joy (Jn 15).

St. Camillus felt this merciful love of God and converted, becoming a man with a heart that was full of mercy for the sick.

To identify with the merciful Christ is to listen to the cry of the oppressed, the tribulation of

those who are sick, of those who are alone and abandoned, of those who have nobody, and to proclaim to them that God is a God who loves, who heals and comforts. Mercy, lived in the concrete realities of life, must become healing of, and solidarity towards, those who suffer.

Jesus asks us to be merciful like the Father; with his life he clearly shows us the pathway: he is profoundly moved when faced with the pain and suffering of men. His nearness is tenderness towards every sick person.

Only those who have found Jesus in their hearts, that is to say have had a personal encounter with him, are able to convert their hearts towards their brethren and to make of their lives an image of the mercy and tenderness of God.

The Lord of mercy comes to us above all during two important moments in life: in the celebration of the Eucharist and when we are at the side of a suffering brother, a poor person. In order to be able to perceive Jesus at these two moments one has to contemplate reality with the eyes of the heart, with humility and in prayer.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What does following the Merciful Christ as a member of the Camillian Family mean?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 10:7-8)

‘Go and preach, “the Kingdom of Heaven is near”!, Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive our demons. *You have received without paying, so give without being paid.*”’

LET US REFLECT

What is the mission that Jesus entrusts to his disciples?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

The special vocation to which God called St. Camillus de Lellis was that of charity towards the sick.

Returning from St. James’ Hospital in Rome, after a second and final departure from the Capuchin fathers, he himself said “Now Lord begins your admirable will...given that you wanted me to be a Capuchin, not even in that state of penitence in which I so wished to live until my death, is evident proof that you wanted me here serving these poor sick people...for this reason, from now on, I want to give the whole of my life to your service”.

His detachment from the world was violent. Until 2 February 1575, that is until the age of 25, he made himself deaf to the voice of grace, but on that day he was shaken and with a steady and intransigent will he said to himself: *no more world, no more world!*

That act of very strong renunciation directed Camillus towards God: “How great was my blindness, before I did not know my Lord!...Why did I not commit all my life to serving the Lord?...Too late, my God, I met you, too late!...Give me time to compensate for my infidelities”

LET US LOOK AT OUR FUTURE

We have all received the invitation to follow Jesus and each one of us responds in a different way, we remember the experience that we have undergone and we answer:

. At what moment in your life did you become aware that the Lord was asking you to follow him as his disciple?

. How today do you live your choice of being a member of the Lay Camillian Family?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Lord Jesus, faithful witness to love for the Father, preacher of the Kingdom of God, brother of every man, friend of sinners and the suffering, we thank you for the witness of your life and for the message that you left us. You are the path to the Father, the truth of living and dying, the life that gives of itself for love. Lord, our only teacher, keep us steady on the way that you indicated.

Amen

(S. Carrarini).

CHAPTER II

LAY MEN AND WOMEN MEMBERS AT THE SERVICE OF THE WORLD OF HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

One of the worst dramas that today's man experiences is the loss of his own identity. This is the price that we have to pay for a technological world, a world that every day expands its economic, political and religious frontiers, and believers as well, we members of the lay faithful too, who made the decision to be disciples of the Lord, are experiencing this crisis of identity.

For this reason, it is important to reflect in a serious way on what defines us in relation to the world and other people: the only thing that defines is 'being followers of Jesus', striving to be witness to the Gospel.

The Biblical text which certainly best expresses how a Christian community should be and, in it, the identity of lay men and women in response to the vocation to which we have been called as well, is the passage which speaks about the first Christian community: 'They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship meals

and prayers' (Acts 2:42).

'All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed...praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved' (Acts 2:44-48).

In this handbook the idea is to propose the features of a Christian, the birth and the strengthening of a lay vocation.

They are: the call as a freely-given initiative of the Lord; attention paid to the teachings of the apostles; the communal aspect of faith; the strength of witness; the spirit of service and solidarity towards those most in need; the ongoing need for formation; and the dimension of prayer and the celebratory dimension of Christian existence.

The lay vocation is a Christian vocation. A member of the laity is baptised, he or she is a member of the people of God, a Christian who is simply capable of exploring daily reality, in a capacity for openness to the world with a contemplative approach, so as to be able to read events and discover at every moment and in every situation what the Lord asks of us.

A recent bishops' synod explored the subject

of members of the laity and did so from the point of view of their vocation and mission within the Church: a community of men and women called by God, led by the force of the Spirit, which extends the world of Jesus in history; a community in which everyone and each person proclaims and makes present the good news of the salvation of God, which was manifested in Jesus, for men and women of all epochs.

To refer to the vocation and mission of a member of the laity in the Church is to refer the vocation and the mission of the Church, a community of men and women who are called by God, led by the force of the Spirit, which extends the world of Jesus in history; a community in which everyone and each person proclaims and makes present the good news of the salvation of God, which was manifested in Jesus, for men and women of all epochs.

Our mission is shared by all baptised people: to live in the ecclesial community according to the vocation that has been received, each person journeying according to the charism that has been received, and the ministry to be performed, in order to contribute to the life and the growth of the Church, which should really be communion. In the 'Church of communion' we are all needed and nobody can abandon his or her responsibilities. The participation and co-operation of the members of the laity is not a

strategy motivated by the decrease in the number of believers. It is, instead, an ineluctable requirement of the baptismal commitment.

The members of the laity are the Church, all the baptised form the Church, and they all have their own task, their own mission to perform and, as a community, they live and carry out the mission of the Church.

The Spirituality of the Lay Faithful

The Ecumenical Second Vatican Council well specified that the spirituality of a member of the laity comes from baptism: spirituality and holiness comes from baptism because the baptismal consecration is born, is renewed in the word and the sacraments, is nourished in personal and community prayer, and is the experience of solidarity.

It is the spirituality of the children of God that is lived in brotherhood and personal transformation by the action of the Holy Spirit to live a new life in Christ.

Thus the presence of a member of the laity in the world does not only involve human cooperation so that society becomes more just, it must also be an instrument for the encounter with the Lord, a setting for the contemplation of God who carries forward His kingdom in hu-

man history. Here is rooted the possibility of engaging in a believing reading of reality, of discovering in the shades of the present the seeds of the Kingdom of God, and of praying, lastly, from the heart of secular reality.

A lay spirituality is founded in the triune mystery, discovers the footsteps of the love of God in the world and opens itself to transcendence as an announcer of good news for mankind. To take the Gospel seriously, to be honest in their response, must be the ongoing task of all members of the lay faithful.

The question:

- A change of approach, that is, a conversion of the heart, of mentality and of Christian practice.

- To pass from a psychological, sociological, religiosity, founded on concepts and doctrines, to a personal faith that concerns every aspect of human existence.

- To pass from a ritualistic and sacramentalistic religiosity to live the gospel with more authenticity.

- To pass from an individualistic faith to a communitarian faith, which, preferably, means involvement with the lower and impoverished sectors of the community.

- An approach involving the rejection and denunciation of injustice. The world is dominated by the signs of death. Faced with this situa-

tion, a Christian must be committed to effect a radical cut with everything that is violence, injustice, corruption, oppression, lies and the violation of human rights.

- Commitment to the transformation of economic, social, political, cultural, religious, personal and family realities. Faith presents us with new horizons, openings, and above all the force of the spirit of the risen Christ, present in the world, which is maturing history towards a new heaven and a new earth.

- Participation in a group of a real ecclesial community. Living hope and joy amidst controversies is only possible with a deep personal and communal experience of the Spirit, engaged in through ecclesial communion open to the universal Church.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

How does this observation enrich our lay identity?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 5:13-16)

“You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has

become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it.

You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden, No one lights a lamp and put sit under a bowl.; instead he put sit on the lamp stand where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven”.

LET US REFLECT

What are the principal characteristics that Jesus offers to members of the lay faithful in this passage?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

‘A group of pious and good men’. Following the example of our saint, there were many faithful who devoted themselves at a high level to helping the sick. Camillus was with them, he pushed them, he supported them, and he organised them. He thought once again of creating a congregation of lay men to help the sick voluntarily and without material reward. ‘By the glory of God, on All Saints Say’, wrote Fr. Op-

pertis on 30 October 1592, 'began the congregation of the laity...to attract them as well to practise works of charity in service to the poor sick in hospitals' (AG:2528,41).

After a little time, side by side with the Ministers of the Sick, the Congregation of the Most Holy Cross was established: a group of 'pious and good men, as our Saint wrote, 'who rendered glory to God, helped the poor in the service of this plant, the Religion of the Ministers of the Sick' (30 October 1952).

Towards them St. Camillus had a paternal approach. He made available to them the house of the Magdalene for their formation.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

. How am I living my lay identity as a member of the Lay Camillian Family?

FROM PRAYER TO REFLECTION

Christ, the sunrise that never becomes a sunset. A star that guides our way and inundates us with the shining splendour of your resurrection.

We, once again, come to you to sing the praises with everyone of the creation, Easter.

With joy we challenge the shadows and from their womb, praying, setting free light.

We, once again, leave the sepulchre and run towards our brethren in order to gather seeds of hope and shout out with faith: love is stronger than death!

We, once again, bear witness to the profound peace that dwells in our hearts despite the doubts and fears, despite the pain: 'love drives out all fear'.

Once again! So that you will lead us from slavery to freedom, from pain to joy, and from darkness to hope'.

(V. Salvoldi)

CHAPTER III

WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF A CONVERT

The men and women who belong to the Lay Camillian Family live the baptismal commitment by bearing witness: the merciful love of the Lord for the sick and the suffering and the promotion of health in line with the charism that St. Camillus de Lellis received from God (cf: art. 1 of the General Statutes).

This merciful love of God was poured very generously on our Founder St. Camillus, in particular during the days of his conversion (2 February 1575), and this totally changed his existence. In this sense we can say that his conversion was an essential element of his spirituality and the beginning of his self-giving to God.

At the same time, those that base themselves in their lives on Camillian spirituality must be people who live their own existence in a process of conversion, exercising the Camillian charism. Camillus, himself the object of mercy, dedicated the whole of his life to service to the suffering (C., n. 8).

This experience of radical change took different forms according to the plans that the Spirit expressed to Camillus during his life. We

may remember at least five. These were authentic illuminations which have given rise to important changes and ones that were always positive in care for the sick and suffering.

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

After two months spent working, the guardian used Camillus to move material from one monastery to another. One of these journeys, and in particular that of 1 February, led him to S. Giovanni Rotondo to exchange noodles for wine. That evening he had a spiritual conversation with the guardian, Brother Angelo, which ended with a request by Camillus to pray to be enlightened as to what he should do to serve God and save his soul. Next morning he took part in Holy Mass (it was 1 February, the feast of the purification of the Virgin Mary), and he then left to return to Manfredonia.

What happened afterwards we learn from an account provided by his first and authoritative biographer, Fr. Sanzio Cicutelli: 'He was thinking about what the guardian, a priest, had told him. When, therefore he was thinking, it happened that in a way similar to what had happened to St. Paul, suddenly he was assailed from heaven by a ray of interior light which was so great that his contrition for his miserable state seemed to stop his heart. Troubled by the

pain and by this unusual commotion which he felt inside himself, he was no longer able to keep on riding his donkey.

As though he had been knocked down by a divine light, he fell to the ground in the middle of the road. Here, when kneeling on a stone, with unusual pain and with tears that rained from his eyes, he began to weep bitterly over his past life. With words interrupted by sobbing he said: "Wretched and unhappy me; what great blindness I have had that I did not know my Lord before! Why have I not spent my whole life in serving him? Lord forgive, forgive this great sinner. Give me at least the time for a real repentance and to be able to take as much water from my eyes as is needed to wash away the stains and ugly marks of my sins".

These and other similar things he said and he never tired of shaking himself and giving himself sharp blows in his chest; nor did he have the wish to raise his eyes to heaven, so great was his shame and confusion.

On his knees and weeping, after giving up infinite thanks to divine goodness for having waited for him with so much patience up to that hour, he made the strongest resolution never to offend God again, to engage in sharp penitence and above all to become a Capuchin as soon as possible.

On more than one occasion he declared: no more world, no more world! From that day, 2 February 1575, his twenty-fifth birthday, until the end of his life, he never remembered, by the grace of God, ever having committed a mortal sin or even a venial sin of his own free will. He used to say that he would have preferred to have been cut up into a thousand pieces rather than willingly commit a sin. This day was always celebrated by him; and this notable gift was remembered with so much devotion that he called it the day of his conversion.

Gathered together on this day of prayer, we members of the LCF can ask God for the gift of true and continual conversion to Him, distancing ourselves from everything that is not love and service to love.

It is a question of putting God at the centre of our existence. Our personal experience, as well teaches us that a human being manages to see good and better things and yet continues to feel a strong attraction for those things that are bad and worse. And what should we do to win this battle that is fought within us? First of all, not being presumptuous about ourselves, that is to say, on the one hand, we should not deceive ourselves that we are so strong that we do not need to avoid temptations constantly; and, on the other, we should trust in the grace of God, which we need con-

tinually in order to defeat our connatural inclination to evil; it is from this spring that we must constantly draw in order to have the nourishment that will conform us every day to Christ our saviour.

Other conversions

Our much lamented Fr. Calisto Vendrame rightly said that in Camillus there were a number of conversions. The *first* was the one that has just been referred to: real knowledge of God.

This was followed slowly by knowledge of man in his cry for help.

This *second* conversion took place with the passing of time: at the outset he lived an 'I-You' relationship with God. He felt above all the need to know Him better, to love Him with all his strength, to praise Him for His good works, to repent of his sins. But the moment arrived when this relationship opened up and involved others, his neighbours, above all those in need – the sick. Camillus converted to being a 'Camillian'.

A *third* conversion took place when, as the master of a house, he was trying to 'force' the servants to serve the sick with a little warmth of the heart. He realised that it was not by forcing them that results would be obtained but by choosing some of them (five in all) who already

had favourable interior intentions. This was the first Camillian community. Camillus would not serve alone.

A *fourth* conversion was motivated by a mystical experience: the crucifix told him not to halt because of the opposition of the administrators and the ecclesiastics (including Filippo Neri), but to continue, with courage, the work that was wanted by God Himself. From that moment onwards Camillus was unstoppable and began a journey of service to the sick that did not have human limits.

A last, fifth, and important conversion in Camillus took place when he was going from Novara to Milan: he finally realised that studies for his religious were not only advisable but even more than necessary. And he immediately ordered all the houses that they should provide for the cultural qualification of the brothers.

Below we will have an opportunity to identify other significant changes that took place in our Founder.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

In what sense can we state that the conversion of Camillus was a *total* experience?

Yes it was total: because he converted in his body, his mind and his spirit; he completely

changed his relationship with God, with men and with the possessions of this world (nature).

And because the mercy of God embraced all the dimensions of the person of Camillus without any being left out.

We can dialogue about this other aspect of this conversion which was:

- *radical*
- *absolute*
- *definitive*
- *progressive*
- ...

A BIBLICAL READING: (Luke 15) three parables on conversion and mercy

'The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them he addressed this parable.

"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?

And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon

his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbours and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'

I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

"Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it?

And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbours and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.'

In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it

on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.

But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'

He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.

But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found'.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

It is always very useful when journeying in the conversion of hearts to recognise with sincerity the aspects of our lives that we should change: lack of faith and of prayer, fears and doubts about the love of God, ambitions, pride, sensuality, laziness in service to the sick...and being unable to speak with other members of the LCF in an atmosphere of prayer, of trust and of mutual help.

For example:

- What are the aspects of your Christian life that you would like to change?
- How do you develop your concrete commitment, freely chosen, as a member of the LCF?
- What erroneous personal approaches are asking you to engage in a conversion?
- And in the group to which you belong?

LET US LOOK AT WHAT ORDERS THE CHURCH

The Conversion of the Baptised

Jesus calls to conversion. This appeal is an essential component of the proclaiming of the Kingdom: “The right time has come”, he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near. Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News” (Mk 1:15).

In the preaching of the Church this invitation is directed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Baptism is thus the principal and fundamental setting for conversion. It is through faith in the Good News and through baptism (cf. Acts 2:38) that one forgoes evil and one acquires salvation, that is to say the remission of all sins and the gift of a new life (CCC, n. 1427).

Now, the appeal of Christ to conversion continues to resonate in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is a continual commitment for the whole of the Church which ‘embracing in its bosom sinners’ and ‘at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal’ (Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).

This striving for conversion is not only the work of humans. It is the dynamism of the 'contrite heart' (Ps 51:9), attracted and moved by grace (Jn 6:44); Jn 12:32) to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first (1Jn 4:10), (CCC, n. 1428).

This is testified to by the conversion of St. Peter after the triple denial of his Teacher. The gaze of the infinite mercy of Jesus provokes ears of repentance (Lk 22:61) and after the Resurrection of the Lord the triple confession of his love for him.

The second conversion also has a communitarian dimension. This appears in the appeal of the Lord to the whole Church "Repent!" (CCC, n. 1429).

As regards these two conversions, St. Ambrose says 'there are water and tears; the water of baptism and the tears of repentance' (St. Ambrose, *Epistulae*, 41, 12: PL 16, 1116B).

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

A period of time in silent prayer is advisable, paying especial attention to our personal approaches which require conversion to the Lord.

We invoke the Spirit to help us so that he makes of us men and women who are

always open to his illumination and his call, ready. like St. Camillus, to advance in holy service to the sick, the images of Jesus Christ.

The encounter can end with a group saying Psalm 51 (50), 'A Prayer for Forgiveness'.

CHAPTER IV

ST. CAMILLUS: A SICK MAN FOR THE SICK

A young man searching for happiness

Camillus de Lellis was born in Bucchianico (central Italy) on 25 May 1550. His mother, Camilla, was an elderly woman and his father was a military man. One day, when Camillus was eighteen, Giovanni decided to take him with him to look for glory and happiness on the fields of battle, at the service of Venice. The young man felt pushed forward by a great thirst for freedom and adventure and was on the look out for pleasure and wealth.

But half way on their journey, near to Ancona, Giovanni, unable to bear the long journey, and by now an old man, died, leaving Camillus alone. He had already lost his mother when he was thirteen. The young man felt much afflicted and disorientated. In addition, a bad fever tormented him and a small sore on his right foot, above the neck of the foot, forced him to limp. What was he to do? The best thing was to look for help in Aquila from his uncle, Br. Paolo, who received him with affection.

He was to have stayed only for a few days to get better, after which he was planning to set off once again to search for 'his happiness'.

Only a small obstacle was in the way of his illusions: the sore that continued to trouble him.

They told him that a cure was possible at St. James' Hospital in Rome. He entered the hospital for the first time but only for a few months, and after a while he returned to his freedom and the adventure of the battlefields. In the meantime to flee his sad environment he escaped at night to play with those who unloaded the cargo of boats at the port of Ripetta on the banks of the Tiber.

They rebuked him and in the end he was expelled: 'unable to be a nurse'.

He crossed sea and land, in sieges, battles and fights with his companions at arms. Gradually he lost everything that he earned at cards and once again he found himself alone, without a direction, without money, even without a shirt. One day, forced to beg at the doors of a church, he was invited to earn his bread by working as a manual worker in a monastery of the Capuchins. He accepted out of desperation and while waiting for the arrival of spring so as to be able to return to the search for 'his happiness'.

The good example of the friars made him think; they put his scale of values into a state of crisis: could he not perhaps search for his happiness there?

On 2 February 1575 on the road that went

from San Giovanni Rotondo to Manfredonia he discovered that only God can give a full and authentic meaning to life.

He surrendered: “no more world, no more world. Lord give me the time to weep for my sins”. And he asked himself: where? How? To repent for his past the best thing was to stay with the friars and live the lives that they led. But once again he was wrong.

The sore on his right foot reappeared: a sign that God wanted him somewhere else.

On a sad afternoon of the autumn of 1575, Camillus for the second time entered St. James’ Hospital for Incurables in Rome to have his sore treated.

He nourished a great hope in his heart: that it would be a matter of a few months. In reality, he spent four years there, four years of experience with the sick, of impassioned work to help them, of efforts to share in their sadness and hopes. His companions realised that something important had taken place in his life and the sick began to learn about his great heart which was full of charity and love which he nourished by taking part in the sacraments under the wise direction of Filippo Neri.

After seven months the sore healed and he believed that the time had come to return to the monastery to immerse himself in the happiness that he had found there. But in a short time the

sore appeared again. Or, perhaps, it was the voice of God which was calling him to return to the hospital.

He was dismissed definitively from the monastery and once he had arrived at the Hospital of St. James in Rome everyone was happy to receive him, and he did not disappoint them.

He immersed himself in service to others, above all to the poorest and the abandoned. He came to discover that their needs were many in number and he was increasingly struck by the mystery of pain, of physical and spiritual suffering, of the marginalisation of the sick.

Stubborn as ever, as soon as he got better, he knocked at the door of the minor friars but his sore continued not to heal. He thus decided to go back to the hospital. The authorities realised the importance of the experience that he had accumulated over his years of impassioned service and they offered him the position of great responsibility: master of the house, the person responsible for the economic management of the hospital. He had to control the staff so that they did not neglect the patients, he had to ensure that they dealt with the needs of the sick and that all of them served the patients with love and diligence, teaching them by his own example. He was given a salary that enabled him to live.

Thus Camillus finally understood that God wanted him there and that there his life had acquired its true meaning.

A 'minister of the sick' searching for the happiness of others

Camillus was twenty-nine years old and what he was looking for was only the happiness of the 'sick poor'. As the grace of God gradually purified him and faith illuminated him, he came to see in them the 'Children of God'.

The sick were served as though they were 'his lords and masters'. "We must bear in mind, brothers", he never tired of repeating, "that what we are doing with these poor people we are doing to God...In this service we should have a great spirit of humility, a great deal of patience and great charity".

He himself was in the front line, teaching and working. This was the new 'school of charity'.

But it did not seem to him that this was enough. It was necessary to extend his 'contagion' to others so that they would follow him and become formed more deeply at this school. To begin with he created the 'Brotherhood of the Most Holy Cross', in which came together men and women of good will who were ready to work together in this service.

Until, that is, that evening of 14 August 1582, during the vespers of the Assumption. At that

moment an 'idea' suddenly came to him when he was contemplating so much neglect: "Why not create a company of pious and generous men who, taking the place of paid servants, would have as their goal that of serving those poor people, not for payment but voluntarily and out of love of God, with that tenderness and charity that a mother has for her sick only child? They could wear as their special sign a cross on their chests".

He found four generous male nurses and a priest who accepted his proposal, but a short time afterwards two of them abandoned him when faced with the sacrifices that were imposed upon them. The authorities of the hospital prohibited him from meeting together with his companions and obstructed him, having doubts about his real intentions.

Filippo Neri himself, his confessor, left him out on his own and did not understand the sign of God. Later, Camillus said he needed at that time "the heart of a lion".

What did not leave him out on his own was his beloved crucifix which twice encouraged him: "Go forward, pusillanimous one, do not be afraid, this work is not yours, but mine".

And if it was 'his work', it had to go on, whatever the price to be paid.

He had to face up to many sacrifices, suspicion, and marginalisation, but he had many

successes. The Pope himself and a number of Cardinals supported him in his reforms of service to the sick and during a number of difficult moments of infectious diseases which caused slaughter in the streets, they accepted his advice and suggestions. Many young men, attracted by his example, gathered around him. This group increased in its membership and forced him to look for increasingly large houses. He wrote for them his 'Rules and Practical Ways for Good Service to the Sick in Hospitals'.

They advised him to become a priest so as to care for the sick in a more complete way, from the point of view of their bodies and spiritual assistance, and to lead his group in a better way.

He was ordained a priest on 26 May 1584. They suggested to him that he make a request to the Pope for an official recognition of the 'Company of the Ministers of the Sick'. This request was agreed to on 18 March 1586.

Subsequently, Camillus asked the Pope for a distinctive sign – a red cross to be worn on the chest with the habit. He was able to wear it for the first time on 29 June 1586.

From the new house of St. Mary Magdalene, every day the ministers of the sick went out in turns to serve the sick in the Hospital of the Holy Spirit, in line with certain instructions that had

been given by Camillus, and to visit the sick and the dying in their houses: this included those who had contagious illnesses. Some of them fell ill and others died. Camillus encouraged them by giving himself totally to others.

Other cities asked for his presence and Naples was the first to benefit from that presence.

But more men were needed, and priests in particular. From this was born the idea of asking the Pope to raise the Company to a religious Order with solemn vows. The matter was not easy but in observing the charity of martyrdom of Camillus and his men in face of the plagues of the years 1590-1591, the Pope granted him this.

This river of charity could now flow forth. Milan, Genoa, Florence and other cities could enjoy the presence and service of the Ministers of the Sick: "I would like to have a thousand arms to reach everyone", Camillus went on saying.

On 1 November 1592 began the 'Congregation of Laity', with the wish 'that it be of some usefulness for our Order and the sick'.

Faith each day increasingly purified the charity of Camillus and guided him, transforming his senses, expanding his heart, and leading him forward on the pathway of holiness. He felt led to bear witness to the perennial mercy of the love of God revealed in Christ and to live his original interpretation of the Gospel.

The sore, which was the sign of his real vocation, continued to get worse. To it were added other illnesses which he called “mercies of the Lord”. Camillus felt that his end was arriving. “Camillus will die like a swan singing of charity, charity”, he often said during the last years of his life.

And thus it was that on 14 July the ‘sick man for the sick’ returned to the house of the Father, but his heart remained with his sick people and with his sons to love them and to animate them.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What does basing myself on the charism of Camillus and following in his footsteps as a lay person mean for me?

Knowing my soul better and taking part in his ‘new school of charity’?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Luke 10:1-12)

‘After this the Lord chose another 72 men and sent them out two by two, to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go, He said to them “...Go...Whenever you go into a town and are made welcome, eat what is set before you, heal the sick in that town, and say to the people there,

“The Kingdom of God has come near to you”

Reflect on your life

What is Jesus saying to you? How can you ‘heal’ the sick and proclaim to them the hope of the Kingdom?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Bless the Lord, my soul,
What is in me bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul,
Do not forget his many good works.

He forgives all your wrongs,
Heals all your illnesses,
Saves from the ditch of your life,
Crowns you with grace and mercy.

Good and pitying is the Lord,
Slow to become angry and great in love,
He does not keep on rebuking
And does not keep for ever his indignation.

As a father has pity for his children,
So the Lord has pity for those who fear him.
Because he knows what we are made of.
He remembers that we are dust.

But the grace of the Lord is for ever,
It lasts for ever for those who fear Him,
His justice is for the sons of sons,
For those who steward his covenant
And remember to observe His precepts.

(Adapted from Psalm 103)

CHAPTER V

THE ORDER OF THE MINISTERS OF THE SICK

“First God and then this bent leg of mine...”

Fr. Cicatelli, in his *Vita manoscritta del P. Camillo di Lellis* ('Manuscript Life of Camillus de Lellis') (p. 63), engages in a brief summary of the pathway followed by Camillus and his work in the following way:

It is true that his first thought was none other than that of founding the Company of the 'Servants of the Sick' inside the Hospital of St. James, but God placed certain impediments in his way which forced him to found it outside the hospital, in the Church of Miracles, and to go to other hospitals. He thought that he would found it with simple members of the laity but God disposed that it would be formed of those moving towards the priesthood and priests and he would be the first to be ordained. He thought of a free Company without vows that tied people to it, but God disposed that a short time later it would be recognised as a religious Order with solemn vows. He thought of freeing the sick from the hands of mercenaries who only concerned themselves with services to the body,

but God, seeing that this was little, and a thought to which little attention was paid, wanted the sick to be freed from the hands of certain spiritual ministers as well, and this was something that was even more needed by Christendom. He thought of founding an institute only for the sick of the Hospital of St. James, where sick people who had sores were the only people to go, but God wanted that it he would also serve hospitals for wounded people and people with fevers. He did not think of helping those with contagious plague and prisoners but God ordered it that he also embraced this sector. And, in the end, he did not think of accompanying the dying who were perishing in their homes, but God inspired him, or to put it better, forced him, by the voice of the people, to accept as well a great undertaking which was so needed for the world like everything to which I have referred above, by day and by night'.

In his testament in the form of a letter he reminded his sons: 'I have said that our foundation is a clear miracle, in practical terms because God used me, a miserable sinner, an ignorant man full of defects and shortcomings, and worthy of a thousand hells; but God is the master and can do as He pleases and what He does is infinitely well done. Nobody should be amazed that God acted though a certain in-

strument, it being thus for His greater glory, given that he makes wonders from nothing’.

The official birth in the form of the ‘Company of the Servants of the Sick’ was the approval by Pope Sextus V on 18 March 1586. Afterwards there was its elevation by Pope Gregory XIV to the ‘Religious Order of the Ministers of the Sick’ with solemn vows on 21 September 1591, which concluded with the solemn profession by Camillus and his first twenty-five companions on 8 December of the same year in the Church of St, Mary Magdalene

Thus Camillus declared with much joy to his first cousin, Onofrio de Lellis: ‘I am very busy because by the grace of Christ the Lord, next Sunday, which will be the day of the Immaculate Conception, the eighth of December, this Order will be founded, that is to say we will make a solemn profession, which will be done with great solemnity because it is the first...But what engenders greatest wonder is that God has wanted to use me who am such a sinner...May everything be for His perpetual glory!’

He himself with Fr. Biagio Oppertis had worked a great deal to draw up the ‘Formula for Life’ which was to be the ‘heart’ of the document for approval and which would always express his will and remain the basis for all future Rules or Constitutions.

‘He who has decided to exercise perpetually works of charity should think that he must die for the world and for all its things and must live solely for Jesus Christ and he should join it to do penance for his sins, under the softness of the yoke of perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience and perpetual service to the sick, even if contagious, and this not only in hospitals but also in the infirmaries of prisons where sick people suffer great needs for everything, both corporeal and spiritual...’

From that moment onwards the Order began to expand to other parts of Italy, facing up to and overcoming new difficulties, such as those of the great debts that had been accumulated and above all ‘full service’ to the sick, including all services both corporeal and spiritual in hospitals which the Founder wanted to impose on all his religious as an overall expression of his original inspiration and which up to that point could not be exercised in a precise way.

Within a few years the foundations multiplied throughout Italy. Camillus and his followers struck people because of their ‘way’ of doing things, their new style of serving the sick. Many hospitals (fourteen in number) could take advantage of their work and many others wanted it. In Naples he supported a movement of lay women who wanted to care for sick women in the hospital there and to help the community.

Involving members of the laity was always a concern of Camillus who was aware of the great needs of the sick. His presence and the presence of his religious during the episodes of plague, which he called 'feats of charity', was a guarantee of his care which reached the point of martyrdom.

A little before dying he commended all his religious to be faithful to the '*Istituto*' (charism) and he exhorted them in the present and the future to 'walk in the way of the spirit...because our Institute is such that it needs perfect men to do the will of God and to reach perfection and holiness'. 'To all, present or future, who will be workers of this holy Order until the end of the world', he wrote in his testament in the form of a letter, 'I send a thousand blessings'.

And down the centuries the Order, many times, has had need of 'these blessing' to survive internal tensions and external persecutions, but faithfulness to the charism has never been absent, and the same may be said of creativity as regards opening up new pathways.

In Peru the Order experienced its 'golden century' in the eighteenth century. And in North Italy the initiative of Fr. Camillo Cesare Bresciani at the middle of the nineteenth century reinvigorated the presence of the Camillians who had been much reduced in number in that

region.

The crisis of vocations of countries in the First World is at the present time causing a certain concern.

Despite this, expansion in the countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, an opening up to the laity, the creation of new expressions of the charism during the twentieth century, give good grounds for hoping that there will be a development of the Order, of pastoral care in health, and of Camillian spirituality.

On 2 February 1987 the Holy See approved the new Constitution of the Order and this gave a new impetus of life to the Order and to its activities, uniting in creative faithfulness the past, the present and the future. 'The Order of the Ministers of the Sick', article n. 1 declares, 'a living part of the Church, has received from God, through its Founder St. Camillus, the gift of witnessing to the world the ever-present love of Christ for the sick'.

"Therefore", confirms article n. 10, 'the charism which has been granted in a special way to our Order and which establishes its character and mandate, is expressed and realized in the works of mercy towards the sick. Nevertheless, the Order, in particular circumstances of time and place, and in response to the more urgent needs of the Church, is open to other works, especially on behalf of those in need'.

'In this presence of Christ in the sick', declares article n. 13, 'we find the source of our spirituality'.

'The last eight General Chapters (held from 1965 to 2007) opened up new pathways for the charism of the Order of St. Camillus, promoting a large number of various initiatives for the poor and sick, reinvigorating pastoral care as regards vocations, and increasingly associating members of the laity with the pastoral and spiritual work of the Order, with the promotion of voluntary work and the creation of the Lay Camillian Family. As the Constitution lays down in article n. 54: 'Our Order...is dedicated to animating the greatest possible number of lay people in loving and serving the sick'.

The Order of the Ministers of the Sick at the present time has 1,147 religious. They are present in thirty-five countries of the world; twelve countries in Europe; ten in America; five in Asia; seven in Africa; and one in Oceania.

The ways in which the charism is expressed have multiplied over the last 20-30 years in an unimaginable way: the charism is expressed creatively in various cultures, as the gospel message itself envisages. In addition to chaplaincies, to our works or houses administered by our religious, homes for AIDS patients, multi-clinics, and parishes, centres for formation for our religious and for pastoral workers at the

'Camillianum' International Institute for the Theology of Pastoral Care in Rome and in centres for pastoral care have also been created.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What struck me during the reading of this brief history of the Order of St. Camillus?

What are my reactions?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 25:31-45)

'Come you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the Kingdom that has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world...I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me'.

LET US REFLECT

What does Jesus want to say to me with these words? What is he inviting me to do?

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

As a member of the LCF do I feel that I am an 'integral part' of this Order, beginning with my lay identity or 'simply as a supporter'? How do I display this?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

We are the wheat of Christ,
Grown in the sun of God,
In the water of the font
We are kneaded,
Marked by the divine charism.

O Father, transform us into bread,
For the sacrament of peace:
One Bread, one Spirit, One body,
One, holy Church, O Lord.

Called to relieve pain
At the school of Father Camillus,
We join hands in the heart,
Ministers of the Son who suffers.

O Christ glorious shepherd,
To you the power and the honour,
With the Father and the Holy Spirit
Forever and ever.
Amen.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAY CAMILLIAN FAMILY A LIFE CHOICE

The Order of the Ministers of the Sick, in the development of its mission, has always worked with lay people who work with the Order. Ever since the beginning of the Institute, the project of St. Camillus to form a group of pious men who know how to exercise works of corporeal and spiritual mercy for service to the sick has been recurrent.

The saint managed to found a congregation of laymen on 1 November 1592 as a group of volunteers based on Christian values.

This institution of St. Camillus was taken up in the year 1995 when the General Chapter of Camillian Religious established a committee entrusted with the task of drawing up the statutes of the LCF.

The LCF is an association that brings together those who feel called in their lay condition to live an evangelical life bearing witness to love for the Lord in line with the spirit of St. Camillus.

Baptism makes us a Church, the Church of Christ. The LCF brings us together to help us

to live our lives at the service of the sick and people who suffer, thereby giving fullness to our baptismal consecration.

The life of the LCF is founded on the example of merciful Jesus, on the teachings of the Church, and on the charism and the spirituality of the Camillian Order and its mission.

Although it continues to have a lay nature, the LCF is also open to priests, deacons and men and women religious who wish to share the Camillian charism, respecting the commitments derived from their membership of a diocesan clergy or their religious families.

The LCF is a public ecclesial association which the Holy See (the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) has recognised as a *specific work* of the Camillian Order, with an approval of its Statutes.

The LCF constitutes one of the ways in which Camillian religious and members of the lay faithful relate to each other and work with each other. Side by side with it there exist other associations which exist to establish and maintain significant relationships between Camillian religious and members of the lay faithful.

Objectives

The LCF seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To engage in works of corporeal and spiritual mercy for the sick.
- To sensitise the ecclesial community and the social/health-care institutions to sick people through the promotion of a service permeated by authentic human values in harmony with the principles of Christian ethics.
- To cooperate in the promotion of a culture of life and health in line with the Christian vision of man.
- To explore and actualise the charism of the Order, being committed to work with Camillian religious in projects of evangelisation and humanisation of the world of health and health care and in missionary initiatives.
- To appreciate prayer both as an effective instrument of apostleship and as a help in living in faith the difficult season of suffering.
- To make known about and strengthen the evangelising role of sick people in the ecclesial community.
- To cultivate fraternity in the sphere of concern of the LCF, expressing it through mutual material and spiritual help so that every member of the LCF can find support, especially during difficult moments.

Spirituality

The spirituality of the LCF is realised in the

style that is specific to it, in a project of life centred around the person of Christ and following him, and it is based on the example of St. Camillus, as is evident from the Constitution of the Camillian Order:

‘God loved us first and it is our wish to respond to his love. For this reason, we seek to personalise more and more, our relationship with the Father, who is full of tenderness, through Jesus Christ his Son, in whose name we serve the sick, and through a readiness to allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit throughout our life’ (C, n. 61).

‘We strive to understand ever more intimately the mystery of Christ and to cultivate a personal relationship with him. Our entire religious life must be permeated by the friendship of God, so that we may know how to be ministers of Christ’s love towards the sick. In this way, we manifest that faith which in Camillus was expressed in charity and by means of which we see the Lord himself in the sick’ (C, n. 13).

In a journey of human and Christian growth, the members of the LCF hold dear: an assiduous listening to the Word of God; frequent taking part in the sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation; love for the Immaculate Virgin, health of the sick; and reading about the life of St. Camillus and reading his writings.

Union with God finds effective expression in

an openness and readiness to engage in dialogue and cooperation with everyone.

Participation in ecclesial life, with special reference to the dioceses and parishes to which one belongs, has particular importance.

In non-Christian countries the members of the LCF work with people of other confessions in service to the sick.

The Criteria and Modalities of Admission

To belong to the LCF the following are required:

- A *period* of initial personal and communal discernment with the coordinator of the local Camillian Family and with the group.

- Learning about and accepting the Statutes.

- Filling in a personal questionnaire.

- A period of formation lasting a year involving knowing the person of Jesus and the spirituality of St. Camillus to order to make the commitment.

- Expressing in written form after two years of formation the wish to restate one's own commitment to the LCF.

- The *commitment* is an important, conscious and responsible act. It is expressed publicly during a liturgical celebration and it is

renewed every year, possibly on the feast of St. Camillus.

- Committing oneself, if this is possible, to a suitable period of service involving care for, and the accompanying of, sick people and the elderly.

Formation

Formation – both initial and ongoing – seeks to promote a pathway of maturation at a human, spiritual and apostolic level and follows a rhythm dictated by the circumstances, by personal needs, and by the resources that exist in the various contexts.

It seeks to foster:

- better personal knowledge;
- the ability to discern in a Christian way the events of life;
- knowledge of the person of Jesus and his activities as regards the sick;
- in-depth study of the life and spirituality of St. Camillus;
- knowledge of the world of health and health care and the socio-political dimensions that characterise that world;
- in-depth study of the meaning of suffering, of illness and of death in the light of faith;
- the study of the Bible and the assimilation of gospel values;

- good knowledge about the Church and ecclesial documents, the ethical and bioethical questions, and issues connected with the health-care world;
- the study of, and reflection on, handbooks and documents relating to the LCF;
- sharing that will strengthen personal and group growth;
- each person will give value to their own formation.

Formation takes place through taking part in courses, seminars, congresses, conferences, spiritual retreats or exercises and in monthly meetings of the grass-roots group.

OUR ORGANISATION

A Central Committee exists which coordinates, directs and configures the general features of the LCF at a world level.

At a national level a Council of the Presidency exists which has the function of promoting and spreading the spirituality of St. Camillus, and strengthening the lines of communication and the organisation of the various groups.

The local team has the purpose of fostering knowledge and integration between the various grass-roots groups of the same city: it also promotes the human and Christian formation of

its members.

The grass-roots groups are made up of a limited group of members and meets once a month in order to reflect upon the Word of God, explore the life and writings of St. Camillus, pray together, and review the life and the work of the group.

We have Statutes that contain the features and the general orientations that allows us to walk with a unity of criteria and helps us to organise ourselves in a better way.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What does belonging to the LCF mean for me?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

Following the example of St. Camillus many faithful have devoted themselves well to helping the sick. Camillus sought out sick people, encouraged them, supported them, and organised them. He remembered his first thought which was to found a congregation of members of the lay faithful for voluntary and disinterested care for the sick.

By the glory of God, All Saints' Day', he wrote to Fr. Oppertis on 30 October 1592, 'we will begin the Congregation of the laity...to attract them to exercise works of charity in ser-

vice to the sick poor in hospitals (AG., 2528,41).

In a short time, side by side with the Ministers of the Sick, the Congregation of the Most Holy Crucifix was established everywhere: 'A body of good laymen, as the saint wrote, that will render glory to God, help the poor in service to this plant, the religion of the Ministers of the Sick' (30 October 1592).

'In truth, certainly, Camillus was chosen by God to serve the sick and teach how they should be served'.

A BIBLICAL READING: (Luke 10:1-2)

'After this the Lord chose another 72 men and sent them out two by two, to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go.

He said to them. "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest".

LET US REFLECT

How does this passage from the gospel illuminate my membership of the LCF?

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

Why did you decide to belong to the LCF?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for having called us
To bear witness to the merciful love of Christ
Amongst our sick brothers.
In the face of your Son you wanted to mani-
fest to us your tenderness towards all hu-
man suffering.
Make our time be lived with joy because it is
Your time, Lord,
The time when you called us
To carry out our mission as believers.
Infuse your Spirit so that in taking up the
Challenges of today's world we prepare our-
selves to accept the future that you have
Prepared for us
Open us to his inspiration and give us the
Courage and the ability to change.
May your mother and our mother Mary and
The holy father Camillus accompany us on
This pathway!
Amen.

CHAPTER VII

CAMILLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Christian spirituality as an experience talks to us of a profound knowledge of the reality of God. God transmits His Spirit to the believer and carries out in him or her a dynamic of knowledge and understanding of ultimate realities. The absolute of God consists, therefore, in uniting ourselves to His person and receiving His Spirit.

The spiritual experience of Jesus, of his disciples, and also of St. Camillus, can be captured in the Cross. The spiritual itinerary of St. Camillus from his conversion of 2 February 1575 is the expression of a life of experience of suffering but at the same time of the trust and love that Christ offered this saint.

A Camillian spirituality that is not centred around the person of Jesus has no value; it is not original.

St. Camillus made Christ his model for his life, but above all he contemplated the crucified Christ and joined the whole of his person to him. A Christ made of flesh, who suffered, felt hunger, who was sick, that is to say who suffered the ordeal of the cross. For Camillus the

cross was without doubt the essential source of his spirituality. The cross that led to the most sublime gestures of devotion and love for the sick, for the plague-stricken and for the poorest of the poor.

For Camillus, the sick were the source of all his experience of union and of following Christ: “the sick are the pupil and the heart of God’ and ‘more heart in those hands brothers”.

In one of the very many letters written by the saint to his dear religious, he exhorted them to live their vocation in perfect love to Christ and his sick poor.

‘For this reason, my very dear brothers, we imitate the prudent servant of the Gospel and the wise virgins of the same gospel: I mean we recognise the force of our vocation, striving to make ourselves true and perfect workers of this holy ministry given that this is the will of the Lord who wants to spread this plant of his to many cities of Christendom to help thousands of souls.

Blessed are we if we know how to appreciate such a great good! It is not therefore good news that the Lord tells us: “I was sick and you visited me, come blessed of my Father”. And at another point he says “everything that you did to the these least you did to me” (Letter to the professed and novices of Naples, Rome, 19 March 1595).

The spiritual wealth of this saint, his great love for the Crucified Christ, his implementation of that love in his care for the sick, like his profound interest in the formation of his religious sons, lead us to understand his spirituality as a spirituality profoundly rooted in the Word of God, simple in its way of adhering to the Word and the saving action of Christ but above all else the bearer of comfort and love for the suffering.

St. Camillus embodied and expressed with great simplicity Christian charity. Some passages from the history of the Order refer to a great many heroic facts in the exercise of charity. In addition, the approval of the Order was made after a major plague in Rome when many Camillian religious, infected by the disease, offered up their lives; they shed their blood as martyrs of charity and of love for the suffering.

But which charity did St. Camillus speak about and live? What were the facts and the gestures of his work that led him to be recognised by the Church as a 'Giant of Charity'?

The answer is perhaps brief but at the same time rich in contents: Camillus felt and lived the infinite love of God.

He felt the profound love of God, the experience that changes horizons, that leads to the extreme sacrifice of one's own life, that makes

one feel that the only valid thing is to love Christ and one's brethren, and this without doubt was the source of the charity of Camillus towards all sick people.

Camillus' behaviour can be understood solely starting with love; his fecundity, charity and love are expressions that define the spiritual life of a believer. For this reason, Camillian spirituality is to make the gospel charity of Christ present, to bring the good news of salvation, solidarity and love for all suffering people.

In his 'Rules for the Service in all Perfection of the Sick Poor' (Milan, June 1613) we find one of the many very original and important writings which help us to know about and understand Camillian spirituality. In all these Rules one sees care for the sick but above all else a striking stress on charity; charity that is lived and practised with the sole concern of serving the sick poor with the love of Christ.

'When the lunch hour arrives for the poor, each person should do what corresponds to his function. During the lunch they should try to move around to help the most vulnerable, covering them in winter to defend them against the cold. After removing the little tables put these between the beds'.

A charity that was mixed with profound love for Christ for the suffering. A love that led to the provision of care down to the last detail, trying

to mitigate and accompany the pain of the sick. Great care for the body, created in the image of God. Loving the body of the sick person so as to bring him or her the unfathomable love of God.

In the spirituality of Camillus the body and soul were united in a very close fashion. Charity that practised, edified and confirmed love. The strategy of Camillus was first of all to demonstrate the love of Jesus for the poor and needy.

This is the subject that made his spirituality original and renewed. Today's commitment will be to implement and actualise the liberating gestures that St. Camillus proclaimed. Our mission in the Church and contemporary society will be to edify and illuminate the world of pain and the difficulties of society with gestures of love and charity. Will we have the gift, the commitment to be like St. Camillus, to be new Giants of Charity?

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What does Camillian spirituality mean? What are our commitments, beginning with Camillian spirituality?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Luke 10:29-37)

‘But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus answered, “There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road, but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. “Take care of him”, he told the innkeeper, and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him”. And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?” The teacher of the Law answered, “The man who was kind to

him". Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same".

LET US REFLECT

How was what is lived in Christian spirituality given practical expression by Jesus in the Gospel?

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

All of us have received the invitation to be followers of Jesus. Our spiritual lives involve first of all knowing and growing in the love of God, remembering our multiple experiences of God and our spiritual growth.

1. What could be the special way of being followers of Jesus bearing in mind Camillian spirituality?

2. How do we live today Camillian spirituality beginning with our condition of being lay men and women and the choice of the Camillian Family?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

O God, infinite providence,
Refuge of the suffering,
Listen to the prayer that we address to you
For those who suffer.

Reassure and comfort the sick and the infirm, the old and the dying.

Give those who take care of them expertise and compassion.

Inspire in them gestures that give relief,

Words that illuminate

And love that Comforts.

We commend to you discouraged hearts,

Hearts in revolt, lacerated by temptation,

Tormented by passion,

Wounded or profaned by the incompetence of men.

Place inside us, Lord, your Spirit of love,

Of Understanding and of sacrifice,

So that we may bring effective help to all

Those on our pathways who are suffering.

Help us to answer their prayer:

It is yours.

Amen.

(Ancient Christian prayer)

CHAPTER VIII

ST. CAMILLUS AND THE CRUCIFIX

The cross, with or without the body of the crucified Christ, was of fundamental importance in the life and work of St. Camillus.

Almost as though his pathway was marked prophetically, we remember his famous dream about his mother, Camilla. This dream had generated great pain in him. The child of the dream could only have been her child; that cross on the banner, and the group of young men who followed it, they too with a cross, what did they mean? Only future crimes and punishments, criminality and human justice?

Time would not allow Camillus to see the fulfilment of his dream, a dream that would be fulfilled in a diametrically opposed way. In reality, given the life that Camillus had led during his first twenty-five years of life, it was easy to make a pessimistic interpretation. What could one expect from a rebellious boy, an undisciplined mercenary soldier?

But things changed when Camillus was touched by grace during the journey towards Manfredonia.

From that moment began his encounter with the crucifix. At the outset Camillus had the illu-

sion that he would have found it in the austerity and penitence of the cloister of the Capuchin monastery, following Francis of Assisi. He needed time to discover that his Christ was waiting for him in the hospitals. Time and difficulties, in addition to the persecutions that he had to undergo, helped him to feel the presence of the crucifix in his life.

And thus it was that when everything seemed lost, new roads were opened up to him. Camillus had gathered around him a number of male nurses and a priest in order to offer generous service to the sick at St. James' Hospital in Rome.

Camillus could not imagine that rather than supporting this group, which gave the hospital a better service, those who ran the hospital would themselves have forced him to move away. We should also refer to St. Filippo Neri who privately urged him to end "that bad initiative"

And then there was the comment when the Crucified Christ intervened. This was a crucial moment in the life of Camillus. One cannot think that that scene was just a dream given that our saint paid so much importance to it. Camillus felt truly disheartened and needed a strong push, a voice that was not imaginary but real, that he could hear, spoken by a figure who was not imaginary either but whom he

could really see. It was that very crucifix of the small oratory. He saw it move. The crucifix spoke to him.

It said to him "Do not be afraid, pusillanimous one. Go forward, because this is my work and not yours".

In this way the crucifix penetrated his work and guided it. It made it its own.

The eyes of Camillus, which saw the crucifix moving, were struck, astonished. From that moment on, Camillus saw the suffering Christ in every sick person.

Yes, this was the truth: "you did it to me"

Thus what sign could be better for his religious than a flaming red cross on the chest and the cloak? How could one doubt the sincerity of the words that the saint wanted for the 'formula of life': 'every religious must see it as a great benefit to die for the Crucified Christ, our Lord'. He commended his religious in the following way: 'When you care for the dying do not speak too much. Remind them in particular of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Often he gave his crucifix to a sick person so that he or she could kiss it, and he placed it before his or her eyes. 'We pray, he commended his religious, the most holy Passion of Our Lord and his blood shed for our good'.

With how much happiness, when returning to Bucchianico, his birthplace, when he was al-

ready a priest, to those who had previously seen him as a man with licentious habits, did he show the flaming red cross on his habit and say to them: "Yes: this is the cross that my mother interpreted as an announcement of ruin and destruction for my family. Behold here how God has converted it into the resurrection of many and in exaltation of His glory. How different is the thinking of God from the thinking of men!"

He commissioned a picture of the Crucified Christ saying that from the wounds of Christ "much blood has to flow so that I, seeing such an abundance of blood, will have greater hope in my health". Without him knowing it, the painter painted him at the foot of the Crucified Christ, putting on his lips the following words: "Lord, forgive your servant whom you redeemed with your most precious blood".

When he saw that he had been put in the picture, Camillus was very troubled, but afterwards he said: 'Lord, this was not my intention but given that you wanted it this way it means that you must still have greater hope in your mercy towards me'.

One day Father Crotoni found him speaking to the crucifix that he was holding in his hands. "What are you doing, Father?" "I am waiting for the good news of the Lord, Come, blessed of my Father: I was ill and you visited me".

This was true: Camillus had found and cared a thousand times for the Crucified Christ who moved his arms to encourage him in the person of sick people.

The crucifix, as was the case with Camillus, continues to be at the centre of our spirituality.

Service to the sick is marked by the cross, by incomprehension, hostility, discouragement and crisis. The crucifix restores trust to us and confirms us in our mission. "Do not be afraid, pusillanimous one, go forward, this is my work and not yours".

The crucifix helps us to move out of ourselves, to have trust in a God who is master of the impossible, to have more trust in Him than in our possibilities. "My grace is enough for you" (2 Cor 12:9).

The crucifix also calls on us and leads us to discuss the large number of crucified people whom we see every day nailed to their beds of pain, of loneliness, of abandonment, and of illness, and it calls us to work and to struggle to take them down from their cross, redeem them and relieve them. This spirituality of the cross is not a pitying, pain-praising spirituality, but a spirituality that leads us to service.

It is a spirituality that generates hopes and life, it is paschal spirituality and the spirituality of resurrection.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What did the crucifix mean in the life of St. Camillus?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 27:32; 33; 37-39)

‘As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. They came to a place called Golgotha which means ‘The Place of the Skull’...Above his head they put the written notice of the accusation against him: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews”. Then they crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left’.

LET US REFLECT

What is the meaning of the cross of Christ for Christians?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

When he thought of creating ‘a group of good laymen to give glory to God and help in service to the Ministers of the Sick’, he called it the ‘Congregation of the Most Holy Crucifix’.

Where the crucifix had helped him in the dif-

difficult moment of foundation and afterwards in continuing with it, it would also help him in that decisive step which had always rather frightened him: the leap, as he called it, from this life to the other. To whom should he not entrust himself if not to the Crucified Christ?

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

What does the Crucified Christ mean for a member of the LCF?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you
On your pathway of the cross.
You upset our dreams and our projects and
Yet you are our peace...
Accept us with our fears and the hesitations
of our hearts,
Receive our humble love,
Which is capable of giving you only the little
That we are.
Convert to us, Lord, and we will convert to
You, allowing ourselves to be lead
Where perhaps we would not have liked to
have gone, but where you precede us and
You are waiting for us,
To make of the poor stories of our lives and
our pain, your story with us.

Amen.
Hallelujah.

(Bruno Forte)

CHAPTER IX

THE GREAT SEA OF CHARITY THE PARISH

The Christian community is the historical extension of Christ and is based on he who came 'so that we may have life, and have it in abundance' (John 10:10).

This means that the parish community must be involved in an evangelising action that generates health, that educates people to live in the healthiest way possible and that welcomes people, especially during moments of illness, offering them the same way of acting as Jesus and his saving presence.

When analysing the contemporary situation of the world of health and health care, we can see certain important elements which should be taken into consideration:

- Today the great majority of sick people live with their families and it is for this reason that pastoral care and assistance is an important task of the parish.

- The parish must embody in its community the healing service of Christ, its healthy style of living, its capacity for welcome, its joyous celebration of salvation, its striving to educate peo-

ple to give meaning to illness and death.

- The parish, which is a healing community, is first of all a community of love and sick people should find in it the privileged place that they find in Jesus.

- The sick are an active part of the parish community, they should not only 'receive' from other people: they are active subjects in the life of the community. The parish should try to foster and welcome their witness, esteeming their apostolic work.

The Parish and the Sick:

✓ Knowing the sick

It is important to know the sick that live in the world of the parish Christian community. Sick people who are in their homes permanently, the chronically ill, the physically or mentally ill, the unfortunate, elderly people etc. or sick people who have been discharged from hospital centres, from long-stay structures, and are convalescent in their homes

✓ Drawing near the community to the sick

The community must draw near to the sick and in a special and preferential way to those who are most forgotten about and alone. This drawing near must be carried out in the style of Jesus: in a friendly and respectful way, in a

personal relationship, one that reconciles and heals.

✓ *The family of a sick person*

We should not forget that often it is the family itself of the sick person that needs to be supported, to feel the nearness of the community, so as to be able to live in a more human and gospel way the illness of its own family member.

✓ *Making a space for a sick person within the community*

We must retrieve the space that sick people have in the life of the community, their presence, their words and their witness in the community itself.

It is important to make possible their participation in the celebrations of the community, above all when there are special festivities (Easter, the World Day of the Sick, the feasts of patron saints), proposing and fostering the communal celebration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and praying for these sick people and with them.

✓ *The celebration of the sacraments of the sick*

The sacraments are the culminating gestures of every activity and care that the community offers to the sick. From this presence at their 'side' springs the need in a more participated

way for the sacraments of the sick, overcoming ritualism and redeeming all the force of healing that they contain.

✓ *Pastoral care for sick people in hospitals*

Maintaining the union between the parish community and sick or elderly people who have been admitted to health-care institutions is a very meaningful way of expressing the care of the ecclesial community, the charity and interest of the parish family, and the pastoral care of brethren in faith.

In addition, if within the orbit of the parish there is a health-care institution (a hospital, an old people's home), the parish community must make itself present as a Christian community, trying to concretise and coordinate its presence and pastoral action between the health-care centre and the parish.

The Parish as a Source of Health

The parish is called to an evangelising action and an action that generates health, involving itself in everything that can help human beings to live in the healthiest way possible, to relieve them in their suffering. It offers its help to the suffering not only at a personal level but so that they feel a living part of the ecclesial and social community. The community can have within it a healing power.

Some actions in this field could be:

- Fostering the promotion of health and education in health, acting in a preferential way in the field of prevention: AIDS, drug addiction, alcoholism
- Being committed to living conditions that are more healthy, such as diet, housing, safety at work; managing to have structures that promote the overall wellbeing of the person through more fraternal and cordial relationships, the promotion of recreation and rest, a healthy relationship with nature, and care of the spirit and the body.
- Promoting initiatives against loneliness and exclusion; fostering communication and interpersonal relationships; working to foster an old age that is healthier and health-inducing.
- Giving priority to educational initiatives in favour of a true culture of life and health.

How Pastoral Care in Health in the Parish should be Organised

The formation of groups for pastoral care in health.

These groups express the vitality and the evangelical spirit of the people of God, they try to make present the love and solidarity of Jesus towards the suffering and are involved in the promotion of health and education in

health. This kind of group should have coordination and be assisted by the parish priest.

It should try to draw up a work project and a calendar of activities that will allow suitable planning and effective assessment

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE:

What seems to us to be most important in this reflection?

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 10: 5-11)

‘These twelve men were sent out by Jesus with the following instructions: “Do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan town. Instead, you are to go to the lost sheep of the people of Israel. Go and preach, “The Kingdom of heaven is near”. Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive our demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid. Do not carry any gold, silver, or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar’s bag for the journey or an extra shirt or shoes or a stick. Workers should be given what they need’.

When you come to a town or village,

go in and look for someone who is willing to welcome you, and stay with him until you leave that place’.

LET US REFLECT

How does this passage from the Gospel illuminate my pastoral service?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

Despite everything Camillus understood very well that hospitals could be nothing else but a small sea, the Mediterranean sea for the Order that he had founded. Instead, the commending of souls in private homes had to be an endless ocean because ‘people die everywhere’.

For this reason, from the beginning of his foundation Camillus accepted care for sick people in their homes, subordinating this to the requirements of hospitals which at that time absorbed the efforts of the early Congregation.

Care for sick people in private homes was at one and the same time both spiritual and corporeal, as it was in hospitals, as is borne out by the ‘Approval of the Company’ (18 March 1586) which sees them as equal tasks.

‘We want, with the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our religious to visit and as soon as they can comfort and practise other similar offices of charity, in conformity with the constitutions that

will be made, to relieve the sick who live outside hospitals and prisons'. In practical terms, during the lifetime of our saint, given that hospitals took up most of the energies of the Order, in private homes care for the dying alone was provided.

However, placing limits and formulating some reservations in the exercise of charity where it was required was very far from the mind, the spirit and the habits of the Founder.

Camillus commended his religious with words or in written form to cultivate an iron will so as to do great things not only with sick people in hospitals but also with people who were dying in their own homes. He wanted to have a thousand lives to dedicate to these two undertakings (28 May 1611).

From the beginning of the Foundation, Camillus organised care for sick people in private homes, arranging for a number of religious to stay in their house every day waiting for calls.

Indeed, they ran everywhere with so much zeal and enthusiasm that the presence of Ministers of the Sick at the bedside of a dying person was seen as a sign of their predestination.

Camillus had established from the beginning of the Foundation that 'with the arrival of the plague (which God did not allow) all those who want to subject themselves to this form of life must promise to serve the plague-

stricken...this Company is obliged to help people with the plague, both priests and laymen' (Rule13, 1584).

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

What can I do to organise pastoral care in health in my parish?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

If you are healthy, relieve the need of those who are sick and poor.

If you have not fallen, help those who have fallen and live in suffering.

If you are happy, comfort those who are sad.

If you are fortunate, help those who have been struck by misfortune...

And be rich not only in possessions but also in pity; not only in gold but also in virtue, or better, only in virtue.

Make yourselves God for the unfortunate, imitating His mercy.

In man, in fact, nothing is as divine as to do good.

You who love God do not despise the poor or the sick; do not pass by on the other side, do not move away from them as though they were a malediction, a negative reality, objects to flee from and to detest.

They are your limbs, even though bent under misfortunate.

They are brothers whom God has entrusted to your charity.

(St. Gregory Nazianzus)

CHAPTER X

ST. CAMILLUS AND THE HUMANISATION OF HOSPITAL CARE

REFORM OF THE CONCEPT OF THE 'SICK PERSON'

The situation of hospitals at the end of the sixteenth century left much to be desired: the service was not adequate, there were many failings and little affection; the patients did not have what they needed, and suffered from marginalisation and from a lack of care at both corporeal and spiritual levels.

St. Camillus felt inspired to carry out a reform that involved him personally and which would favourably 'infect' the society of his epoch. For this reason, we may define him as being a 'reformer of hospital care' in all senses, able to dictate still today the basic principles and the guidelines so as to achieve in our society a 'reform of hospitals and care' that meets the fundamental requirements of the Gospel.

His service was very diversified and according to the practical circumstances involved had differing objectives which he knew how to pursue with wisdom and a strong will.

‘To serve the poor and the sick, children of God and my brethren’.

After his conversion, he saw in every sick person first of all the Son of God but often he called them my brothers with human emotion and a special ‘empathy’.

For Camillus, a sick person was truly a ‘man’, a concrete man, an unfortunate man, poor in material possessions, but above all else poor in health.

The ‘rights’ of the sick for him were not abstract principles printed in Constitutions or laws but, rather, ‘concrete needs’ that required ‘concrete answers’ from those who were at their side.

He constantly repeated that a sick person was “the very person of Christ” and “the pupil and heart of God” – he was “my Lord and master”. To those who insulted him, who reneged on him, Camillus continued to say: “You can send me what you want”

The Christian vision of man does not darken in illness but, rather, enriches the overall human perception: every person in his or her poverty and illnesses conserves his or her own unique and *intangible* dignity.

THE REFORM OF ‘SERVICE’ TO THE SICK

It is certainly the case that Camillus conse-

crated himself to the 'whole' man, to the integral man and not only to his illness. For this reason, and because of his personal experience, he intuited that a sick person should be admitted to hospital with the 'whole of himself or herself', without leaving out any of his or her person or personality: he or she brought his or her dirty and poor clothes but also his or her free and immortal spirit.

This was an insight of great relevance during his epoch when the classic division of the needs of the body and the needs of the spirit held sway. Because of this belief of his, was born the need to care for both body and spirit at the same time.

What one should emphasise is the 'totality' of the service that Camillus wanted to achieve for sick human beings, and not only in the sphere of corporeal care, laying down practical rules to meet all personal needs which were not confined to essential clinical services but which also reached the needs of the patient which the staff of that time, and often also today, often neglected

This took place when Camillus, for example, recommended taking care of oral hygiene and people's teeth, when he taught how to make beds, when he wrote to the authorities of a hospital asking them to deliver woollen clothes to patients so that they could defend them-

selves against the cold, and when he called on these authorities to deal with environmental hygiene. It is true that Camillus thought of offering patients a welcoming 'home' and worthy and familial care that would bring them relief for their suffering and avoid them feeling wasted and thrown-away objects.

A hospital had to be a home of 'hospitality' in every human and Christian sense.

From his position he was able to realise the way things were: physicians without technical/professional training who were more interested in carrying out experiments than healing; employees and male nurses which were recruited from amongst unemployed lazy people, common prisoners and criminals who had to live out their sentences and who stood out for their negligence and cupidity. They were unable to tie the most agitated patients to their beds and took dying people who were still alive to the mortuary. Hygiene and cleanliness were almost unknown and indeed so absent that fleas, bedbugs, lice and even maggots took possession of the bodies of the sick: maltreated and insulted sick people or patients abandoned like dogs.

THE REFORM OF THE 'PERSONNEL'

Camillus had the good fortune to find amongst the nurses honest and pious men who were as he wanted them to be, and in addition there were 'volunteers' who went to the hospital to give the patients food to eat according to the time of day. Camillus invited them. He then began to fulfil the 'inspiration' that he had felt on the eve of the feast of the Assumption in 1582: to gather together good and generous men who would devote themselves to patients not for a salary but out of love for God.

He was the first to make others understand what had to be changed. He gave practical lessons in care and afterwards he brought these together in a number of written Rules, even though he was not a man given to letters or study.

We still have this valuable document on hospital reform: *Regole e maniere concrete per ben servire i malati negli ospedali* ('Practical Rules and Ways to Serve the Sick in Hospitals').

They are made up of twenty-five short and practical articles, a deontological/professional code that goes back to 1584. These are very simple rules that have the sole aim of 'serving the sick with all charity both in soul and body because we wish with the grace of God to serve all sick people with that love with which

a mother usually cares for her only sick child’.

Camillus also wrote: ‘Each person with all possible diligence will try not to treat the sick poor in bad ways, that is to say using bad language or doing similar things, but, rather, he must treat them with charity, meekness, and should remember the words spoken by the Lord “Everything you did to the least of these, you did to me”. Everyone should treat a poor person as one treats the person of the Lord’.

REFORM ‘OUTSIDE’ HOSPITALS – VOLUNTARY WORK

The fourth aspect of the reforming work of St. Camillus should be seen in the decision to extend care for the sick outside hospitals. In this he wanted to pursue two objectives: care for the sick and the formation of those who served them.

For that matter, animating volunteers and motivating them was a constant concern that accompanied Camillus from the beginning of his reform when before the Religious Order he founded the ‘Congregation of the Most Holy Crucifix’ in which he brought together men and women who were well disposed to address the difficulties and deficiencies that existed both in

the hospitals and in the poor neighbourhoods of cities.

Finally, first and foremost the groups of 'volunteers' had to be duly trained to be ready to provide their total cooperation, thereby confirming the whole of the tradition of the Church which in the field of 'voluntary work' has written the finest and most brilliant pages of its history.

Summing up, we can say that St. Camillus planned and effected a reform whose goal was to recover the true dignity of man, total and integral care for the sick, the training of hospital staff, and the voluntary cooperation of members of the lay faithful and of the whole Church.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

What relationship do you find between the situation of the hospitals of the epoch of St. Camillus and these situations of today's hospitals?

A BIBLICAL READING: (John 5:1-9)

'After this Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. A large crowd of sick people were lying in the porches –the blind, the lame, and the paralysed. A man was there

who had been ill for 38 years. Jesus saw him lying there and he knew that the man had been ill for such a long time, so he said to him, "Do you want to get well?" The sick man answered, "Sir, I have no one here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, someone else gets there first". Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick your mat, and walk" . Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking. The day this happened was a Sabbath'.

LET US REFLECT

What health does Jesus offer to the sick person?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

I am about to work in the vineyard of the Lord, Camillus sometimes said in the hospital, where I find all my satisfactions and all of my happiness, I do not want anything else in this world. The first field of action is a hospital. Hospitals, he repeated much moved, are wonderful gardens, my vineyard, my wonder. Hospitals are the battlefield of the Ministers of the Sick and their highest aspiration must be to live and die in a hospital.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

How am I cooperating in the humanisation of health-care institutions?

FROM RELECTION TO PRAYER

Lord,
I thank you for putting me on the road of the suffering man;
For calling me to love him and to serve him.
Give me, Lord, the love that respects suffering and draws me near to it on tiptoes,
As at a sacred mystery.
Give me the love that will make me forget myself
So as to give at least a little time and serenity to the suffering,
Give me, Lord, the generous devotion of the Good Samaritan
So that I never give way
To the east temptation to 'pass by'
Before those who suffer.
Give me the delicacy of Veronica
Who does not solve the drama of the condemned man,
But removes him from isolation,
And makes him feel that at least one heart is

Near to him

Give me the readiness to help of the Cyre-
nean who shouldered the cross of Christ,
Sharing it for a part of the journey.

O Lord, ensure that my contact with the sick
make me more human and sensitive;

Ensure that my gestures and my words
speak of you to those who are in pain.

CHAPTER XI

MARY: HEALTH OF THE SICK

A Very Beautiful Icon

A Specifically Camillian Devotion

Bearing in mind the charism of service to the sick that St. Camillus received and handed on to his religious, one could say that the cult of 'Our Lady of Health' or 'Mary: Health of the Sick' correlates profoundly with his ministry and with his spirituality, giving him a Marian dimension. Mary is the light that accompanied the performance of his pastoral work in the world of human pain, she herself being that mother that felt pain and suffering during the life of her son and knew how to understand the needs of other people.

Fr. Simonio, rector of the church and a true son of St. Camillus in care for the dying, promoted with great zeal devotion to Our Lady as portrayed in the picture, and with the prayer of 'St. Mary of Health' he sent copies of the painting to other churches of the Order, thereby, expanding her cult. In various epochs and in various cities Our Lady and the Baby Jesus were crowned with pure gold as a sign of thanksgiv-

ing for the innumerable graces received through her intercession, above all by sick and saddened people. In her honour arose various initiatives for the benefit of poor and sick people, amongst which one should especially remember the '*Cofradia della Madonna della Salute, San Giuseppe e San Camillo*'. The image of 'St. Mary of Health' or 'Health of the Sick' continues to be venerated in many churches and houses of the Order and her feast is celebrated on 16 November.

In this field, as well, Camillus was a teacher and an inspirer. The whole of his life was marked by the presence of Mary and his spirituality had a great Marian dimension. This does not amaze us because nobody lived with so much intimacy as the Virgin Mary the various moments of the life of Christ, her son. 'The Christ centrism of the spirituality of St. Camillus', writes Fr. Felice Ruffini, 'has female and Marian connotations. Both the moments of his journey as a believer and founder and the reasons for his charismatic experience were profoundly inspired by Our Lady. The wonders achieved by God in Mary express a salvific action of Christ and are a sign of the new saved and healed humanity, in addition to being a model of solidarity to the ultimate consequences. Both at the feet of the cross, as when she welcomes the Word of Life and accompanies

him in his mission, Mary for Camillus was the woman of integrity and tenderness, of serenity and solidarity' (*La Spiritualità Camilliana*, P. Virgilio Grandi, Edizioni Camilliane, p. 139).

The singularly Marian character of the spirituality of Camillus is to be found in his practical approach, in his style of life, and in his ministry of caring for the sick. 'The pastoral care in health of Camillus', continues Fr. Ruffini, 'was Marian because in his apostolate and in his catechesis on the sick and in his own brothers and spiritual children there was a constant existential reference to Mary, the mother of the suffering Jesus'. He lived and communicated to others that Mary, the Mother of pain and the Virgin of health, is at the side of a sick man, as she was at Calvary, at the feet of the cross of her son Jesus, so that man can have total salvation by the merits of the blood of the crucified Christ'.

The Marian dimension of St. Camillus has travelled down the centuries to impregnate the life and the ministry of the Order which has not only wanted to invoke Mary as 'Health of the sick' but has also appointed her 'Consolation of the Afflicted', who is present with her love in the painful experience of those who suffer so as to comfort them and support them. Down the centuries many Camillian religious, impregnated with a profound love for Mary, have un-

dergone in their earthly personal experience an intimate filial relationship with her and have spread in the world of pastoral care in health devotion to she who is the star of hope in the mystery of pain and death, a sign of hope in the earthly pilgrimage of sick and suffering man, a loving mother who shares with her son, from the presentation of Jesus in the temple to Calvary, the existential experience of suffering that redeems and saves.

The new Constitution of the Order, at article 68, invites a Minister of the Sick to see in her a model of caring and generous services: 'Mary, the mother of Jesus, faithful in her acceptance of the Word and in her cooperation in his work, especially in her concern for the suffering, presents herself to us as a model of the spiritual life and of service to others. She assists us with her maternal love. Our Order venerates her with singular devotion, devoutly celebrates her feasts, and honours her by praying the rosary. We recognize and love her as our mother and invoke her as "Queen of the Ministers of the Sick". And in the General Statutes (article 32) there is an explicit invitation: 'According to an ancient tradition, we also venerate the Mother of the Saviour with the title 'Health of the Sick'. A few lines but ones dense with Marian theology in harmony with chapter VII of *Lumen Gentium*.

Mary and the Gospel of Suffering

In his apostolic letter *Salvifici doloris*, John Paul II was able in a marvellous way to point out this special presence of Mary at the side of Christ, associated with his work of redemption: 'It is especially consoling to note – and also accurate in accordance with the Gospel and history – that at the side of Christ, in the first and most exalted place, there is always His Mother through the exemplary testimony that she bears *by her whole life* to this particular Gospel of suffering. In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that that were not only a proof of her unshakeable faith but also a contribution to the Redemption of all' (n. 25).

And the Pope relates these moments: from Mary's mission as a mother received from God through the angel Gabriel, passing by way of the events that accompanied the birth of Jesus, the painful announcement of the prophecy of Simon, the worries of the sudden flight to Egypt, and on to the difficult moments of the public life of Jesus which were characterised by incomprehension and rejection shared by her with great sensitivity and above all until Calvary where the suffering of Mary together

with the suffering of Jesus reached a very profound high point from a human point of view, but certainly one that was mysteriously and supernaturally fruitful as regards universal salvation. 'Her ascent of Calvary and her standing at the feet of the cross together with the beloved disciple were a special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her Son. And the words which she heard from His lips were a kind of solemn handing-over of this Gospel of suffering so that it could be proclaimed to the whole community of believers' (*ibidem*).

The people of God has been able to understand down the centuries this special presence of Mary in the life of the Church and to mould it in the various expressions of its devotion.

The above-cited chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* stresses this: 'By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix' (n. 62). In the trials of life, above all in illness, believers have always found in Mary that 'loving mother' who restores to them the meaning of life.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

How does this reflection illuminate this devotion of ours to the Virgin Mary?

A BIBLICAL READING:

Three gospel icons

The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* informs the faithful: 'Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues' (n. 67).

The liturgy of the feast of Mary Health of the Sick places at the foundation of devotion to Mary three gospel passages that represent three icons of her maternal solicitude and care towards those in need.

1. *The Meeting between Mary and Elizabeth* (Luke 1: 39-40)

'Soon afterwards Mary got ready and hurried off to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zachariah's house and greeted Elizabeth'

Mary hurries to begin her journey and to reach Elizabeth's house. She finds Elizabeth in a delicate situation and in need of help. She

bears the mystery of God in her womb, she goes to serve her cousin with solicitude and brings her 'the source of health', Christ the Saviour.

She is comfort and support, she is valuable presence, she is generous help before she was called upon and invoked.

2. *The Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)*

'Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee...When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother went to him and said to him, "They have no wine left". "You must not tell me what to do", Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come". Jesus' mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you"...Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee, there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him'.

Mary realised and saw what others did not see. Once again she anticipated with solicitude the request and was worried about the embarrassing situation that those present were experiencing. Thus Mary opened for Jesus the first experience of intervening to solve the problem of these spouses. She was the 'bridge', the 'mediator', at a difficult moment. She knew that the last word was not hers but her son's. But she knew that son loved her and would not de-

ny her the favour and would help those who were in need. Mary was also the person who would make possible the first sign, the first manifestation of the salvific mission of Jesus.

3. *Next to the cross (John 19:26-27)*

'Jesus saw his mother and the disciple that he loved standing there, so he said to his mother, "He is your son". Then he said to the disciple, "She is your mother", From that time the disciple took her to live in his home'

This is the new motherhood of Mary for believers and for humanity. A motherhood that was born in pain and for those who would live the experience of pain as the limit of human nature. Calvary, which was a place of death, was also a place of life. This new motherhood of Mary, mother in pain, is certainty as regards her loving and caring presence at the side of those who suffer.

LET US REFLECT

What does having and invoking Mary as our 'Mother of Health' mean in our lives and in the lives of those who suffer?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

Camillus felt great devotion to the Most Holy

Virgin. He turned to her in all trust: "In your hand, O Mary, I place every petition of grace that I make to God and I hope for it from you. We poor sinners", he sighed, "if we did not have in heaven this advocate, it being that She is the treasurer of all the graces that come from the hands of God!"

As a grace of Mary, indeed, he understood his conversion on 2 February 1575, the feast of the Purification, which marked the whole of his life.

The foundation of the Ministers of the Sick, after the Crucifix, was seen by Camillus as work of the Most Holy Virgin. From her he received the inspiration in the year 1582 on the feast of the Assumption; at the side of her sanctuary 'The Virgin of Miracles'.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

Is my devotion to Mary 'only sentimentalism' or is it an 'expression of faith' well rooted in the Word of God?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Mary, Virgin of the Magnificat,
You went to help Elizabeth,
Give us a humble and generous heart

To welcome and serve every human life.
Make us courageous in defending life,
Tireless in promoting its value,
Wise and passionate in educating young
People to live it.
Mary, Health of the sick,
Visit and comfort our pains
And teach us to hope in your Son,
Who was crucified and rose again
For our salvation.
Amen.

(Prayer for the World Day of the Sick 2009)

CHAPTER XII

THE EUCHARIST: THE SACRAMENT OF CHARITY

The Institution of the Eucharist

On the eve of his passion, during the celebration of Passover, to express the total devotion of his life to love alone, Jesus engaged in two gestures: the washing of the feet of his disciples and the institution of the Eucharist.

Jesus had a strong wish and it was to manifest all his love: "I have wanted so much to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).

And during the paschal supper Jesus, foreseeing his passion and death, handed over his life. Offering the bread and wine, he said: "this is my body which is given for you...this cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19-20).

The body that is given and the blood that is poured are Jesus who offers himself in sacrifice for us, freely and out of love.

Jesus adds "take and eat, take and drink". Jesus, in the very act of offering himself, gives himself to all of us as food and drink to enter into communion with us, and by this he wants

to communicate to us his life and his love.

Eucharistic life does not involve only the celebration or adoration of the Eucharist, it also consists in filling ourselves with divine life, with divine mercy, so that our lives are lived in union with he who gave himself to us for love.

In the Eucharist the Lord makes himself one with us because we live in him and like him in our daily lives, our relationships, our work, and our apostleship. Communion with the Lord fills us with his feelings, with his attitudes, in particular his love of mercy, and he steadily transforms us into merciful people.

At the end of the celebration of the Eucharist, after *communion* comes *mission*: we are invited to irradiate what we have celebrated, lived and experienced. When we irradiate his presence and his love we are living a Eucharistic life. Every celebration and adoration of the Eucharist must be an encounter with the Risen Christ, who transmits to us his divine life, who touches us, forgives us, frees us, heals us, increasingly configures us to him and makes us witnesses to his mercy.

The Washing of the Feet

For these who consecrate themselves to an apostolate of mercy, the gesture of service that Jesus engaged in during the last supper – the

washing of his disciples' feet – takes on a special significance.

Jesus engaged in this gesture moved by the fire of love, 'he loved them until the end' declares John the evangelist, and to manifest this extreme love he lowered himself and made himself a servant. Jesus put into practice his words "I have not come to be served but to serve and to give life". Jesus, who is the Teacher and Lord, made himself the Servant of everyone.

In this most humble gesture he revealed his deepest identity: Jesus is the Son of God, he reveals God to us, because God is love, and love is humble, love is serving, and love gives itself fully.

The Eucharistic encounter with the Risen Christ is the privileged setting in which divine tenderness offers itself to us according to our needs: we must only receive it, welcome it into our hearts.

As we gradually accept being served by the Lord, we learn to serve other people as he does. Then the love and tenderness that we receive and experience we begin to irradiate and offer in the smallest gestures of life of daily life. Thus we make ourselves witnesses to his mercy, and we will allow him to continue in his mystery of love.

The Eucharist as a Sacrament of Healing

In time of illnesses what does taking part in the celebration of the Eucharist mean? The greater our faithfulness to the Eucharistic Mystery, the greater our creative response to being and fulfilling the vocation to which we have been called, above all in difficult moments when we feel weighed down because of our condition of illness.

To celebrate the Eucharist faithfully, actualising the mystery instituted by Christ at the last supper, leads us to respond with creativity in our Christian lives. The Eucharist as the table of life, communication and healing presents itself to us as a giver of meaning, the bearer of life, the architect of communion and the cause of healing.

The celebration of the Eucharist actualises the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Words on the bread and the chalice remind us of the words and the attitudes of Jesus during the last supper. They are words that capture the whole of the life of Jesus, what Jesus was and what he did. Which for us, as well, today capture what we are and what we are called to be.

The last supper was the full expression of the whole of the life of Jesus given to others, a life given from and in mercy; an existence given to patient service.

Jesus consumed himself for others. The celebration of the Eucharist makes present in us now the presence of Jesus: bread of life, a life given and offered. Jesus Christ is the bread of life (John (Giovanni) 6).

It is to the utmost the sacrament which is the 'source and collimation of the whole of liturgical life', the centre of the Christian community and of its mission. The Second Vatican Council stated: 'In breaking the Eucharistic bread, we truly participate in the body of Christ, we enter in communion with Him and with our brethren'.

In the Eucharist we receive the gift of the Spirit and we are inserted into the paschal dynamism of death and resurrection.

A sick person is a living memory of the Passover of the Lord; the Spirit infuses strength so that the sick person makes of his or her suffering a trusting supplication to the Father and transforms his or her condition of illness into a setting of the manifestation of the Passover of the Lord.

'The Eucharist, although it is not the specific sacrament of illness, has a close relationship with it. First of all because the sick person, who is already living in the faith of the incorporation of his illness in the Passion of Christ, may have the desire to celebrate it as a sacrament. Secondly, because the Eucharist will be of use so that the sick person, tempted to close himself

up selfishly in himself, discovers the meaning of total communion with God and with the men that Christ gave to life' (Ritual of Anointing, n. 63).

A sick person, because of the fracture and the division that his or her illnesses provoke in him or her, hungers for communion. Whereas the illness tends to close him or her up in himself or herself, the Eucharist helps him or her to open himself or herself and to enter into communion with other people.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

How does this reflection illuminate our celebration of the Eucharist?

A BIBLICAL READING: (John 13:3-5)

'Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel round his waist. Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel round his waist'.

LET US REFLECT

What relationship do you find between the washing of the feet and service to the suffering?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

The Eucharistic piety of Camillus was also manifested, after his conversion, towards Holy Communion. As regards the receiving of the Holy Sacraments he attended Holy Communion as often as was allowed at that time, that is to say twice a week. He established frequent Holy Communion for sick people as well, especially in hospitals. This practice of piety acquired admirable development due to the zeal and burning love of Camillus.

The ceremony took place on the first Sunday of every month. The previous afternoon he prepared the patients and the staff of the hospital with confession, he made the beds, the wards and refectories were opened and decorated, and a priest celebrated Holy Mass. In the morning the clothes of the patients were changed and Camillus before and after Holy Communion went to the priest to ensure that each patient received Holy Communion in the best way possible.

The Eucharist was at the centre of the piety of Camillus. Its celebration was his first and most important job of the day. Often he stayed

behind in adoration before the Most Holy Sacrament. And during the night, in particular, he stood praying in front of the tabernacle before going to the hospital or after coming back from it.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

What does the Eucharist mean for me, a member of the LCF?

The example of Camillus enables us to understand why the Eucharist is so important in living our charism: placing ourselves in communion with Jesus, we increasingly configure ourselves to him in his giving of himself to the Father and his brethren, and we receive his Spirit of charity that leads us to live like him and to give ourselves like him to other people.

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Lord Jesus, one day you said:
"I have pity on this crowd"
Your words express a goodness
That welcomes every man.
They go beyond the boundaries of place,
The limits of time, the circumstances of the
People who are present.
You, then, helped that people,
Feeding them with the bread

That was multiplied.
Today you repeat that gesture,
Distributing the bread of the Eucharist.
The bread that was given to that crowd
Was to be the sustenance to return to
Their homes in faraway villages.
You, today, present to man yourself,
The living bread descended from heaven
For the nourishment of souls
In pilgrimage towards heavenly Jerusalem.
We need your bread, O Lord,
Bread that gives strength to go on walking,
Like Elijah in the desert,
Like the hungry crowd in Palestine,
Like the saints of all epochs.
With this holy bread of yours,
We will face all difficulties,
We will avoid all dangers,
We will defeat all evil,
And life will grow resplendent
Like a tree by a river.
Stop, today, Lord, at our table,
Break your bread given for man,
Because the evening is always near
And dusk arrives at the end of every day.

CHAPTER XIII

PRAYER: AN ENCOUNTER OF LOVE

Nothing in the Gospel reveals better the need for prayer than the place that it occupies in the life of Jesus. He prayed frequently on mountains, during the day, and when he went from village to village he praised his Father with his apostles, saying and singing psalms. Jesus had an intense life of prayer.

But the prayer of Jesus was not confined only to a desire for silent intimacy with the Father: it was connected with his mission and this is to be seen in the forty days when he prepared himself with prayer and fasting at the beginning of his mission.

Prayer is at the centre of spiritual life and the point where God through the Holy Spirit communicates with us. This means that through prayer we can converse, speak, and dialogue with God.

Prayer is the instrument that makes possible the encounter and the experience of love and friendship with the Father, for Jesus Christ, in the Spirit.

Prayer is the proof that a man of faith truly believes, he feels saved and lives this salvation. It is the first expression and the most

characteristic expression of his faith, his relationship with the salvific project of God. One prays beginning with experience, with remembering, with what arrives and what we live today, and so that something will arrive to ensure that the salvation of God is fully actuated in people.

Prayer should be united to the divine will that is carried out in mission. All the supplications that are expressed concern the Kingdom of God that is being achieved.

Through prayer we work for the coming of the Kingdom. In prayer we become integrated into what we call for; we participate in the same wish of God. This, far from being an evasion from a more precise commitment, requires our prayer to be more honest.

Prayer carried out in this way is increasingly effective, given that it coincides with the will of God. Prayer is above all else a desire for the Kingdom of God and inasmuch as our active participation is directed towards this Kingdom becoming a reality, it is an anticipation of the Kingdom because it wants God to be everything in everybody.

In prayer we express our weaknesses and our poverty, and it is an opportunity to declare and demonstrate to God our love.

St. Paul throws the right light on the role of the Spirit in prayer which unites us to the very

life of God. But he who makes us pray for Christ in his name is specifically the Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 8:15).

‘To show that you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who cries out “Father, my Father”’ (Gal 4:6).

And it is the same Spirit that gives us the certainty that we will reach these depths from where God calls us, and these are the depths of charity. We know how we should call this gift which is at the beginning and the end of prayer. It is the Spirit of love that we have already received (Rom 5:5ss) and which, notwithstanding this, we call (Lk 11:13). In him we call for a new world and we are certain that we will be heard. In him all prayer is the opposite of an escape from reality.

Prayer is a dialogue of love and the answer to it is also an integral part of prayer. God cannot speak with us if we do not answer. God cannot engage in dialogue if we are internally deaf and dumb. He awaits our answer, which consists above all else of sharing our lives and our feelings. We tell Him what we are living, not to make Him know things that He already knows but, rather, to nourish our relationship with Him and to increase communion, to make ourselves feel listened to and loved in what we live and in what we are, and to engage in the

experience of being steadily transformed by Him. We present to Him our needs and we ask for His help. Prayer involving a request is important because it makes us aware that we are in need.

Prayer is an encounter of love. In this encounter there is dialogue in which the most important thing for the person who is praying is to listen. *To pray is to listen* to He who says to us “my beloved son, my beloved daughter”. It is God who loved us for first and it is He who chose us and not we who chose Him (John 15:16). This means that prayer is a gift, a gift of God. God comes to our encounter with love. There God is present.

To pray is first of all to listen to the Presence that dwells in us and ‘to allow the whole of our being to be sated with this first love’ (H.Nouwen).

A lack of prayer demonstrates a lack of faith and a lack of trust in the Word of God. We pray to demonstrate our faith in God, certain that He will do what He promised in his words and that He will bless our life in abundance in a way greater than we could expect (Ephesians 3:20).

Prayer is our principal means by which to see the work of God in the lives of other people.

Jesus says to us: “When you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father

who is unseen” (Matthew 6:6). To go into your room means to enter your heart. Given that prayer is an encounter of love, *a person’s heart is specifically the place of this encounter*. Our hearts are the centre of our being. God lives there permanently and is waiting for us there.

This is spoken about in the prophet Hosea: ‘So I am going to take her into the desert again; there I will win her back with words of love’ (Hosea 2:14).

‘The important thing in prayer’, says St. Teresa of Jesus, ‘is not think much but to love much’ (*Il Castello Interiore, quarta dimora*, chapter 1). Thus prayer comes to be a dialogue of love, a heart-to-heart encounter.

We pray to a personal, living, present God who loves us. We pray to God who has revealed Himself and is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and who dwells inside us. *The ultimate foundation of prayer is the habitation of the Trinity inside us*. We pray to Jesus who leads us to the Father. We go to the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh who rose again, occupies a central place in prayer, whose purpose is our conformation with him, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, so that we may live as children our relationship with the Father.

Prayer, an encounter of love, involves, there-

fore, looking at Jesus, listening to him, welcoming him so as to allow ourselves to be transformed by him and to become increasingly in his image. When we look at Jesus who loves us, the best part of us reawakens, the divine being of our being, which lives in us through the creative act, because we were created in him (Ephesians 2:10).

Our profound aspirations and our potentialities have kinship with Jesus. In particular mercy, which we feel as an existential need: we discover it, we identify it and we explore it in an encounter of love with Jesus.

Praying with and for the Sick

Prayer is a source for facing up to suffering. When we are sick it is not difficult to pray, at least with the formulas that are repetitive, because prayer for those who suffer is a channel that permits a sick person to live the mystery of his or her weakness. Prayer strengthens and gives comfort to a sick person in his or her struggle against suffering and illness.

It is important to discover and promote the value of prayer 'with' and 'for' sick people. In prayer is manifested not only our faith but also the 'faith of the Church' which, to paraphrase the valuable passage from Matthew, could say: "I was ill and you prayed with me" (Matthew

25:33).

The prayer of a sick person has in addition its own characteristic which reflects the condition that he or she is living: he or she passes from questioning to praise, from abandonment to communion, from anxiety to peace, and from complaint to trust.

All of these feelings can be lived and expressed in a whole variety of ways.

The prayer of trust

People who have suffered a grave and long illness often feel defenceless, confronted with their own destiny, orphans, abandoned.

We know, however, that in this situation as well we can experience the trust, the presence and the tenderness of God.

The prayer of supplication

The prayer of supplication is the prayer that arises most spontaneously on the lips of sick people, above all during the harshest moments of illness. At times it is expressed with a cry of desperation, in a sequence of questions without answers, in an accusation that almost comes to be an offence...

The prayer of people who suffer in these cases is full of affliction, of doubts, and of rebukes.

The prayer of acceptance

This prayer is the outcome of supplication. Faced with an irremediable fact, with deterioration, with the drawing near of death, we have no other alternative than that of opening our eyes, recognising and accepting reality, our frailty and our limitations, and taking upon ourselves what will happen.

The prayer of acceptance is a prayer of maturity and wisdom, specific to those who know to locate themselves in the face of reality and to acknowledge that they are finite creatures.

The prayer of abandonment

The prayer of abandonment is an act of love for God, for life, for other people, and for ourselves.

In abandonment and self-giving a person reaches a capacity to love to the point of forgetting himself or herself. In this way true life is manifested.

The prayer of contemplation of the cross

The prayer to the God of the cross expresses pain, loneliness, abandonment, compassion and mercy. To the worshipped and contemplated cross we ask for the nearness and presence of the Crucified Christ.

A sick person prays to the crucified God so that he or she receives strength, so that his or her pathway is illuminated, and above all so that he or she is helped to find a meaning to his

or her suffering. When looking at and contemplating the cross we become amazed, speechless; in it we find relief, comfort, peace and calm.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

How does this reflection illuminate our way of praying?

A BIBLICAL READING (Matthew 6:5-13)

‘When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to you Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you...

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven:

May your holy name be honoured;

May your kingdom come;

May your will be done on earth

As it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need.

Forgive us the wrongs we have done,

As we forgive the wrongs that others
Have done to us.
Do not bring us to hard testing,
But keep us safe from the Evil One.

“If you forgive others the wrongs they
have done to you, your Father in heaven
will also forgive you. But if you do not
forgive others, then your Father will not
forgive the wrongs you have done”.

LET US REFLECT

What does Jesus tell us about prayer?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

St. Camillus spoke about prayer as a daily practice, He himself dedicated himself to contemplative prayer to the point of having mystical phenomena involving ecstasy. But he put prayer in its rightful place. He made understood what had to be the role of prayer in a life consecrated to works of charity when he said that “piety that cuts the arms of charity and makes men of lead is not good”. In contrary fashion: prayer had to lead us to put “more heart in our hands”. The function of prayer is to unite us with Jesus to the point of identifying us with him and acting with him – the healer, the Good Samaritan.

All of these words of Camillus which perhaps may appear to us strong and specific to a man of action are, rather, the words of a man of profound prayer who invites us to constant self-criticism in order to verify the authenticity of our prayer which should always be translated into works of charity.

When prayer does not obtain these results, it cannot be authentic. During the epoch of Camillus as well there were very pious men who consecrated themselves to an intimistic union with God but they forgot about other people. And Camillus said: 'I do not like this union...Anyway it is high perfection, as long as we have time to do good to the poor...and leave God for God. Leave God whom we find in prayer in order to find and serve God in the poor and the suffering'.

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

What is the place of prayer in our lives as members of the LCF?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Great merciful God, I, too, very often,
Use many words in prayer
And do not step to listen.

I often ask for favours, without being aware
That I should first thank you for having been
Inundated with gifts, amongst which
Your love takes pride of place.
I err in asking you for little things
Rather than imploring the stupendous
Grace of taking part in your life itself.
I do not ask you to reveal your name to me,
Because I see it written everywhere,
Every time that I grant myself the privilege
Of creating silence, to reduce my activities,
To placate my troubled heart.
I do not ask the revelation of your Name,
But your blessing, using the words of the
blessed Solomon, who when asked by you
To request anything he wanted,
Implored neither goods or material wealth,
But was satisfied with being able to invoke:
"Make me participate in your wisdom:
Lord, give me a heart that listens".
(B. Haring)

CHAPTER XIV

THE SICK EVANGELISE US

It is usually believed that the sick and the elderly are people who can only receive from other people, that they do not give and cannot give anything useful to the Christian community and to society.

This idea sets to one side and marginalise those who do not 'produce' and is the result of the mentality based on efficiency, productivity and consumption that reigns in modern society.

The sick and the elderly can truly offer to the community a rich and valuable contribution. They are seen as poor and in need of everything because they lack health and cannot engage in any activity. But specifically beginning with their condition of poverty and apparent uselessness, they can offer, communicate and transmit great human and Christian values that constitute wealth for the social and religious community.

St. Paul says that Jesus 'rich as he was, made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty' (2 Cor 8:9). One may say the same about sick people and the elderly.

At a Human Level:

. *The contextualisation of things:* illness makes us contextualise things and above all wealth, power, titles and prestige.

. *Realism as regards life.* Pain and illnesses bring realism to a world that is happily consumerist and which frequently lives by fragile and transient illusions.

. *The humanisation of pain.* Suffering borne with serenity and peace is humanising. A sick person shows us that 'being a person' is more important than 'having things', that the 'culture of being' is more important than the 'culture of having'.

. *It reminds us of the reality of human life subjected to limitations and illnesses:* being often forced to depend on other people. The sick and the elderly who live the experience of human limitation break the myths and the illusions created by prosperity, by efficiency, by ambition and by power.

. *The sick invite us to rediscover values that are in crisis today:* humanity in the face of human frailty; patience in addressing difficulties that are at times painful; solidarity towards and care for the needs of our brothers and sisters; and defeating one's own selfishness.

. *They expand the horizon of other people* through the patrimony of their experience of life: they illuminate where there is doubt; they animate in hours of trial or misfortune; they strengthen qualities and capacities; they invite us to persevere.

. *They offer the gift of a tradition.* The elderly in particular transmit to the young generations the vitality of the past as a gift, experienced by them in the present to be transmitted to the future.

A sick person is a person who fights for life, the greatest gift of God. Faced with the mystery of pain and death, envy, selfishness and hatred disturb us. What really counts is goodness, solidarity, and in definitive terms, love.

. *They remind us of the transcendence of human life* and of the Kingdom of God. Illness and old age are signs of our journeying and our exodus towards the eternal homeland. We are transitory citizens in this world and pilgrims on a journey towards the goal of heaven. The sick and the elderly are a symbol of humanity on a pilgrimage towards God.

. *They help us to address the reality of death.* Contemporary culture and civilisation try to distance and mask the reality of death. The sick and the elderly remind us of our

mortal condition and help us to reconcile ourselves with 'our sister' death.

. *They bear witness to us that the cross and pain are a part of life* and can have their fruitfulness in the light of the redemptive suffering of Christ.

. *They generate feelings of Christian hope.* Resurrection and life infuse in them serenity and peace because they know that the best is to come given that 'when this tent we live in – our body here on earth – is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, which will last for ever' (2 Cor 5:1). This serenity and this peace are the best and most credible testimony to the hope that does not disappoint.

LET US ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

Sharing an encounter experienced with a sick or elderly person:

. *What values have they communicated to us?*

. *What questions have they left for our lives?*

A BIBLICAL READING: (Matthew 8:5-13)

‘When Jesus entered Capernaum, a Roman officer met him and begged him for help. “Sir, my servant is sick in bed at home, unable to move and suffering terribly”. “I will go and make him well”, Jesus said. “Oh, no sir, answered the officer, “I do not deserve you to have you come into my house. Just give the order, and my servant will get well. I, too, am a man under the authority of superior officers, and I have soldiers under me. I order that this one ‘Go!’ and he goes; and I order that one ‘Come!’ and he comes; and I order my slave ‘Do this!’ and he does it”. When Jesus heard this, he was surprised and said to the people following him, “I tell you, I have never found anyone in Israel with faith like this. I assure that many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast of the Kingdom of heaven. But those who should be in the Kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness, where they will cry and grind their teeth. Then Jesus said to the officer, “Go home, and what you believe will be done for you”. And the officer’s servant was healed that very moment.

LET US REFLECT

. What does the attitude of the Roman officer suggest to you?

. How does the attitude of Jesus call on us and illuminate us?

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. CAMILLUS

For Camillus, a sick person was not only a creature equal to us to be treated with the love of a mother but also a superior being: ‘the sick are our lords and masters and we must serve them as servants and slaves’.

Ever since the beginning of the Company, when St. Camillus discussed with his companions the name that should be given to the Company, ‘moved by their great charity towards the sick whom they saw as their lords and masters, they had almost decided to call themselves the servants of the sick’.

These are our masters, our saint said to his religious, pointing to the sick, we love them tenderly (Brother Roncalli)

“You are my lord”, answered our saint to a sick man who asked for a work of charity, “and I have no greater consolation than to serve you”.

“Father, come to sleep. You are worn out”, a patient suggested to Camillus. “Brother”, the

saint answered him, "I am your slave and I should be here to serve you".

When writing and speaking, at every moment he remembered the poor and the sick, preferring phrases such as 'our lords and masters' or even 'Son of God', 'Limbs of Jesus Christ'. On seeing God in a sick person, He became clearer, more luminous, more burning in the eyes and heart of our saint. "Father and my brethren", he often repeated to his religious, "let us look at the poor and the sick that we serve; one day they will make us see the face of the Lord".

LET US LOOK AT OUR LIVES

Who are the sick for us?

What have they taught us in our pastoral encounters?

FROM REFLECTION TO PRAYER

Lord Jesus, who in your life on this earth always demonstrated an affection full of understanding for the sick, turn your gaze to us who, although in suffering, profess to believe in your Love.

We offer you our maladies and our suffering so that you make the light of faith shine on those who have lost faith, restore your grace to those who have dissipated it.

Lord Jesus, we ask you to unite to the pain
of your passion the pain of our illnesses so
that all men can experience the goodness of
the Father and live by your peace.
(Paul VI)