

*CHAPLAINS MEETING IN ROME*  
**LA DIMENSIONE PROFETICA DEL CHARISMA NEL MONDO DELLA SALUTE**  
**THE PROPHETIC DIMENSION OF OUR CHARISM IN THE WORLD**  
**OF HEALTHCARE**

1. Most hospital chaplains know their job and how to go about it. Most of us know that we could and should be much better at what we are doing, and that we can always learn more and be enriched by new insights. You cannot be taught how to be a hospital chaplain, but you most certainly can be helped to be a more effective one through greater self-knowledge and knowledge of the human sciences. However, it is important that we don't become too engrossed too engrossed in theory and in the process lose contact/touch with the stress and trauma encountered at the coalface of an ever changing hospital ministry.

I believe that these days together should be characterised by sharing honestly the reality, the difficulties, challenges and what exactly it is that helps us to keep going. So I hope that I can be authentic in this presentation, as I reflect on my own life, and my motivation in the light of the reality I see around me at this moment in the history of the Order and of my own wee province, and my personal response to it all.

2. I see before me chaplains from the four corners of the world. And as I look out at you I am very aware that the reality of chaplaincy ministry as exercised in Africa, South America or Asia is light years away from that of Europe and North America. I am sure that this issue will surface strongly in the group work and perhaps in other presentations. What unites us all however, is that **our Camillian Charism has to be the driving force for all of us** as we seek to meet the challenges presented to us by the diverse cultural surroundings in which we work. Our charism is one of our main sources of motivation for doing what we do and never changes. How we express that charism will be constantly changing depending on the reality we have to encounter. Values don't change while structures must, and our charism is one of our central values.
3. **I am called to be prophetic where I am planted.** Yes, the charism will find various different expressions because of the reality of the environment in which we have to minister, but the source of our motivation will be our charism. And I need to remember that by the very nature of my religious profession I am called to be prophetic.
4. **Motivation is of paramount importance if we are to be prophetic.** We should never lose sight of the fact that our ministry must always have a strong evangelising dimension, which if missing means we are not doing our work, that we are no longer in mission. We should always be on guard against losing our sense of mission as "*when we are clear about the why we can face any how*" (V. Frankl). This happens when our identity and motivation are clear. The fact that we are involved in pastoral activity does not of itself mean we are involved in ministry. We are involved in ministry "*when both our lives and our actions spontaneously indicate and promote the Kingdom of God*" (M. Amalodoes).

If we are true to our charism our ministry will always have an evangelising dimension. So a very pertinent question for all of us is to ask ourselves just how alive is that charism for each one of us right now? Do we burn inside like Camillus?

The healthcare world offers us enormous possibilities for evangelisation. More people pass through the doors of a hospital in a day than through the doors of a Church in a week. No one escapes being hospitalised or of having to visit somebody who is there. Did Camillus not see the hospital as "*the mystical vineyard of the Lord*" where the "*sick are our Lords and masters*"

5. I believe that the greatest challenge facing us as Christian people, **especially in the western world lies** in the area of faith. Our challenge lies in our ability and willingness to face an uncertain future with joy. Only the other day the Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Martin, remarked that *“faith is now a foreign language”*. What a challenge for chaplaincy ministry where the traditional language of sacrifice, suffering, the cross, trust in God, the Our Father, are fast becoming for people mere words in a dictionary which needs consultation to be understood. Only a short few years ago all the patients and staff with whom I was called to work came from the main line Christian Churches, I now find myself confronted by all beliefs and none (well over a 100). In such an environment our Christian future would appear to be more uncertain than ever. Are we men and women of Christian hope, who are prepared to continue doing what we do because it is the right thing to do, independent of the consequences, without looking for results? This is part of being prophetic.

I look at secularised Europe today and I ask myself: Is there anything which is still considered as sacred? Are we still capable of wonder? What exactly touches us deeply? Is there something there that can lift our spirit? **And this is the reality in which I am called to be prophetic.** If we are to be prophetic it has helped me if I distinguish Secularism and Secularisation.

Michael Paul Gallagher describes **secularism** as a way of perceiving the world in which there is no room for the transcendent, the divine, the supernatural. We can say that God is missing and his absence is not felt.

**Secularisation** however is a life process through which life, at a personal and social level is freed from the detailed control of religion, while it still remains, in great part illumined and guided by faith. **Secularisation wants its own autonomy but not necessarily its independence.** Secularisation is not necessarily, he maintains, the enemy of discipleship, nor of the Christian mission.

**Christians respond in many different ways to a secularised world:**

1) There are those of us who respond in anger or with hostility. This type of response is often based on fear and uses a language that is very negative and which has little to do with Christianity;

2) Others reply with a certain thoughtless liberalism that is a bit ingenuous, in which everything is accepted without criticism or reflection. This is another way of stating that Christianity has nothing to say or contribute, and so we might ask **what happens to the prophetic voice of the church.** If one culture is the equal of another then there is no further need of discernment.

3) But the prophetic way I would suggest is that of St. Paul (Acts 17.16). Initially Paul was disgusted with the attitudes of the people in Athens, but then he showed a capacity to see and recognised their hunger for spiritual and genuine religious values. If we treat contemporary culture with disgust, we are engaging in a futile exercise that is very mistaken.

Most people still have very broad spiritual values and this is a point of connection, an opening for discussion and interaction. Try to help them discover what it is that connects for them. What it is that gives meaning to this moment of their life. We invest a great part of our lives in work. Hence the way we regard work is of the greatest importance. **If our work has meaning it becomes a blessing.** But if it has no meaning or little meaning it becomes a curse.

I believe that **it is not death that frightens people but rather life without meaning.** The famous painter, Vincent Van Gough, searched for what he wanted to do with his life and discovered that he wanted to be a painter. From that day on his life changed. It wasn't that it suddenly became easier, in fact you might say that the opposite was the case, but he would say: *“I am rich not in money but because I have found in my work something to which I can devote myself heart and soul and it gives meaning and inspiration to my life”*

6. The Holy Father's repeated exhortation to "***not be afraid to show tenderness***" is quite inspirational and very prophetic: Tenderness is mercy, delicacy, joy, grace, wonder. "*Only tenderness will change the world*".

Baptism is not just a gift of salvation but is also a call to ministry. We are all called by our baptism to evangelise. We through our public profession of vows step forward and proclaim ourselves open to answering that baptismal call, to taking it on board. We must ask ourselves whether in our ministry we are involved in a maintenance exercise or whether we have a sense of mission.. By maintenance I mean an attitude of simply keeping the boat afloat, a safe pair of hands, or "*of keeping the ball kicked out*" as one of our Irish bishops would say.

By maintenance I have in mind staying close to the converted and saved, while avoiding the deluded and those who find the Church discouraging and unwelcoming, and we find loads of these in our hospitals, hospices and nursing homes. It is very tempting and very easy to drift into a cosy life style and conveniently forget about going the extra half mile. "Mefeinism" (looking after number one/myself) is quite healthy where I come from. We are afraid to be prophetic, to say what needs to be said and to do what needs to be done, and so we settle conveniently into our comfort zone.

7. Camillus before the crucifix discovered that on his own he did not do so well, that he was becoming discouraged – he needed likeminded spirits. "*Self knows that self is not enough*". (Brendan Kennelly). "*No man is an island entire unto himself*" (John Donne). Hope cannot be sustained simply by our own will. Hope is something we need to hear from outside ourselves sometimes. As Susan McEvoy says, "*just as the fire needs the help of a branch to grow its warmth, we need a voice sometimes, or a sight, or visitor, to fan the flicker of our hearts when faith grows dim*". We need one another

**What does it mean to be prophetic today?** Is it foretelling the future or having the courage to tell forth what needs to be said to a audience that would prefer not to hear/ To me it means meeting the real needs of today and applying the charism as an evangelising tool in today's situations To do this we need to be fired with the spirit of St. Camillus

8. **What is this Charism that we have to apply to the reality of today?** It is important to remember in the case of someone like Camillus that as a founder of a religious organisation he received a gift from God: "*the Charism of the Founder is an experience of the Spirit, transmitted to the disciples to be lived, guarded and constantly developed in harmony with the body of Christ in constant growth*". (MR no.11).

I believe that through our religious profession as Camillians we too receive that same gift from God that Camillus received, and we are commissioned to go out and be faithful to the living of that experience as envisaged by Camillus. We do this by constantly developing it so as to meet the needs of the sick and vulnerable in the age in which we live. That means today. We have to exercise it in the reality of today's world and avoid engaging in a nostalgic longing for doing what Camillus did.

Because his was an *Experience of the Spirit* it means it came from God and it brought something new. It is not easy to get to know a founder because we are confronted by the mystery of God. Camillus was an instrument of God. Founders were invariable radical but not rebels. They were not afraid to challenge the status quo but they always do so with humility. e.g.. *Mother Teresa v Mons Leferbre ; Scillibex v Boff*

Because it is an experience of the Spirit there will always be a certain tension between the Institution and the movement of the Spirit. This is something positive as the charismatic and

institutional need each other. Perhaps we don't disturb our top brass enough, and worse still we stifle the Spirit working through us by becoming "yes" men

This gift that Camillus received from God is the source of our spirituality (the font from which we drink). When a Camillian ceases to burn with enthusiasm for this gift passed on to us by Camillus he is in trouble with his Camillian vocation. **The Church needs these experiences of the Spirit** because the people of God cannot survive without the hand of God on the tiller. The gift given to the like of Camillus is for the benefit of the building of the mystical Body of Christ.

The Charism will always be judged on its usefulness, or lack of it, to the community – the more useful the more important. According to Rahner this charismatic dimension is as important to the Church as the sacraments and the ministry. **The Church needs religious life. The church needs our charism as it is a gift from God to his people**

Our faith in Jesus and our charism are the main sources of our spirituality or our prophetic living. If we aspire to Camillian spirituality we need to know Camillus De Lellis, both the man and the founder touched by the Spirit.

NB Camillus gift to the church was to restore the merciful love of Christ for the sick to the central role it occupied in the life and teaching of Jesus as this had been lost sight of. Healing you might even say was suspect in the church's promulgation of the Message.

Camillus was unique and quite inspired in understanding and perceiving how Jesus had raised the bar for all carers by making Himself the object of our care ("As often as you do it to the least of these brothers of mine you do it to me" Mt 25.40).

Camillus' unique insight was to see Jesus as the direct object of his care, and he would take this to the point of seeing Jesus in the sick and confessing to them; *"in order to exercise our ministry fruitfully we strive to understand ever more intimately the mystery of Christ and to cultivate a personal friendship with him. 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. In the presence of Christ in the sick and in those who serve them in His name, we find the source of our spirituality"*. (Cons. 13). This is the core of our being prophetic

9. When I speak of charism I am talking of burning, of being consumed by doing good for the sick. **Spirituality** will be how I express that in the reality of my life. When I speak of spirituality I am specifically concerned with the relational and personal dimensions of the human person as he/she relates to God, to the Divine. Spirituality is not about discussing theories, principles or moral dogma. **Spirituality is the most dynamic theological discipline** as it deals with how we actually live, move and have our being, rather than the theory of it.

The discipline of spirituality has developed out of moral theology's concern for the agenda of human living. On the one hand there is what I believe (what the theologians call the "**credenda**"), and then there is what I do with what I say I believe (this they call the "**agenda**"). For this reason spirituality is the most dynamic and concrete discipline of theology as it covers or deals with the reality of life.

Is the gap between the faith we profess and our daily lives not one of the great dichotomies of modern Christians living? (The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World No. 43). Is the closing of that gap not one of our greatest challenges as Christians? We might paraphrase Pope Benedict and ask whether *our Charism is a life-giving and sustaining hope? Is the message of our charism a message which shapes our lives in a new way, or is it just*

*'information', which in the meantime, we have set aside and now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information? (Spe Salvi).*

It is important to clarify from the beginning that, there is only one, basic, Christian spirituality. Spirituality is our response to the Christian call lived with a particular tone or nuance. Since Camillus set in motion a *"new school of charity"* and had *"a real experience of the Spirit"* it is natural that following the Camillian way has meant the development of our own specific spirituality with its own particular hues and tones.

## **II So what should I look for in Camillian spirituality?**

- 1) The starting point of Camillian spirituality must be: **I'm a sinner who is loved by God.** If I am convinced of this then I must proclaim to the people by word and deed. This gave Camillus a total acceptance of the sick and vulnerable where they were at rather than where he might like to find them. It could be useful to reflect on the effect a conviction like this will or might have on your ministry. Camillus never forgot his own unworthiness and how merciful God was to him. I love Pope Francis response to the question: "who is Jorge Bergolio?"....."A sinner but called"
- 2) Camillian spirituality is that of the **workplace of the healthcare community** and is expressed in the ordinary: *"ordinary things wear beautiful wings"* (Seamus Heaney). It is the spirituality of the **ordinary**, of the everyday which shows an appreciation of and gratitude for everything and every person around about us. I feel it suits me as it is very much in tune with Celtic spirituality which is based on an awareness of God in everything and everybody. We know we have embraced Camillian spirituality and that the dawn has come for us when we can look into the face of any man or woman and see our brother or sister. Ours is a lifelong process of intimacy not only with God but with humanity in the sick, the abandoned, the poor, the neglected or abused. **Camillian spirituality is nothing if it is not incarnational**, and must be made flesh in the world where we live, in the world of healthcare.
- 3) Camillian spirituality challenges us to decipher God's presence in the signs of the times: in the happenings, needs, and desires in which the people have a part with other people of our age. We proclaim what we see by our lives, by our actions, by our words.
- 4) I often think that a Camillian definition of atheism might be the loss of contact with humanity rather than a rejection of God. We as Camillians, rather than struggle to keep at a high level our commitment to the sick, discover that it is precisely this commitment to the sick that sustains us; Surely this is a prophetic insight. Mother Theresa of Calcutta put it rather beautifully when she said that *"we heal through contagious humanity"*. In other words, it is compassion that heals. It is the sick who keep us on the right path and are our real teachers. Each sick person is an unopened book from which we have much to learn.
- 5) St. Camillus had to discover God and then his neighbour, and the more he discovered his brothers and sisters the closer he came to God, desiring to know this God more intimately, and to then show the genuineness of his love for Him by serving Him in the least of his brethren. Dostoevsky, in his book, *The Brothers Karamazov* describes the atheist as one who has lost contact with his fellow human beings. Ivan, the elder brother is incapable of love. This is an important intuition for our service as Christian carers and for living in the spirit of Camillus De Lellis.
- 6) Camillian spirituality demands that we have a **sense of mission and Collaboration** – we believe that more is accomplished that is worthwhile when done together. In this light the

involvement of the laity with our religious is of paramount importance. Camillus began his Christian ministry as a layman and set out immediately after the founding of the Order to assure that the lay dimension and collaboration was not lost sight of.

We must remember that Camillus before the crucifix discovered that on his own he did not do so well, that he was becoming discouraged – he needed likeminded spirits.

- 7) When we speak of Camillian spirituality we are dealing with **adult Christianity** – it is about taking our beliefs, making them our own and living them in a specific way and in specific settings – it is about fostering psychological and spiritual maturity. Being a saint does not mean being called to live as the greats of long ago, but rather in centring one’s life on God in the here and now with feet of clay, helping others and being helped by others to discover the compassion of God for all of creation including ourselves.
- 8) **Hospitality and presence** (the sacrament of presence) are both central aspects to Camillian spirituality. Our pastoral approach must always be personalised. It must be person centred. This is a key element in our approach. When we start seeing the sick as being all the same and lose sight of their individuality then we lose all sense of prophecy. We have always believed that good health is not just an absence of sickness and disease but rather a whole state of wellbeing which involves all the dimensions of the human being: physical, social, mental and **spiritual**. Rene Leriche defines pain as “*the result of the conflict between the stimulus and the whole person*”. Pain affects all dimensions of our personality: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual. A pain which is diagnosed as being of a physical nature does not just affect the body, but will invade all other dimensions of our being, as you cannot compartmentalise one part of who we are and isolate it from the other dimensions. Each dimension is a part without which the whole is incomplete, nor does said part function independent of the other dimensions. The Camillian must always distinguish between “disease” and “illness”: “disease” being the structural disorder in an organ or tissue that gives rise to ill health; “illness” on the other hand being the individual’s experience of ill health, his experience of dealing with that structural disorder.

### **III Conclusion**

**What qualifications do I need for this work?** I firmly believe that that the most important preparation is not the fact that I am a doctor, a nurse or any other healthcare professional, but rather the fact that I am committed to my own inner journey. If I am, then I will be aware of my own vulnerability, of my own not knowing, and will be less judgemental in my relations with others. As Michael Kearney says so beautifully, “*it is the belief that in this area it is not so much about the skills I have but the self who I am*” (M. Kearney). We have two tools: our skills and our heart.

Don’t ever underestimate the preparation you have had right from the beginning of your religious consecration, from your Christian and Camillian journey. I am convinced that in our case the spirit given to St. Camillus has also been given to each one of us, but we must have the courage to exercise it and to collaborate with the grace it bestows.

I cringe when I think of the stupid things I will have said in my early years of ministry, long before the emphasis on Charism, Camillian spirituality, the human sciences and CPE etc. came on the scene and we began discussing our difficulties more openly. But I believe that the only real mistake is the one you don’t learn from. If we have not learned from our mistake but rather keep repeating it, then of course it is a disaster. It is so important in our ministry that we have some kind of regular supervision, either professionally or from our peers. I personally will be forever grateful for the lessons I have learnt from the sick, especially in the areas of faith and prayer. We will learn and be more effective if we are open to learning from the human sciences,

and are willing to accept the dying as our teachers. We will learn not just about death and dying, but also about how to live.

**St. Camillus is an excellent example of how the grace of God works on nature.** Camillus was stubborn before his conversion but it is evident from his biography that he remained rather pick-headed during the remainder of his life too. The difference being that, after his conversion this great determination and strength of character was used for the good of others. Many people are afraid of placing their trust completely in God because they think they will become puppets. Reflecting on the life of Camillus one discovers a man that had given all without reserve to God and in the process became the freest man in the world. As a philosopher says “*the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing*”. Cervantes in Don Quiote tells us that “*freedom is the greatest good that the heavens have given to men*”. I had the great privilege of meeting Mother Teresa of Calcutta on a one to one basis on a number of occasions and I was struck both by her simplicity and her freedom. Perhaps she was the freest person I ever met. She was totally her own person. Camillus was like this too.

There are two types of freedom. There is a freedom that accepts no external conditioning, no boss, no superior and no ties. Then there is internal freedom that is capable of surrendering oneself, of **not** being tied to one’s own tastes or to that which does not please me. Every day on our radios we hear singers who speak of freedom but what they are so often singing about is their dependency on drugs, on alcohol on sex...

Interior freedom is none other than being at home in one’s own skin, being content with what one has. If I am at ease with myself I will have a much better chance of possessing and living the gift of hospitality. A good host is one who is capable of giving full attention to his guest rather than being full of intentions when dealing with them. For example, in every good house there is a junk room, but if I am over conscious of this I will be more concerned about it being discovered than with making my guest feel at home. This is an important point for Camillian spirituality as hospitality is a basic tenet of the Camillian way.

When I think of St. Camillus, the importance of the three verbs “to know”, “to love” and “to serve” in the life of the Christian, immediately spring to mind. Indeed one could sum up the whole of Christianity in these three words. The more Camillus came to know Jesus after his conversion which followed that extraordinary meeting with Father Angelo, the Capuchin in San Giovanni Rotondo, the more his love for Jesus increased. But then in time he came to understand that this love, if it were to be genuine, required a response: it was a case of “*if you’re in love show me*”, as a modern puts it. His response found its expression in serving the most abandoned of the children of God in hospitals, and in the midst of the plagues and the floods of those days.

From this point of view the task of penetrating the thought pattern and the motivational sources of Camillus de Lellis is stimulating. He was a man of the world who became a man of God, a carefree man who became a profoundly spiritual person. Camillus was “*a saint with his heart in his hand*”. The heart is the source of generosity, of maternal attention and of compassion. “*More heart in your hands, brothers*” Camillus used to say to his confreres. “Don’t be afraid to show tenderness” (Pope Francis). Camillus rediscovered his heart and relocated it to its proper place making it function as the Lord has destined. He opened his enormous heart to the Lord and to his neighbour. Let us try to do the same and then I have no doubt but that we will be prophetic.

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