

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE CAMILLIAN PROVINCE OF GERMANY

Pastoral Visit – 13-20 November 2016

We Camillians are sons and heirs of a convert who lived, and proposed, following the merciful Christ under the banner of radicality. Our vocation to consecrated life is a free gift of God that involves us in all the dimensions of our being. We thus perceive a deep need for conversion, for holiness (cf. VC, n. 35), for unconditional dedication to the Kingdom of God, for forgoing ourselves, to live totally of the Lord, so that God is everything in everyone (cf. 1Cor 15:28).

The Camillian Project: Towards a Faithful and Creative Life. Challenges and Opportunities. Part One: Towards Interior Revitalisation and Renewal

In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a “visceral” love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.

Papa Francesco, *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 6

***Rev. Fr. Siegmund Malinowski, Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Germany
Esteemed Provincial Council and all Camillian Confreres***

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

As Superior General, I made a pastoral visit to the Camillian Province of Germany on 13-20 November 2016. I met all the communities of this religious Province and I completed the meetings on Sunday, the liturgical feast day of Christ King of the Universe and the end of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

I would like to recall briefly my visits to the Delegations of the Province of Germany in the world. In January 2016 I visited the residence of Barranquilla (Colombia) where there is a Camillian religious from Holland, Fr. Cyriel Swinne, and Maria Poulisse, a volunteer aggregated to the Delegation of Holland. In April 2016, I visited the Camillian Delegation of Tanzania, in Dar Es Salaam, a Camillian mission which has been historically linked to the Camillians of Holland and which was begun in 1960. This is the first and oldest Camillian mission in the continent of Africa. This Delegation now has 16 religious (eight perpetual professed and eight temporary professed).

During this pastoral visit to the community of the Province of Germany in Europe I met the Camillian religious communities that live in the cities of Freiburg, Essen, Asbach (residence), Monchengladbach (residence) and Roermond (the Low Countries, about 80km from Essen). Together with the Provincial Superior I also visited the community of the Daughters of St. Camillus in Asbach. The Camillian religious, Fr. Alfred Meyerr, aged 91, notwithstanding some difficulties with his hearing, in that place still works with great enthusiasm at the chaplaincy of the *Kamillus-Klinik* Hospital which is run by the Daughters of St. Camillus. We also celebrated the Eucharist with the sisters.

On 16 November, in Essen, in the *Cardinale Hengsach Meeting House* which belongs to the local diocese, I took part in the Provincial assembly, during which we had an opportunity to discuss the new developments in the Order as regards the priorities for the central government for the six-year period 2014-2020, as laid down by the Camillian Project for the Revitalisation of Camillian Consecrated Life.

At the end of the day we celebrated the Eucharist together. The assembly commemorated and celebrated the first ten years of the joint journey of German and Dutch Camillians.

On 18 November, in Essen, I took part in the meeting of the Provincial Council, during the course of which various subjects of common interest for the Order and the Province were discussed: the next Provincial General Chapter, which is envisaged for the period 12-14 February 2017, and the pathway towards the next elections to appoint the Provincial Superior. It is interesting to observe that in your Province you do not have the custom of engaging in a prior exploration, to act as a guideline, of all the religious with an active voice in order to indicate three names on whom to vote for the position of Provincial Superior. This time, after an in-depth dialogue and shared reflections, the Council decided that it would invite the religious to engage in a survey in order to draw up a slate of candidates, before the official vote, which would be sent to the general curia in Rome.

At Essen we were invited to a lunch with the local bishop who welcomed us with great cordiality and expressed his great joy at the presence of the Camillians in his diocese and at being their friend. Harmony and communion with local Churches has always been very important and vital for our charism and for Camillian ministry: we are part of the Church with a specific and unique charism authenticated by the Church herself, at the service of the weakest in illness and suffering, in the complex world of health and health care.

***Looking at, and remembering, the past with gratitude
How did the Camillians reach Germany?***

Camillian religious arrived in Germany, in the city of Essen, 126 years ago (in 1901), arriving from the Low Countries. The founder of the Camillian Province of Germany was Fr. Francisco Vido (1846-1926), an Italian Camillian religious born in Venice who had received his formation in Verona. He was also the Provincial Superior of the Province of France and subsequently the Superior General of the Order for sixteen years (1904-1920).

In the hall of the nursing home and the Camillian community of Roermond (the Low Countries), today there is a fine statue of Fr. Vido. During this visit I also had an opportunity to visit an old and historic cemetery of the city of Roermond where the first Camillians to arrive in Holland are buried. Fr. Francisco Vido is also buried in this cemetery, even though he died and was buried in the city of Vaals (11 May 1926) where the Camillians had a community. His mortal remains were moved to Roermond a few years ago.

How did the history of the Camillians in the Low Countries and Germany begin? On 2 August 1884, Fr. Francisco Vido went to Holland together with Fr. Franceschini in order to find a place for his French religious community which had been expelled from France. Many French Camillians already lived in Verona as refugees.

In the middle of his journey, in the diocese of Utrecht, they spent the night in the religious house of the Redemptorists in the Dutch city of Roermond, near to the railway station. During the prayers before a meal, it is related, Fr. Vido heard the supplication that was addressed directly to St. Anthony in which his intercession was requested to ensure that someone would appear to buy that property. The Redemptorists were about to move to another place. Fr. Vido expressed his interest, pointing out that he was looking for a place for his community and he offered to buy the religious house. He drew up a contract of sale on 3 August 1884. Thus it was that the Camillian community of Roermond was born.

On 13 August the first Camillian priests and brothers arrived at this community – they had taken refuge in Verona and on 15 August 1884, the feast day of the Assumption of Our Lady, the new community was inaugurated. In this way, the novitiate was also begun with the presence of some German novices as well. The news of the transfer of the novitiate and the studentate from France to Roermond reached Rome when Fr. Camilo Guardi (1809-1884), the Superior General in 1868-1884, was at the end of his life (on his *deathbed* – in fact he died on 21 August 1884). Not being able to answer personally, through his secretary Fr. Gioacchino Ferrini (who succeeded him as Superior General of the

Order – 1884-1899), Fr. Guardi said that ‘this news filled him with joy and that he blessed the new community and the novices’ (cf. Jerzy Kuk, *I Camilliani sotto la guida di p. Camillo Guardi (1868-1884)*, Edizioni Camilliane, Turin, 1996, p. 258).

The Order of Camillians during the leadership of Fr. Camillo Guardi, according to the statistics of 28 August 1884, had six religious Provinces (Lombardy-Veneto, Rome, Piedmont, Naples, Sicily, and France); 159 religious in communities, of whom 73 were priests, 25 were brothers, and 61 were young men receiving formation, as well as 45 religious who had been *dispersed* because of civil laws that had decreed the dissolution of religious Orders (cf. Jerzy Kuk, *I Camilliani sotto la guida di p. Camillo Guardi (1868-1884)*, Edizioni Camilliane, Turin, 1996, p. 358).

In 1891, the French Camillians left this residence and returned to France. Forty-eight German Camillians remained in this community and gradually, with the change in the political context which became less hostile and less anti-religious, they went back to Germany.

At that moment many Congregations tried to settle in the Low Countries because of its stable political situation and a climate that favoured religious freedom. The Province of Germany grew very rapidly and soon founded communities in Austria (Vienna), in Denmark (Aalborg), in the United States of America (Milwaukee), and in Poland (Tarnoski Gory).

On 3 May 1897 the Province of Germany officially came into existence. Fr. Francisco Vido was its first Provincial Superior. The Province of German was canonically erected on 8 May 1903 in Essen. I will now highlight some important points of reference of this presence of the Camillians in Germany which goes back over a hundred years.

In 1898 the Camillian community of Aalborg, in Denmark, came into being and it remained active until 1982 when because of a lack of new religious it had to close. In 1899 the German government offered the Camillians the possibility of going back to Germany to take care of the health of alcoholics. In 1901 the first clinic in the German Catholic world for alcoholics came into being and its service still continues today.

In 1901 some German Camillians went to Lima in Peru, to the historic religious house of the *Buena morte*. In 1907 the community of Tarnovice in Poland was created. In 1910 the Camillian community of Vienna in Austria was established and the first Camillian community of Neuss was organised for patients with tuberculosis. In 1919 the Camillians went to Freiburg to work for *Caritas*, a charitable institution of the Bishops’ Conference of Germany. In that city in 1943 the Camillians also took responsibility for the pastoral work (chaplaincy) of the hospital of the University of Freiburg and we are still there today. In 1920 the scholasticate of Sudmühle, near to Munster, was established. In 1923 the Camillians reached Berlin, then the capital city of Germany, with the project of taking responsibility for a parish, for an old people’s home (this is currently administered by the *Caritas* of the Archdiocese of Berlin), and for pastoral care in hospitals. With the decrease in vocations and in the number of religious, the Province of Germany offered this community to the Camillians of the Province of Poland in 1987. In 1977 the community of Munster was closed and in 1997 the community of Neuss also came to an end.

How did the German Camillians reach the United States of America? Between 1919 and 1920 a North American priest, Giacomo Durward, on a number of occasions got into contact with the Provincial Superior and the Superior General, offering a property where the Camillians could found a religious community and a nursing home as well. In the late summer of 1921, Fr. Michael Muller and Fr. Langenkamp were sent to the United States of America with the mission of assessing this opportunity. The results were disappointing: the property that was offered was distant from any important inhabited centre and in addition this North American priest wanted to maintain his ownership of the property at all costs. Not wanting to abandon the project, and with the support of the Archbishop of Milwaukee, Fr. Muller and Fr. Langenkamp settled in Milwaukee. In 1924 other German Camillians moved to Milwaukee (WI), amongst whom was Fr. Karl Mansfeld (1889-1972). He had been born in Bochun and during the First World War served in field hospitals in France and Belgium. After arriving in the United States of America he took on the leadership of the new foundation and took up the question of the

donation of the property of the Durward family in Baraboo (WI), 120km from Milwaukee (WI), on more favourable conditions than before, engaging in many discussions and well managed negotiations. He also established the novitiate in this house. Mansfeld was elected Superior General of the Camillian Order for eighteen years (1947-1965) – up to that time the longest tenure in the history of the Order. With Fr. Enrico Dammig, the Superior General from 1971 to 1977, Germany has provided three Superior Generals to the Camillian Order during its long centuries-old history.

In May 1946, just after the Second World War, the Province of Germany was divided into various new Provinces: the United States of America; Austria; Poland; and the Delegation of the Low Countries (1946), which later became the Province of Holland (1967).

After the Second World War, the German Camillians had to leave Holland. The Superior General of the times, Fr. Florindo Rubini, decided that a Dutch Camillian community should remain. The Dutch Camillians from France and Germany were concentrated in the cities of Roermond (5) and Vaals (4).

They stayed in Roermond, where they opened a clinic for alcoholics, and in Vaals, where there was an old people's home. They also opened a seminary and sent a large number of novices and students of theology to Germany and Austria. In 1960, when the first Camillians were ordained priests in Holland, there was no place for them in the pastoral service of hospitals because there were many priests in the Low Countries and the bishops did not know what work to offer them. In this historical context, the Province decided to open a new mission in Africa, in Tanzania. In 1969 there were six Dutch Camillian priests who worked in German hospitals on the border between the two countries. By the 1970s the Province of Holland had grown to having 36 religious.

Some important historical facts

At the end of the nineteenth century the German government had prohibited the entrance of new religious Congregations and Orders into Germany because there were already a large number of them. The Camillians were accepted only because of their project to create a clinic to provide care to alcoholics and this became the first Catholic institution in Germany to provide this kind of specialist care.

The official documents thus registered the following: 'On 18 February 1899, the Ministry for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Public Instruction and Medicine authorised, therefore, the Camillians to erect a house in the district of Essen with the purpose of caring for the sick in a clinic for alcoholics. Terrain had already been explored and in the end an offer was accepted that had been made by the school association of Heidhausen relating to a healthy place that was well connected with the two industrial centres along the rivers *Wupper* and *Ruhr*...The first three Camillians to begin this Camillian mission were: Christian Adams, Bernhard Kaschny and Joseph Platzer (cf. Gerhard Kuck, *Storia dell'Ordine di San Camillo. La Provincia tedesca*, Rubbettino, 2014, p. 23).

We cannot forget that the Camillians in Germany suffered a great deal because of the two world wars. During the First World War (1914-1918) priests, lay brothers (nurses) and novices were called up to the war. We do not have precise figures on how many of them were killed but it is said that many German religious died. And this in not to count those who were dispersed by the war and did not return to their communities. Accurate data are lacking because many important historical documents were destroyed. One explanation for this lies in the fact that many religious Congregations burnt their most sensitive documents before they could fall into the hands of the Nazis in order to avoid further suffering.

'According to a summary that was compiled in September 1933, in all 169 members of the Order had been involved and they engaged in the following military services: under arms: 71; spiritual care at the front: 14; in isolation hospitals: 25; in prisoner of war camps: 1; nursing care at the front: 43; in the homeland: 15. Taking into account that the Province of Germany in 1917 had in all 209 religious, one can observe that the activities of the Camillians were almost completely taken up by the war' (cf. Gerhard Kuck, *Storia dell'Ordine di San Camillo. La Provincia tedesca*, Rubbettino, 2014, p. 48).

The Province of Germany was the youngest and most numerous Province in Europe. The total

number of religious of the European Provinces, as regards in general terms the first quarter of the twentieth century, was 1,071, the year of reference being 1929.

	P. Rome	P. Piedmont	P. Lombardy-Ven.	P. France	P. Germany	P. Spain
1910 –	73	42	129	80	165	88
1917 –	67	42	144	104	209	116
1928 –	130	77	247	136	318	138
1929 –	143	81	255	137	312	145

In 1933 the number of German Camillian religious reached the figure of 373: 107 priests; 24 professed clerics; 61 professed brothers; 7 clerical novices; 8 novices preparing to be brothers; 1 oblate brother; 148 clerical postulants; 10 (plus 7 aspirant) postulants preparing to be brothers. After 1933 a decrease in the numbers of religious began. The figure had gone down to 313 by 1934 and to 157 by 1937.

Between 1936 and 1938 the Camillian school for postulants began to suffer from a series of restrictions imposed by the National Socialist regime and in the end it was closed. At the beginning of the Second World War all Germans who were able to work were forbidden to enter a religious house or a religious Order and many priests and brothers were sent to the front. In this way, the number of Camillians began to decrease.

The Camillian Province of Germany endured heavy losses before and during the Second World War: ‘with respect to individuals, the war caused heavy losses...A list has already been sent to the general government of the Order. The losses, however, have not been confined to the data that has been reported but are also due to the closing of our school because of National Socialism, without counting those caused by the absolute prohibition of new religious professions for the duration of the war’ (cf. Gerhard Kuck, *Storia dell’Ordine di San Camillo. La Provincia tedesca*, Rubbettino, 2014, p. 48).

In 2001 the Dutch Camillians, faced with a drastic reduction in the number of their religious and without the prospect of new religious vocations, and in response to a request made by the central government of the Order, united with the Province of Germany. On 25 May 2006 the Province of Holland was closed and since that time a Dutch Camillian Delegation of the Province of Germany has existed.

***Living in the present with passion and serving with Samaritan compassion.
Pope Benedict XVI remembers a Camillian who is well known in Germany!***

The Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his latest book entitled ‘*Ultime conversazioni*’ (‘Last Conversations’), edited by Peter Seewald (Garzanti, Milan, 2016), when speaking about his spiritual exercises during his theology studies and subsequently also as a priest, remembers the preaching of Fr. Robert Swoboda, an Austrian Camillian. This religious was also the Provincial Superior of the Province of Germany (March 1939) and was well known in Germany for his capacities as a preacher in spiritual exercises. Benedict XVI expresses himself as follows: ‘After the ordination we had to take part in the annual obligatory retreat for three days. The preaching of a certain Father Swoboda, a Viennese Camillian, remains fixed in my memory. A member of the Order founded by St. Camillus de Lellis, he preached the exercises with lightness, strength and decision, but also with great competence. And then we also did a retreat with *Hugo Rahner* (brother of Karl the theologian: editor’s note). I have to say that we were rather disappointed (cf. Benedetto XVI, *Ultime Conversazioni*, edited by Peter Seewald, Garzanti, Milan, 2016, pp.77-78).

The Camillians today in Germany and Holland, the Delegation in Colombia (Barranquilla) and the Delegation in Tanzania (Dar es Salaam, Morogoro)

At the present time there are 34 Camillians in Germany: 22 priests, 4 brothers and 8 temporary professed. They are principally involved in providing pastoral care to the sick in many hospitals. A special feature of this Province is the participation of two women who made their *private* religious consecration in the Province of Holland, from which they come, and who live as ‘associates’ with the Camillians: *Trix Coerts*, who works in the Low Countries (S’Hertogenbosh), and *Maria Poulisse*, who lives and works in the Camillian work of Barranquilla in Colombia. The Province of Germany engages in various activities: a clinic for alcoholics, hospitals, and the parish of Essen. Today, in the health-care works, administration is entrusted to third parties and other connected health-care organisations. In Roermond (the Low Countries) there is a still an old people’s home, the building of which has been refurbished. A long time ago this was a religious house.

The Province has two Delegations: that of Holland, which was created on 25 May 2006, with the community of Roermond, which has 4 religious (3 religious who are priests and one brother), and the Delegation of Tanzania, founded in 1960, which to begin with belonged to the Camillians of Holland. This Delegation has 16 religious (8 religious who are priests and 8 temporary professed). At Barranquilla, in Colombia, since 1977 there has been a residence with the presence of a religious, Fr. Cyriel Swinne, and cooperation offered by an aggregated woman volunteer of the Delegation of Holland, Maria Poulisse. There is a series of initiatives for human development in the outskirts of the city and great social sensitivity is demonstrated.

***Embracing the future with hope.
Accepting opportunities and facing up to challenges.***

Your Province has a strong tradition in its history of having religious who are brothers and nurses. I listened to the cry of some brothers who asked for the figure of the brother in our Order not to be forgotten about but valued. There has been a *clericalisation* of our charism which has been very damaging and penalising for the figure of the religious who is a brother. In the animation of vocations, as well, we should talk about and present the figure of the *religious who is a brother* and not only that of a *religious who is a priest*. We are first and foremost Camillian religious who can then be either priests or brothers. In many centres for formation I have observed the identification of Camillian religious with religious who are *fathers*.

We have to engage in a revision of the process of formation at the level of the promotion of vocations and the contents of the formation programmes, and at various levels. I note that in October 2017, in Rome, we will have a meeting about formation at the international level of the Order which will involve all the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Delegations. An updating of the handbook for formation of the Order is planned. Certainly, these and other questions connected with the promotion of vocations, and initial and ongoing formation, will be on the agenda.

At the meetings that we had at individual, community and Provincial levels, I called attention to the value of the Camillian project for the revitalisation of Camillian consecrated life and the three priorities that the extraordinary General Chapter of June 2014 indicated should be urgently addressed by our general government: a) *economics* – the reorganisation of the generalate house and the monitoring of the Provinces that are in a state of financial difficulty; b) *the promotion of vocations and initial and ongoing formation* – the updating of the handbook for formation of the Order. Here our survival or otherwise in the future is at stake (new vocations). In Europe we are growing old and slowly dying, without great prospects at the level of vocations, whereas we are being born again in some countries in Africa (Burkina, Benin, Togo, Kenya) and Asia (Vietnam, Indonesia). c) *communication* – without communication it is impossible to speak about communion and fraternity in our communities. We commented on the existence of a historical barrier in the Order: in using two languages officially, Italian

and English, a large part of the important literature of the Order ends up by being translated into German. This involves a supplementary effort on the part of the Province in order to face up to this challenge of communication.

At our meetings we also spoke about the ecclesial context that we are going through today. We have three important elements that help us to deepen our Camillian identity as it emerges from the *Camillian project*: the election of Pope Francis, who is more a pastor than a theologian: as he is a Jesuit religious he has a very good knowledge of the lights and shadows that affect consecrated life today; the decision to dedicate the year 2015 to thinking about, and praying for, consecrated life; and the indiction of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015-2016).

In the letter that Pope Francis sent to all consecrated people, he referred to the post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* del 1994 (n. 110), observing that religious do not only have a glorious history to remember: with the help of the Holy Spirit they also have *a great history to build*. The Pope invites us *to look to the past with gratitude*, to live the present with passion, to be instruments of communion – and we Camillians can add, *to serve with Samaritan compassion* – and *to embrace the future with hope*.

In the light of this historical perspective, I would like to emphasise that the next Provincial Chapter and the Chapters of the communities will be important moments for *all religious who are called to take responsibility for, and perform the role of, reflecting on, discussing and establishing priorities and concrete pathways to be followed as regards the future that we want for this Province*. The future cannot be improvised and even less can it be imposed from outside or by a higher institution on a lower one through a decree or a regulation! It must be an advance achieved by everyone.

Frankly speaking, I think that a very passive approach exists, one that accompanies a simple diagnosis, which affirms the fact that by now *we have already reached a terminal stage, suited to palliative care*, and that we have no other possibilities or options than that of simply waiting and accepting death when it comes to our near future! Our destiny will probably be that of simply disappearing from history or dying with dignity.

As regards the economics of the Province and the performance of your works (whose administration has been given to third parties), starting with the reports and the accounts that have been presented, there is no reason for great concern. Overall, you are going forward with ease within the previously established parameters. At the present time the religious in fundamental terms live on their earnings from their pastoral work (in the main chaplaincies) and their pensions.

From this specific point of view, you offer fine witness to simplicity and to sobriety as regards the things and the instruments that you need to live, and you remind us of the spirit of authentic evangelical poverty. It was also observed that the economic *report* of the Province to be sent to Rome needs to be drawn up in conformity with the official model of the Order, which itself was drawn up by the Central Economic Commission, in order to assure correct economic information and to be able to offer an overall comparison of the financial and economic data with the other Provinces and/or Vice-Provinces of the Order.

Another aspect that commands our attention at this historical moment is the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the joint journey of the Dutch and German Camillians – the mutual respect that is cultivated in your relations despite the cultural differences and the idiosyncrasies that characterise identity. You offer an important example for the Order, in the sense that it is possible to live, work and plan together without fearing cultural differences and idiosyncrasies, but, instead, highlighting primarily the essence that identifies us, that is to say our Camillian charism and our Camillian spirituality. At a historic moment in Europe when other Provinces will also become Delegations, I heard it said amongst you: why not form a European Province made up of a confederation of former Provinces?

Without doubt we will have a great deal of work in the future completely redrawing Camillian geography, as was emphasised in the Camillian project, in particular in Europe, because of the reduction in the number of religious who are growing old or dying, and without the prospect of new vocations. Being few in number and often also isolated, it is only by *living as neighbours for each other* and not in

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front of each other, by walking in the same direction, together with the other and not against the other, that we will have a future! If we do not go in this direction, we will silently decree our own deaths.

At the end of this message, I would like to express my deep gratitude for the hospitality with which we were welcomed amongst you in the communities in which I had the privilege to stay, to fraternise and to know you a little. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to know better and in detail the *holy places* of your rich history and to observe the atmosphere of serenity that exists amongst you and your sincere interest in the life of the Order. I felt *at home!*

I wish each one of you a great deal of peace, health in body and spirit, and above all that hope that will make us plan and wish for a shining future for the Camillian charism in your countries. Let us not lose the unique opportunity that we have at this point in our lives which in reality is the grace of the mercy of God! We can be happy serving the sick in a *Samaritan way*, always with *our hearts in our hands*, as St. Camillus did, as he bore witness to, and as he taught.

May St. Camillus, our Father and inspiration, our Founder, always protect you!

Roermond, the Low Countries,
20 November 2016,
Feast Day of Christ King of the Universe,
The End of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Fr. Leocir Pessini, MI
Superior General