

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

International Meeting of Camillian Parish Priests and 'Rectors'

Camillian Parishes. A Setting for Communion (koinonia), for Evangelisation (kerigma) and for Mission (diakonia)

San Paolo – Brazil, the Santa Fe Centre, 19-23 April 2017

Dear Camillian religious from the various continents of our Camillian geography: welcome to Brazil, to San Paolo, to my country, and to my home Camillian Province!

In offering my welcome to all of you, I would like at the same time to emphasise the importance of this third international meeting which deals with the ministry of our Camillian religious who are active in parishes, churches, rectories and sanctuaries. At the two previous events organised in 1985 and 2008, the question of the marginalisation of this ministry in the exercise of our charism characterised the tone of the debate. The general government of the Order was called upon to offer greater opportunities to meet and to explore matters at a theological and pastoral level in order to define in an increasingly better way the Camillian identity and physiognomy of parishes. The conclusions of the last meeting (held in the year 2008) wanted a meeting on this subject to be held every three years. A meeting of this kind should have been held in the year 2011 but nothing was organised in this direction and nine years have passed since the last meeting.

This third international meeting takes up a journey that has already been begun with a subject that is very stimulating and of great contemporary relevance: *Camillian Parishes. A Setting for Communion (koinonia), for Evangelisation (kerigma) and for Mission (diakonia)*. In addition to reflecting upon, and examining, this subject, those taking part in this meeting have the precise and concrete task of drawing up statutes for Camillian parishes that will then be proposed to, and shared with, the whole of our Order. As was the case with 'our socio/health-care works and institutions' for which, in the year 2002, a document relating to their identity was created called *Magna Carta*, now is the moment to think of a similar certificate of identity for the parishes entrusted to Camillian ministry.

As the location for this meeting, Brazil itself has been chosen given that the Province of Brazil, within the context of our Order, is responsible for the largest number of parishes (10) and has already provided itself with statutes relating to the Camillian ministry in parishes. This has become an important instrument of reference and guidance for Camillian ministry in this area of ecclesial pastoral care. This document will be the *instrumentum laboris* for the drawing up of guidelines for all the parishes of our Camillian world.

1. Our History (where we Come from): the Constitution, General Statutes and Decisions of the General Chapters

In our four centuries' old history, hospitals have always been seen as a privileged and practically unique and exclusive setting for the exercise of our charism. The importance of parishes for Camillian ministry has been a recent acquisition, starting with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

I will now outline the principal decisions concerning parishes run by the Order and the Camillian Province of Brazil.

When speaking about the charism of the Order our Constitution observes: 'Therefore, 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' (Const., n. 10).

As regards our ministry, two important points are highlighted at the level of the interface between our charism, ministry and parishes, specifically in numbers 54 and 57 of our Constitution: 'Our Order is also keenly sensitive to the pastoral care of ecclesiastical and civil institutions involved in the care of the sick and the poor, and is dedicated to animating the greatest number of lay people in loving and serving the sick' (Const., n. 54).

'Our work is a part of the whole apostolic activity of the universal and local Churches. Therefore, in the exercise of our ministry, we cooperate with the local Ordinary, following his pastoral directives, and foster coordination and collaboration with other religious institutes, with the diocesan clergy, with the laity and with apostolic associations' (Const., n. 57).

'In places where the signs of the times and pastoral needs suggest it, our Order is favourable to new forms of presence and action in the world of health' (GS, n. 32).

'Parishes which are erected with the consent of the General Consulta (C 10), should give special attention to the care of the sick (GS, n. 35).

The final document of the fifty-sixth *General Chapter* of the Order (Ariccia-Rome, 2007), whose theme was 'United for Justice and Solidarity in the World of Health', when presenting some guidelines for action of the Order in relation to our charism and spirituality expressed itself in the following way in relation to parishes: 'Where this is necessary and the Order takes responsibility for parishes, it should give them a typically Camillian countenance, seeing them as 'open hospitals' in which the poor and the sick deserve first place, in particular home care which St. Camillus saw as 'the great ocean' of charity, so that parishes become centres for the promotion and pastoral animation of health'.

The general government of the Order, in particular the sector for Camillian ministry, put this decision of the General Chapter into practice by planning a meeting of Camillian parish priests and rectors (Rome 10-11 November 2008). At that time in the world there were 47 parishes and 32 rectories and sanctuaries and these involved in the exercise of ministry about 10% of all the Camillian religious. Twenty-seven Camillian parish priests and rectors took part in the symposium and ended it with a message to the whole of the Order in which they expressed themselves in the following way: 'Camillian parishes offer the possibility of implementing aspects of the Camillian charism that cannot be practised in hospital chaplaincies, such as home care for patients, the formation of lay people in general and volunteers and those who assist the sick, in particular the Lay Camillian Family, and the promotion of vocations' (para. 3).

The *fifty-seventh General Chapter* (Ariccia-Rome, 3-17 May 2013) had as its basic theme: 'Towards a Faithful and Creative Life' and approved 'The Camillian Project: Towards a Faithful and Creative Life. Challenges and Opportunities'. This project, which constitutes the programme of the general government of the Order for the six-year period 2014-2020, in its guidelines for ministry when referring to parishes expressed itself as follows: 'In Camillian Provinces where there are parishes 'guidelines' should be established for their ministry in order to offer them a Camillian countenance'.

Just a year later, following a mandate of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), we celebrated another extraordinary General Chapter because of the judicial events that involved Fr. Renato Salvatore, the former Superior General.

The *fifty-eighth extraordinary General Chapter* (Ariccia-Rome, 16-21 June 2014) had as its theme: 'Towards a Revitalisation of the Order in the Fourth Centenary (1614-2014)'. At this General Chapter the 'Camillian Project: Towards a Faithful and Creative Life between Challenges and Opportunities' was approved. This project highlighted certain urgent needs which became the subject of the priorities for action of the current general government of the Order.

a). *A greater proximity and presence* of the general government of the Order in relation to Camillian religious, in particular those live in the outlying regions of the Order.

b). *Financial administration*. The reorganisation of the finances of the generalate house, offering the possibility of a supervision to Provinces with economic and financial problems through a re-establishment of the central economic commission of the Order.

c). *Formation and the promotion of vocations.* This is a necessary condition that can assure a future for our Order. We cannot lose the capacity to attract young people to our Order. We need to be fertile in *spiritual paternity towards our new sons* and not declare that we are spiritually sterile.

d). *Improvement in the mechanisms of communication* between the religious of the Order so that news and events can circulate, ensuring that communication is not reduced to announcing the deaths of our religious. This commitment to communication must value the sharing of projects, of events and of celebrations which can restore courage and hope in our hearts as consecrated men.

In order to meet the need to revitalise our traditional forms of ministry, in this field two important meetings were organised: the symposium of all the *centres for humanisation and pastoral care in health* of the Order (Madrid, 2016) and the *meeting of Camillian chaplains* (Rome, November 2016). We are now looking forward to a meeting that will take up the process of reflecting upon, and examining, our Camillian ministry in parishes, with the aim of drawing up guidelines that should present the Camillian identity and profile of our parishes.

2. A Page of History that should be Remembered with Affection

I believe that it is important to remember some historical facts about the beginning of the Camillian foundation in Brazil. Fr. Innocente Radrizzani arrived in Brazil from Italy, together with Fr. Eugenio Della Giacomina, in September 1922: they were Camillian religious of the then glorious Province of Lombardy and Veneto (now the Province of North Italy).

Our Camillian presence in the city of San Paolo was accepted by the then Archbishop of San Paolo, Dom Duarte Leopoldo e Silva, on the condition that the Camillians took responsibility for service in a small chapel because of the shortage of local priests. Our ministry began in that chapel in November 1933. With the passing of time, it became the Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary in Villa Pompeia (1939) and its first parish priest was Fr. Giuseppe Simoni. This place is the cradle of the Camillians in Brazil. They subsequently also built a small school and clinic which later became the St. Camillus Polyclinic, today the important St. Camillus Hospital.

In the far South of the country, in the State of Santa Catarina, in an enclave of the culture of Italian immigrants, a second Camillian community was established, starting in the year 1934, in a small town which was then called Faxinal Bianco – today the municipality of Iomerê – which had about 3,000 inhabitants. The Camillians from Italy arrived in this city in search of vocations. In 1935 they began pastoral care in the local chapel to accompany, and support spiritually, the Italian settlers of that locality. This chapel subsequently became the Parish of São Luiz Gonzaga and Fr. Giuseppe Garzoti was its first parish priest.

In this area the first home grown Camillian vocations of Brazil germinated and these young men went to the St. Camillus Seminary of Iomerê. Amongst the pioneers we may list: Fr. Calisto Vendrame (a former Superior General of the Order); Fr. Julio Munaro (a former member of the General Consulta and Provincial Superior); Fr. Niversindo A. Cherubin (a member of the central economic commission of the Order from its beginnings who held this post for twenty-five years); Fr. Velocino Zortea (a former Provincial Superior; the brothers Fr. Angelo and Fr. Carlos Pigatto; and many other religious. I also come from this area in the South of Brazil!

Fr. Innocente Radrizzani, with his iron determination and his vision of the future, opened up this new ministerial horizon, overcoming the initial difficulties of the new mission. In a letter addressed to the Superior General Fr. Pio Holzer, dated 26 March 1926, he presented the proposal to create a new community in the city of Santos for service in hospitals and to officiate in a little church which – in his view – in the future would be transformed into a parish: ‘Parishes in Brazil are not as frightening as in Italy... Because of the grave shortage of local clergy, one has to meet the wishes of the bishops as one can. This is what all the religious do’.¹

It is interesting to observe that before the Second Vatican Council, taking into account the reality of the needs of the population, these first Camillian missionaries took responsibility for ministry in hospitals

¹ Sannazzaro Pietro, ‘Sessanta anni fa p. Radrizzani arrivava in Brasile (1922-1982)’, in *Quaderni di storia della Provincia Lombardo-Veneta dei Ministri degli Infermi*, vol. V, March 1983, p. 71.

but also in parishes, with a pressing need for cooperation with the local Church. If Fr. Innocente had followed literally the general statutes and the Constitution of the Camillians which expressly prohibited any type of activity in a parish, it is very likely that today the Camillians would not exist in the Province of Brazil. One may speak here of a 'responsible transgression' in interpreting the spirit of the law of the Constitution, which only prophets and saints, ahead of their time, know how to accomplish with so much freedom and creativity.²

3. The Camillian Province of Brazil and Parishes

The Camillian Province of Brazil, being the Province in the Order with the greatest number of parishes, felt the need to respond rapidly to the appeal of the General Chapter to draw up statutes for parishes in this Camillian Province.

The Provincial Chapters of 2006 (Itanhaem-SP) and 2010 (San Paolo-SP) decided to draw up statutes for Camillian parishes: 'To draw up statutes for Camillian parishes that include the following elements: the reasons for taking on and running a parish; pastoral care in health; pastoral care for vocations; the creation of a religious community; the time that we stay there (six years); the remuneration of the parish priest and the parish vicars; and the terms of the contract with the diocese. We invite the creation of mechanisms to ensure that religious who live in a parish are not isolated' (Itanhaém, 12-14 December 2006).

The same question was further discussed at the Provincial Chapter of 2010 (San Paolo) given that statutes for Camillian parishes had not been created. On that occasion, the decision of the Chapter was to the point: 'Statutes for Camillian parishes should be drawn up (this was a decision taken at the previous Chapter but it has not been followed through)'.

This project was addressed to parish priests, with the coordination of Fr. Arlindo Tonetta and with consultancy about the rules and regulations of canon law provided by Fr. José Maria dos Santos. The statutes that were drawn up with the contribution of all the parish priests were approved at the Provincial Council of 10 June 2011. I myself, who at that time was Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of Brazil, followed the entire process of drawing up these statutes right up to when they were approved. This document today will act as the *Instrumentum laboris* for your international event.

The final result of this work went beyond a simple legal definition – it also sought to define the identity of a Camillian parish, establishing guidelines, rights, duties and canonical and legal obligations towards dioceses. In addition, it is an exploration of the Biblical, theological and pastoral dimensions of Camillian parishes.

The identity and mission of Camillian parishes still remain a great missionary objective to be achieved and implemented through pastoral initiatives for the people of God. As a living and vivifying centre of evangelisation, a living a cell of the Church, a Camillian parish must pursue as a priority – in the context of all its activities involving evangelisation – the mandate of Jesus *to preach the Gospel and heal the sick*. The idea of a parish being an *open hospital*, which is held so dear in our Camillian tradition, and our Samaritan presence with sick people in their homes, which are *our great ocean (mare magnum)*, legitimate our ministerial presence in this field of pastoral care of the Church.

The rules that were established with the participation of all the parish priests seem to offer a minimal direction to walk together, in order to conserve, promote and strengthen those Biblical, theological and pastoral values that mark out the Camillian countenance of our parishes. Without them, where they are clearly defined, we run the risk of sliding into a form of pastoral routine in which it will be easy to lose our charismatic identity. This would undoubtedly be an impoverishment and a loss for us and for the Church.

4. The Challenge of Ministry Experienced Together with Lay People

After three years of pastoral visits to all the communities of the Order of Camillians, without being a pessimist, I can observe that we Camillians have still not learnt to work in synergy with lay people! Often

² Cf. Leocir Pessini and Arlindo Toneta, *Parrocchie camilliane in Brasile: storia, identità e missione*, San Paolo, the Camillian Province of Brazil, 2012.

they are seen as being on the same level as the usual employees of our institutions without there being any concern on our part to offer them adequate Christian, human, and also Camillian, formation! We run the risk of following the rules of a heartless market and the strategies of a ‘throwaway’ economy, as our dear Pope Francis has often denounced! Fortunately, to nourish our hope, we have some happy examples of this ministerial cooperation which will certainly be talked about at you international event. We are still very *clericalised*.

Our Constitution states that ‘Using every suitable means of the apostolate, we dedicate ourselves to the ethical formation and Christian animation of health care workers, and we are a leaven of unity in their midst’ (Const. n. 52), and it goes on: ‘Our Order...is dedicated to animating the greatest number of lay people in loving and serving the sick’ (Const. 54).

‘Mutual cooperation between us and lay people – in associations or otherwise – should be promoted for activities whose goals are shared, in particular as regards the world of health’ (GS, n. 21).

‘Our religious cooperate diligently and generously with lay personnel, showing that they are open to the interdisciplinary dimension (Const., n. 52), respecting their professional competence, experience and personal witness as sources of inspiration and learning (AA, n. 27), given that they are an example from the professional point of view as well. In accord with the community, they actively participate in their associations and initiatives when these are compatible with the obligations of the religious state (Const. 52, nn. 54). They do not neglect to offer them spiritual, ethical and pastoral formation (Const., n. 52)’ (GS, n. 22).

The ministry of our parishes, rectories and sanctuaries is an area of excellence where we are called to work with lay people. It would be advisable to ascertain and discuss what we are doing in this sector and how we are doing it.

5. A Reference to the Latin American Church: the Church of Pope Francis

Christ commanded his apostles to preach the Kingdom of God, to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, and to heal the sick. St. Camillus, as a disciple of Jesus, received from God the charism of caring for the sick and he left this heritage to his followers. Today we are the continuators of Camillus...

The Camillians have the specific charism of promoting health and care for the sick and to this belongs, in historical terms, care for those people who are in a precarious condition and at the terminal stage of their lives. During the course of history, people have always seen us as the *fathers of a good death*. Therefore, we believe that it is fundamental to give a Camillian identity to those parishes, churches, rectories and sanctuaries that are entrusted to our pastoral care.

Of what does this identity consist? The Document of Aparecida (DA), which was drawn up in the year 2007, is the document that presents a programme for the whole of the Church of Latin America and the Caribbean. It was drawn up under the coordination of the Cardinal of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, today Pope Francis.

‘The maternity of the Church is expressed in visits to the sick in health-care centres, in providing silent company to the sick, in an affectionate approach, in delicate attention to the needs of illness by professionals and volunteers, disciples of the Lord. The Church welcomes with her tenderness, strengthens hearts, and in the case of death accompanies the dying during the final transit. The sick receive with love the word of the Lord, forgiveness, the sacrament of anointing of the sick, and the acts of charity of their brethren’ (DA, n. 420).

Within the context of this symposium of ours, a pilgrimage is planned to the sanctuary of Aparecida (which is located 178km from San Paolo). This is one of the largest Marian sanctuaries in the world and every year it welcomes over twelve million pilgrims. After their visit to this temple (Our Black Lady of Aparecida), our Camillian religious from other parts of the world will have a better idea of what it means to be Catholic in the outlook of the poor and simple people of Latin America, in particular in Brazil. This will certainly be an experience with a great impact and it will be especially illuminating for many of us, as it was for hundreds of bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean who came together in the year

2007 before this 'Our Lady' of ours to pray and to reflect together about the future of the Church in the continent of Latin America and the Caribbean

A Camillian religious who works in a parish rectory, church or sanctuary, above all in developing countries or poor countries, should give especial emphasis to pastoral care in health in its three aspects: at a supportive level, at a community level and at a political-institutional level, as was already pointed out to all the pastors of Latin America and the Caribbean in the document entitled 'Missionary Disciples in the World of Health. A Guide for Pastoral Care in Health in Latin America and the Caribbean' (CELAM, 2010). All of us, both religious and lay people, as the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, are *missionary disciples* who have the challenge of providing formation to lay people as regards health care for people but above all in relation to providing care for the sick, for the poorest, and in particular for those in situations of the greatest need at a physical, spiritual, social and economic level. Formation should be provided to lay people so that they have special affection for sick people in hospitals where there is no longer religious assistance or a chaplaincy with the presence of priests. Formation should be provided to agents of pastoral care (extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist) in visiting the sick with competence and joy so that these last can be encouraged and comforted through the Church's Eucharistic presence. One is dealing here with involving in particular young people in this ministry, with a view to promoting new Camillian vocations as well.

I wish to express special gratitude to Fr. Aris Miranda, the member of the General Consulta responsible for Camillian ministry and the coordinator of this international event, who has dedicated himself greatly to the success of this meeting

I also express special gratitude to my dear home Province, the Province to which I belong, the Camillian Province of Brazil, in the person of the current Provincial Superior, Fr. Antonio Mendes Freitas, and to the members of the Provincial Council. You are offering a fine gift to the Order, welcoming everyone with open arms, with traditional Latin and Brazilian hospitality, also taking responsibility in a generous way for the costs of this event. Thank you on behalf of everyone!

It is my wish and hope that you will have a very fine meeting that will be able to revitalise this area of Camillian ministry – the 'parish'. May our fraternity be strengthened during this period of coexistence, in the dialogue, in the meetings and in the debates of these days in the land of Brazil!

May St. Camillus protect us, may Our Lady of Health cover us with her maternal presence, and may the Holy Spirit enlighten us with the *wisdom of on high*, so that we may be able, with open hearts, to have that discernment that is needed for the present and the future of our Camillian ministry in the world of parishes!

Rome, 4 March 2017

Fr. Leocir Pessini

Superior General