



Meeting of the Camillian Charismatic Family¹
Initial Greetings of the Superior General
Fr. Leo PESSINI

**WHICH CAMILLIAN PROPHECY TODAY? BETWEEN THE PAST...THE
 PRESENT...AND THE FUTURE. PROPHECY...BETWEEN THE
 SAMARITAN AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN**

‘Charisms are not entrusted to an institution or a group for safekeeping; rather they *are gifts of the Spirit* integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ’.

Pope Francis

‘Indeed, around each religious family, every Society of Apostolic Life and every Secular Institute, there is a larger family, a “charismatic family”, which includes a number of Institutes which identify with the same charism, and especially lay faithful who feel called, precisely as lay persons, to share in the same charismatic reality’.

Apostolic letter of the Holy Father Francis to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, III, 1

‘Charismatic Families are qualified groups of reference in the Church. Every Charismatic Family makes contemporary the gift of the Spirit with new methods and new strategies. We are never alone: our Founders and Foundresses are always with us and guide us on the journey of the inexhaustible fruitfulness of faith in the Risen Lord, the authentic gift to be contemplated, to be lived and to be borne witness to. . . We hope that Charismatic Families can be a prophetic witness to communion, joy and hope in service to the Kingdom of God’

Document of the Association AMCG – Charismatic Families: Journeying towards Communion. Charismatic Families in Dialogue. Planning for 2017-2020

On behalf of the Ministers of the Sick (Camillians), I offer our welcome to all those taking part in this historic event of an inter-Congregational character: this meeting of the Camillian Charismatic Family which brings together all the original expressions in institutionalised (religious and lay) form that down the centuries have drawn inspiration from St. Camillus de Lellis, his charism and his spirituality.

¹ Rome, 10-14 March 2019, at the house of spiritual exercises ‘Our Lady Mother of Mercy’, the Congregation of the Handmaidens of Christ the King.

We constitute eight expressions of the Camillian charism which is so deeply human, evangelical, of increasing contemporary relevance, and above all else very necessary in today's world.

1. A male Order: the Ministers of the Sick (Camillians).

2. Three female Congregations:

The Daughters of Saint Camillus (the Blessed Luigi Tezza and the Blessed Giuseppina Vaninni).

The women Ministers of the Sick of Saint Camillus (the Blessed Maria Domenica Brun Barbantini).

The Handmaidens of the Incarnation (Fr. Primo Fiocchi)

3. Three secular female Institutes:

The women Missionaries of the Sick – *Christ our Hope* (Germana Summaruga).

Stella Maris (Guarulhos - SP – Brazil.)

Kamillianischen Schwestern – the Camillian Sisters (Fr. Calisto Vendrame and Heidi).

4. A lay organisation connected with the Camillians:

The Lay Camillian Family (LCF).

All of us taking part in this meeting were chosen for the thorny evangelic ministry 'of the exercise and service of authority' together with our fellow religious as Superior Generals, members of General Consultas and Councils, and presidents of our Congregations, Institutes and/or organisations.

We have gathered together around a fundamental question about the future of the Camillian charism: *Which Camillian prophecy today? Between the past...the present...and the future. Prophecy...between the Samaritan and the Samaritan woman.*

The central word in this subject is PROPHECY. What do we mean by *prophecy* today? Fr. Amedeo Cencini observes: 'Prophecy is not only, and not essentially, prefiguring a future (which is perhaps unprecedented and surprising) that will take place despite everything because it is endowed with a marvellous force that is stronger than our calculations. Prophets do not necessarily unveil the future – they unveil the truth. For this reason, prophecy is always also provocation that invites us to read history with an outlook on history, on the past and on the present as a whole, certainly as regards essential strategic points. Prophecy opens to the future but also explains the past; it is projected towards tomorrow but it is founded in memory. It is specifically thanks to this rooting in the past, correctly understood and discovered in its deepest meaning, that makes us perceive the direction to be placed on the future'.²

For many of our Institutes, which in a short time will celebrate their assemblies and/or General Chapters, the contents of this meeting will certainly be a useful help in the drawing up of the *lineamenta*, and an instrument of work and thought, with a view to the decisions about the present and the future of our Institutes. Beyond this fundamental objective, as regards other goals it will be a valuable experience of inter-Congregational fraternal being together, as a well as a strong moment of ongoing formation on the pathways of our consecrated lives.

In our Constitution and our General Statutes we find encouragement, and the invitation, to meet and to establish 'relations of fraternity and cooperation'.

'Our communities cultivate relations of fraternity and cooperation with the lay Congregations and Institutes inspired by the Camillian charism (GS 19).

'Our religious value the presence and action of members of other religious Institutes who carry out their ministry in health-care and socio-health-care institutions, working with them in projects for formation and pastoral care' (GS 20).

'Mutual cooperation is promoted between ourselves and lay people – whether in associations or not – in relation to activities whose aims are shared by us, and in particular those connected with the world of health' (GS 21).

'Our religious cooperate diligently and generously with lay personnel, showing themselves open to interdisciplinary cooperation, respecting their professional competence, their experience and their personal witness as sources of inspiration and learning, and setting an example to them, from a professional point of view as well' (GS 22).

² Amedeo CENCINI, *Abbracciare il futuro con speranza. Il domani della vita consacrata* (Paoline, Milan, 2018), p. 22.

We read as follows in the **Camillian Project for a faithful and creative life: challenges and opportunities (2014-2020)**:

‘The Lay Camillian Family (LCF), a work of our Order, and as such recognised by all of us, is a living sign of concrete cooperation with lay people’ (**Camillian Project for a faithful and creative life: challenges and opportunities**, 3.1).

‘Lay people are a valuable resource given that they can act with efficacy in the processes involving the revitalisation of the Order. Their presence must not be interpreted solely in the sense of replacing religious who are absent because of age or numbers in the various functions of service in our works or in ministry in general. Rather, it is necessary to listen above all else to their need for fraternal welcome, for a sharing of our charism and our spirituality. Our communities must remain open so that lay people as well can offer their competent contribution in fields that have hitherto not been shared very much, such as social communication, the promotion of vocations, and initial and ongoing formation’ (**Camillian Project for a faithful and creative life: challenges and opportunities**, 3.1).

A Little History about this Itinerary that Began in the Year 2015

In the logic and the furrow of the culture of encounter of the various expressions of the Camillian charism, we began a common journey by bringing together the general governments (Superior Generals, members of the general consultas and councillors of the Camillians, the Daughters of St. Camillus and the women Ministers of the Sick). We agreed on a shared message on the subject ‘Living the Mysticism of Encounter to be Women and Men of Communion’, which called on all the religious to renew their wish to journey together, in the sharing of spirituality and of pathways of formation in line with projects of mutual interest.

To develop this process we met at least two times a year. We agreed, on the occasion of the solemnity of St. Camillus (14 July), to send out a joint message to all the men and women religious of our Institutes. We gradually grew together in an inclusive vision and we finally integrated all these expressions of the Camillian charism.

In addition to taking part in the traditional renewal of religious vows – on 8 December, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene – we sent out the following inter-Congregational messages: ‘To our Elderly and Sick Fellow Religious’ (2015); ‘The Call to be Witnesses and Prophets of the Mercy of God’ (2016); ‘Young People, Faith and Vocation: the Common Wish for Holiness’ (2017); ‘There is only one Sadness in Life: that of not being Saint. The Joy, Holiness and Blessedness of Mercy’ (2018).

Over the last four years we have on average met twice a year. These meetings have fostered the growth of knowing each other: fraternal being together has facilitated the creation of an atmosphere of serene trust.

On this itinerary, the primary objective has been to cultivate and nurture ‘an intonation of hearts and outlooks of common values’, respecting our identities and originalities, before trying to put together ‘material things’.

Many projects and dreams in this inter-Congregational space run the risk of not developing or coming to completion if one privileges the objective of putting together ‘spiritual things’ without hearts being ready and sensitive to this innovation beforehand. Without affective and spiritual harmony, ‘the area of the material of our consecrated lives’ becomes marked by conflict and rather than uniting us it separates and makes people sceptical about the possibility of building something in common.

Why do we Journey Together? Some Reasons for Meeting Each Other

An initial observation

In many parts of the Camillian world we already work together on project and works to care for the sick, the disabled and the poor in projects of formation, of spirituality and of mission.

Appeals starting with the reality and the context of the Church (The Year of Consecrated Life, 2015)

‘I also hope for a growth in communion between the members of different Institutes. Might this Year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and to work together, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? This would make for a more effective prophetic witness. Communion and the encounter between different charisms and vocations can open up a path of hope. No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the disease of self-absorption’

Apostolic letter of the Holy Father Francis to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life,

A truth that is not always valued in our daily lives

Together we are stronger – we can (and we must!) help each other in specific projects in the complex world of health and health care in which we are all involved. Interesting initiatives have arisen in this direction: for example the ‘Association AMCG – Charismatic Families’ project in the context of the USG and the UISG. There emerged from this the ‘Charismatic Families in Dialogue’, with very precise planning for the period 2017-2020 and its central topic of ‘A Journey towards Communion’.

Our Vicar General, Fr. Laurent Zoungrana, has taken part in this movement assiduously ever since its beginning and we thank him for this important involvement in this work in progress.

In his speech of 30 March 2017 to those taking part in the General Chapter of the Somascan Order Pope Francis observed: ‘Do not be afraid to “*leave the old wineskins*,” addressing the transformation of the structures where that is useful for a more evangelical and coherent service with the original charism. In certain cases, the structures give false protection and restrain the dynamism of charity and of the service to the Kingdom of God’.

The moment seems to have come to build ties and live supportive dynamics between different Institutes. Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the Prefect of the CICLSAL, observed in an interview: ‘Consecrated Life in the future will be a life based much more on communion and also on doing things together as Institutes... Hitherto we have not been able to work together’ (cf. *Testimoni*, n. 3, March 2017).

There are no words more realistic than these! In this direction, in front of us, we have a whole world to build!

Msgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, the Secretary of the CICLSAL, in his paper to the World Congress on Consecrated Life (28 January-2 February 2016) emphasised the appeal to communion in the following way: ‘Consecrated life was born in the Church, with the Church and for the Church... Today we are called to pass, like concentric circles, from awareness of the local community to awareness of the Order or the Institute; from awareness of the Order, Institute, Society or Association to awareness of the Charismatic Family; and from the Charismatic Family we have to expand our hearts to communion with all the charisms in the Church’

The road for the future...

I will end these initial greetings with four words: 1. *a new Pentecost*; 2. *discernment*; 3. *humble sowers*; 4. *the future*.

1. **A new Pentecost** – building unity and communion in diversity (Cf. Acts 2:12)

I hope that this historic Camilian inter-Congregational meeting will be experienced and felt as an authentic Pentecost in our lives. With the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit we can *construct cultures, languages, human colours and shared experiences, union and communion, in diversity!*

We have before us the challenge of acquiring *inter-cultural skills and expertise*. True unity cannot be the outcome of *uniformity* (violence): it is born from the diversity that bears with it the beauty of the uniqueness and identity of each one of us with our own gifts and limitations. This approach of openness to the Spirit and to the other person is a laborious process that brings with it the need to listen to the other, with a sensitive heart and empathetic reason.

2. **Discernment** – method and simultaneous objective

I hope these this historic inter-Congregational meeting will be a deep experience of discernment as regards the subject of the meeting and the topics that are raised and discussed, with courageous choices being made about the future as well.

Pope Francis, when opening the synod on ‘Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment’, laid a great deal of emphasis on this aspect. This is not an advertising slogan or an organisational technique. It is a method and simultaneously also the goal that we have in front of us for this meeting. The Holy Father, who is a Jesuit, often stresses the subject of discernment in his speeches: ‘Discernment refers to when a person or a community try to recognise and accept the will of God in the concrete realities of their situation. To do this, one must set out to listen, know how to assess in the light of faith what happens and be attentive to real people’.³

3. **Humble sowers of the values of the Kingdom of God**– ‘Behold, the sower goes out to sow’ (Mt 13:4)

In a world marked by the pragmatism of immediate and tangible results, in consecrated life as well, at times there is the risk of entering this authentic ‘paranoia’ which only values the ‘doing’ of people, forgetting that the justification of everything is, simply, their ‘being’. In this sense, our itinerary towards the future with the Samaritan and the Samaritan woman helps us to be transformed into listeners and humble and prophetic sowers of the mercy of the Father (the Samaritan), in the interior search for ‘that living water’ that quenches our thirst for eternity (the Samaritan woman). What we sow, if there are abundant results and fruits, will be gathered by others.

As Saint Paul said when speaking about true preachers and emphasising the centrality of God in everything: ‘I sowed the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow. The one who sows and the one who waters really do not matter. It is God who matters, because he makes the plant grow’ (1 Cor 3:6-7)

Amedeo Cencini observes: ‘Consecrated life exists for this, *to sow in joy, with an impassioned and creative heart*, so that the love of God, His friendship and His mercy reach everyone’.⁴

³ Sergio da Rocha, a Brazilian Cardinal, general speaker at the synod on young people.

⁴ Amedeo CENCINI, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

4. *The future – embracing the future with hope*

I hope that this historic inter-Congregational meeting will strengthen our trust in the future of humanity. Pope Francis is the only international moral authority who speaks today about hope in the future of humanity.

Others speak about the danger of nostalgia for the past, of *retrotopia* (Zygmunt Bauman): for them the future of humanity is in the past...we must go back...(it is from this attitude that emerge today fundamentalist radicalisms that sow violence and terror in the world: ‘the prophets of doom and terrorists of the spirit’).

Bauman responds by saying that ‘more than on other occasions, we human beings who live on the earth will be forced to address this situation, trying to stay united, hand in hand, otherwise we will obtain only shared graves’. We should not forget that all of us are building the future of the Camillian charism in the world. Certainly we have before us a great challenge but there is also a great hope: that of continuing and expanding the Camillian charism in the world in many forms that have hitherto been unimaginable! The time will come when the little plant of Camillus will be present throughout the world...Our charism is a wonderful gift that we have received from God through Camillus, in the Church. We cannot imprison that gift in our mental schemata or our institutions that no longer help in discerning the ‘signs of the times’. We are called to share it with the people of God. All of us are a privileged expression of this important reality! Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that ‘the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of dreams’. We must, therefore, direct our dreams towards the future and continue to be dreamers (the role of utopia in the secularised city, for us the *Kingdom of God*)!

On behalf of all those who are present, I would like to thank the members of the central commission for their work over the years to being together all the expressions of our charism who draw upon St. Camillus for inspiration. There have been many meetings engaging in preparations, study, thought and reflection. We can see this in the programme prepared for this event: both its aesthetic form and its contents and their subjects.

I hope that all of us, from many countries of the world, with a diversity of languages, races and cultural backgrounds, can meet each other as real brothers and sisters and grow in humanity, communion, fraternity, respect and the capacity for communication (listening and silence) to create a culture of encounter and holiness.

May Saint Camillus, Our Lady of Health and all our Blesseds – Fr. Enrico Rebuschini, Fr. Luigi Tezza, Mother Giuseppina Vannini, Mother Maria Domenica Brun Barbantini – and the Servant of God Germana Sommaruga ...be our real sources of inspiration and models of life!

I wish you all a successful meeting!

Rome, 10 March 2019