



GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITE FRIARS

Corso d'Italia, 38

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2015-2021 SEXENNIUM – LETTER N° 8

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Dear brothers and sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

We send fraternal greetings to you as we finish the three-monthly meeting of the General Definitory which took place at Rome from the 6th to the 10th of March. Present were Fr General and all the Definitors. By means of this letter we wish to share with you news on the dialogue, discussions and decisions of the Definitory, in order to maintain contact and to encourage communion in the Order (friars, nuns and lay Carmel). We hope that knowledge of the different parts of the Order throughout the world will encourage mutual interest and family spirit.

As usual, the first point in the order of the day for the Definitory meeting was a review of the activities of the previous months, particularly the fraternal visits. This time, there were no pastoral visits, keeping in mind that the various areas of jurisdiction in the Order are celebrating chapters and capitular congresses. From this point of view, we invite all to partake in the chapters with real interest and with an attitude of dialogue and communion, open to the voice of the Spirit and the signs of the times. It would be appropriate to re-read Fr General's letter sent to the whole Order on last December 14th, with indications and important suggestions for the chapters.

Fr General himself assisted at the chapter of the South-East Brasil province, which was celebrated in São Roque beginning on the 9th of January this year. Afterwards he presided at the chapter congress of the General Delegation of Argentina, which met at Alta Gracia, Cordoba, from the 16th to the 20th of January, at which the 17 solemnly professed friars of the Delegation participated. Later on he paid a fraternal visit to the Regional Vicariate of Paraguay-Uruguay-Bolivia, which forms part of the Iberian Province. Then he took part in the plenary council and visited the monasteries and convents of the territory. The Vicariate is made up mainly of young religious, who are slowly achieving greater autonomy and internal cohesion.

The Vicar General, for his part, carried out in previous weeks a fraternal visit to the provinces of Lombardy and Central Italy. On the 10th of January, he took part in a joint meeting of the two provinces, who had opened a process of dialogue towards greater collaboration between them, particularly in the field of initial formation and vocational promotion. In Italy the Lombardy province has at present 45 religious in 8 communities as well as one student in simple vows, while in the Cameroon mission there are 9 solemnly professed (from various circumscriptions), 5 simply professed and 2 novices. For its part, the Province of Central Italy, created in 2014 by the union of the Roman and Tuscan Provinces, has 51 solemnly professed and 3 students, as well as 11 religious outside the Province, in service of the Order or in other situations. Both provinces are experiencing, as in other western circumscriptions, a numerical decrease and ageing, which draws attention to the priorities of the present moment and to opening themselves decidedly to interprovincial collaboration.

Fr Johannes Gorantla has been in India. He visited the Malabar Province's Regional Vicariate of North Malabar, which was created in 2008. It is at present made up of 28 religious and is receiving many vocations. He also visited the houses of the Manjummel Province situated in the same area. Afterwards he went to the Provincial Delegation of Ranchi, which also belongs to the Malabar Province and has slightly more than 20 friars and a large number in formation; in this situation it is necessary to pay special attention to the quality of Carmelite formation for the candidates. Fr Johannes was also in contact with other provinces in India, collaborating in the preparations for the provincial chapters. He also visited some monasteries and took part in a meeting of Discalced Carmelite nuns.

Fr Daniel Chowning was in France, where he took part in the provincial assembly of the Paris Province, in order to present the final conclusions of the pastoral visit which he had performed a few weeks before. His proposals were the object of discussion between the religious. He also spoke of the particularly difficult time our presence in Iraq is going through, where at present there is an Iraqi Carmelite Fr Ghadir, who lives in Bagdad and takes care of a mission in the north of the country. Fr Daniel also visited the monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Lyon (Fourvière) and in Flavignerot (Dijon), who after the canonization of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity have seen an increase in the number of pilgrims visiting the monastery and the Dijon area.

As for Fr Javier Mena, he took part in the chapter of the Commissariat of Chile, celebrated from the 2nd to the 6th of January in Auco. The Commissariat has 6 communities, 26 solemnly professed, 4 studying theology and one postulant. During these days, important commitments

were made to strengthen in our parishes our identity arising from our charism and it was decided to support definitively the formation project together with the South Cicla in the stages of novitiate and theological studies. The Assembly visited the councils of the Discalced Carmelite nuns and of the Secular Order, with whom they shared the common worries and renewed the commitment to journey together and give mutual support. It was also agreed to carry on with the project of re-reading the Constitutions, for the purpose of revitalizing personal and community life. Finally, the chapter decided to set in motion the preparations for the celebration of the First Centenary of the death of St Teresa of los Andes which will occur in 2020.

The Definitior continued on to the Commissariat of Peru, where their chapter was celebrated from the 7th to the 13th of January. There are 25 solemnly professed, 4 studying theology and 4 postulants. The Chapter discerned the way to go in order to strengthen the identity of the Commissariat and the Discalced Carmel in Peru. To achieve this the chapter insisted on a commitment to personal and community guidance which ought to seek to become an integral part of the community project. They also committed themselves to the re-reading of the Constitutions as an instrument encouraging renewal of the life and providing a space for dialogue. On the other hand, they united themselves to the communal projects of the Cicla, particularly those concerning formation together in the stages of the novitiate and theological studies. In the pastoral field, the chapter took on the execution of the Strategic Pastoral Plan for the parishes, so that there is some unity and continuity in pastoral work, and at the same time accentuating our Carmelite identity with a strong social commitment. The chapter considered a wealth the journey made by Carmel in Peru together with the Discalced Carmelite nuns and the OCDs communities, and they committed themselves to continue offering communal support. The Assembly was also made aware of the steps being taken in order to move towards greater financial autonomy.

Fr Mariano Agruda informed us about some of the visits he carried out to various Asiatic countries. In the Philippines he was in the nuns' monasteries of Cebu, Lucena and Angeles and later on in Manila and Bacolod, as well as in the friars' monasteries in these last two places. In Indonesia he visited the recent foundation of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Jakarta, which has been very well received and particularly favoured by the Archbishop of the diocese, nevertheless there was no lack of difficulties caused by the Islamic environment which is increasing in the region. From there he went to Lembeng (East Java – Indonesia) where on the 17th of January was celebrated the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Discalced Carmelite nuns' monastery. Afterwards he went to Thailand, where he visited the

Carmelite nuns' monasteries in the country: Samphan, Nakhon Sawan, Bangkok and Chantaburi, as well as the friars' monastery in Amphoe Sam Phran, which has 4 solemnly professed friars, 1 simply professed and 2 postulants. In Japan he took part in the chapter congress which was celebrated from the 13th to the 17th of February at Uji, Kyoto; the General Delegation has 22 solemnly professed and 3 students in 6 communities and cares for 9 churches and 7 primary schools. Afterwards he went to Australia, where he was informed about the regional assembly which the friars celebrated for 4 days in Varroville (Sydney) as a preparation for the chapter, to be celebrated in the coming month of July. On the 22nd of February he took part in the episcopal ordination of Fr Gregory Homeming as Bishop of the Australian diocese of Lismore; Fr Greg was born in Sydney in 1958, made his first profession in the Order in 1986 and at the time of his appointment was the Regional Vicar of Australia (Anglo-Irish province).

Fr Daniel Ehigie has been in various places in Africa. On the 17th December he took part in the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Discalced Carmelite nuns' monastery in Figuil in the north of the Cameroons. Afterwards he visited the monasteries of Etoudi and Bouea. All the monasteries, situated in different parts of the Cameroons, manifested their desire for a greater relationship with the friars and to receive more help in the area of formation. Later on he visited the two communities of friars who are now present in the Cameroons: the parish of Nkoabng and the formation house in Nkolbisson. The mission forms part of the Lombardy province and at the moment has friars from Genoa, Avignon-Aquitania, Nigeria and Congo, as well as the solemnly professed from the Cameroons and some young people in formation. The coming provincial chapters will be a good occasion to discuss ways of strengthening our presence in the Cameroons, with the necessary collaboration of the individual areas of jurisdiction.

Later on, Fr Daniel went to Nigeria, where he visited the monasteries of Zing and Owerri (which is preparing a new foundation in Abuja). In Ghana he visited the monastery in Tamale, founded by the nuns from various monasteries in the Philippines. Afterwards he took part in the English-speaking Conference of OCD Major Superiors, which took place in Entebbe (Uganda) from the 6th to the 11th of February. Finally, he carried out a fraternal visit to the General Delegation of the Congo, which has 8 communities (Kananga [2], Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Goma, Cimpunda-Bukavu and Bukavu). He also visited our nuns in Lubumbashi, Malole-Kananga, Kinshasa and Brazzaville. The Congolese Delegation, formed by a little more than 30 solemnly professed, is going through a time of good vocations (at present there are 18 students and 9 novices) and pays special attention to formation.

As can be seen from this brief synthesis of the visits, good relationships with the Discalced Carmelite nuns continues. It is a characteristic element of our charism right from the beginning and it is necessary to maintain and strengthen it. The presence of visitors in all places has been marked by a friendly tone and there was never lacking cordial welcome and fraternal dialogue on the situation of the Order: in many cases there was also a formative dimension, with talks and discussions on aspects of our charism or of the magisterium, particularly with regard to the apostolic constitution *Vultum Dei Quarere* and its doctrinal and practical contribution to female contemplative life.

Meanwhile, Fr Łukasz Kansy remained in Rome as prior of the General House community and coordinator of the Curia. In the meeting we discussed various aspects of the current situation in the General House. One of these was the coordination between the various secretariats and the Definitory responsible for each sector, in order to evaluate how things are running at present and to maintain always an adequate and efficient service to the Order.

Once the broad overview of the visits made was finished, the Definitory discussed other topics placed on the order of the day. One of the most important was the preparation of the next Extraordinary General Definitory, which will be celebrated at Ariccia, near Rome, from the 29th of August (arrival) to the 6th of September (departure). This will be an important event, given that it will be the first meeting of the major superiors of the jurisdictions of the Order after this year's provincial chapters. First of all Fr General will present a report on the state of the Order which will serve to open and be a guide for the work of the Definitory. After this, three important topics will be dealt with.

- The first will be provincial government, in order to promote better service from authority and better communication and communion with the General Government and with the whole Order. This will foster an informative and formative time, offering superiors instruments and criteria to carry out properly their responsibility of government.
- The second important question will be the analysis and evaluation of the program for the sexennium, in accordance with the document from the 2015 General Chapter "It is time to walk!", which has as its central element the re-reading of the Constitutions. Beginning with the contributions so far received and the experience of those taking part in the Definitory, there will be discussions on what has already been achieved and on the following stages.

- The third topic before the Extraordinary will be the territorial expansion of the Order, particularly the geographical distribution of the provinces and the presence of religious and communities in the territory of other circumscriptions.

As usual in these meeting, we will be able to receive and comment on other reports (economy, missions, etc.), and also have time for meetings of the individual conferences of provincials or linguistic groups. Soon the official convocation of the Extraordinary will be sent out, as well as other details about the meeting. Let us keep in mind that the Superiors' Conferences and the Provincial Councils have been invited to propose questions to be discussed in the Extraordinary Definitory (Norms 199).

The Definitory dealt with some specific questions referring to the academic centres of the Order, for example, the situation of appointments and services that is renew in the coming months in the Teresianum, or other improvement works due in the building. With regards to the International College, some modifications were approved to the rules for procedure, in order to clarify that, in accordance with our Constitutions, the admission of students to solemn profession always pertains to the respective provincial with the consensus of the formative community (CC 123). We also discussed the situation of study burses that are given annually to students from circumscriptions most in need, in order to foster their academic training. With regards to this, we should remember that the centre of the Order pays the expenses for the maintenance and lodging of all students of our provinces who reside in the International College.

We also continued discussion with regards to initial formation throughout the Order. Once again we agreed on the need for good vocational discernment and to dedicate the best of resources to the formation of candidates. We then discussed an issue which affects all the circumscriptions: at the present moment we should work along this lines particularly in those areas with greater vocational vitality, such as Asia and Africa.

With regard to Europe, discussion continued on Fr General's proposal to set up a community to receive religious for some months shortly after solemn profession or priestly ordination to experience a deepening of our charism and for the young European friars to get to know one another. This was presented in November to the European Conference of Provincial and in January to the European formators meeting in Avila. With a majority consensus we agreed on the need for a proposal of this type and on the reasons which justified it, while the specific way of bringing about the proposal seems to require greater reflection. To do this it would be good to have contributions and as wide as possible collaboration from the provincial superiors and those responsible for formation.

The Bursar General on this occasion presented the definitive and detailed accounts for 2016. The financial balance for the year was slightly positive and it was possible to expand the patrimonial balance. Without being very high, the present credit available allows a certain respite after having passed through some years in which, because of investments made and other circumstances, the finance of the centre of the Order has had to rely on the help of some provinces and monasteries, in the form of loans and donations. Financial solidarity is also a form of expressing fraternal communion; one of the services provided more and more by the General House is the redistribution of assets, for example, through help to poor monasteries, which is made possible through donations received. From the same point of view, the work of the Secretariat of Missionary Cooperation is also interesting. We have also received the financial report for 2016 from them; in this area however the resources available are limited because of insufficient donations and contributions from the provinces.

The Procurator General, for his part, reported the current status of negotiations before the Vatican congregations to regularize the juridical status of religious in cases that so require. He insisted on the need not to prolong irregular situations and to take appropriate steps to obtain the needed permissions. It is a task that pertains first of all to the provincials and the provincial secretaries. The Procurator General is at your disposal for all queries and suitable advice.

The information shared during these days and the topics covered by the Definitory have allowed us to renew the experience of being part of a universal family that forges ahead with its lights and shadows. Although problems and uncertainties are not lacking, without a doubt the richness of our charism is much greater, which expresses itself and becomes real in the life of so many of our brothers and sisters, struggling to reply with renewed fidelity to the Lord's call. We feel that we must maintain more than ever the effort to revitalize our personal and community identification with our charism. The season of Lent in which we are now, with its renewed invitation to conversion, can be a good opportunity to deepen our revision of life and our desire to live fully friendship with Christ, the source of any real renewal. May he grant us to prepare ourselves truly to take part fully in the new life of Easter.

Fr Saverio Cannistrà, General

Fr Agustí Borrell

Fr Łukasz Kansy

Fr Johannes Gorantla

Fr Daniel Chowning

Fr Francisco Javier Mena

Fr Mariano Agruda III

Fr Daniel Ehigie