



GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES
Corso d'Italia, 38
00198 Rome – Italy

SEXENNIAL 2015-2021 – LETTER N° 13

Rome, June 14, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Teresian Carmel,

We greet you with fraternal affection as our ordinary meeting of the General Definitory draws to a close. We spent time discussing and reflecting on the manifold facets of the life of the Order between June 4th to the 14th with a desire to accompany and encourage our brothers and sisters in the family from the standpoint of the unique mission which has been entrusted to us. With this letter we want to share with you some of the specific themes with which we have been engaged and, most especially, demonstrate our closeness and fellowship.

As is the custom every six months, the meeting was preceded by a meeting between the General and the Council of Carmelites (O. Carm.) who gave us a hospitable welcome in their General Curia. In a cordial atmosphere, we exchanged information about issues of mutual interest, amongst which was the on-going preparation for the International encounter of young people from the Carmelite family which will take place on 28th January, 2019 in the context of the World Youth Day (January 22-27, 2019, Panama).

A few days prior, Fr. Saverio Cannistrà participated in the 90th six-monthly general assembly of the USG (Union of Superior Generals), during which he was elected as one of the ten Superior Generals who will participate in the next Synod of Bishops scheduled from October 3 to 28, and dedicated this year to "Young People, Faith, and Vocational Discernment." This is an honour as well as a responsibility for the General and the entire Order. Thus, the upcoming program will be characterized especially by the call to open ourselves to young people and to listen to their voice, their sensitivities and their faith; to learn from them, to accompany them, and to help them in the construction of an ever better world.

Going on to the specific work of the Definitors, we dedicated the first part of our sessions to a review of the visitations made during the months of April and May. Thus, Fr. Saverio gave a report on the first pastoral visitation of the Iberian Province. From April 3 to May 15, he visited approximately half of the province (excluding the Vicariate of Bolivia-Uruguay-Paraguay and the Delegation of Western Africa). The second half of the pastoral visitations will be carried out by the Vicar General and is scheduled for October and November. The official conclusion to the visitation is scheduled for the end of November and will culminate in the celebration of 450 years since the beginning of the first community of Discalced Carmelite friars in Duruelo, November 28, 1568.

After a formation meeting with the young friars and stopping by the interprovincial, student community in Triana (Madrid), Fr. General visited some twenty communities of friars and participated in some assemblies of the Discalced Carmelite Federations. He presented a first summary of the visitation in the final meeting with the provincial council before the compilation of the definitive report to be drawn up in the near future. Concretely, he presented some proposals to draw special attention to initial formation which is shared between the

provinces of Navarre and Portugal and to continue to move forward in the necessary process of restructuring of the provinces, pointing out that some areas need strengthening and others should be abandoned.

From April 2 to 20, Fr. Łukasz Kansy carried out a provincial visitation of the province of Germany. Presently, 32 friars reside in four communities with a median age of 67 years. There are 20 monasteries of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in the province and 23 Secular Order communities. The visitor was able to confirm many positive aspects in the province, for example, the vitality of the retreat house in Birkenwerder, the well-endowed and well maintained libraries in the monasteries and the numerous Carmelite publications, as well as the good fraternal relationships between the friars of the provincial family, which extend to the nuns and laity through interesting initiatives of exchange and communion.

At the same time, he pointed out some elements which give rise to troubling concerns, such as the lengthy stay of friars in communities or in positions of responsibilities, and the lack of perseverance of candidates in formation in recent years. In the face of the scarcity of vocations, the German province must embrace the Church's call to renewal. It also needs to move forward in collaboration with neighbouring provinces, especially in the initial stages of formation. During the pastoral visitation, they also spoke about the relationship with friars in India who are present in the territory of the German province. In dialogue with their provinces of origin, they are making progress in applying the decisions which the Definitory made a few months ago to regulate their presence in accord with the spirit and letter of our laws.

Fr. Łukasz most recently visited the semi-province of Austria where he carried out a pastoral visitation from April 29 to May 14. The circumscription includes 22 professed friars and one novice, with a median age of 51 years, distributed in 2 communities (Vienna and Linz). There is one friar in Innsbruck, and the house in Graz has been temporarily given to the province of Croatia. The visitor also visited 11 monasteries of the Discalced Carmelite nuns and was able to meet with some of the four communities of Secular Carmelites.

What stands out is the international element of the province: 11 friars are Austrian and other friars come from 6 different nationalities. This gives a certain richness to their communal fraternal life. The cultural level of the circumscription is also noteworthy: most of the friars are pursuing higher theological studies. Fr. Łukasz encouraged them to intensify their efforts in vocational recruitment. He also asked that initial formation be carried out in collaboration with other circumscriptions and invited them to open themselves up equally to interprovincial involvement in other spheres.

From April 25 to May 29, Fr. Daniel Chowning carried out the pastoral visitation of the California-Arizona Province. The province numbers 40 solemnly professed friars (6 of whom are from Uganda), as well as 8 temporary professed (3 from Uganda) and 3 novices (from Uganda). The visitor visited seven communities in the province and also visited some of the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in the area. A palpable Carmelite identity could be felt in the province, which is manifested in their community life and prayer, as well as in a rich and varied apostolic activity: parishes, retreat houses, house of prayer, schools, spiritual direction, and ministry to our Carmelites nuns and to the Secular Order.

One of the elements in the province which requires special reflection is the liturgy, which calls for reflective discernment and shared decision making. On the other hand, the lack of vocations and the loss of some young people in recent times calls for a need to strengthen vocational recruitment and to work towards serious discernment and a revision of the initial formation program appropriate to the present situation. It is also worth cultivating interprovincial collaboration, which has already been agreed on for the novitiate.

From April 1 to May 9, Fr. Javier Mena carried out the pastoral visitation of the province of Mexico. It comprises 72 solemnly professioned friars in 16 communities at the present time,

with a median age of 57 years. There is a total of 23 candidates in various stages of formation. In the provincial area, there are 38 monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns and 64 Secular Carmelite communities, with a total of some 1500 members, as well as 700 fraternities of Carmel.

The visitor was able to make note the serene and fraternal harmony lived out among the friars. The presence of three large generational groups brings a richness which encourages the transmission of the charism and allows them to look to the future with hope. Pastoral ministry centered on spirituality is a strength of the province, as well as a large number of lay groups and movements. Another aspect is the significant attention to the artistic, cultural, and religious heritage of the province.

Fr. Javier encouraged the province to revise and promote certain aspects such as coordinating the centres of spirituality, support of the Secular Carmelites and the fraternities of Carmel, collaboration with other circumscriptions in Latin America, concern for initial formation, specialisation of the young friars in spirituality, commitment to prayer in community, and the style of government, amongst other issues.

Fr. Daniel Ehigie carried out the pastoral visitation of the Provincial Delegation of Kenya, that forms part of the Washington province. It includes 25 professed friars, 3 novices and 15 postulants. The average age is 46 years. Furthermore, there are four religious present in the Delegation from other circumscriptions for reasons of study. The Delegation has 6 communities at the present time.

The visitor exhorted them to press forward in a sense of community and fidelity to the commitments characteristic of religious life and also to better management of economic affairs. Thus it is necessary to be conscious so that ethnic and political differences are not an obstacle to fraternal communion between the friars. Initial formation is an area where special care is needed.

Fr. Daniel had a later meeting with the council of the Comisariat in Madagascar, where collaboration with the Francophone Conference of Africa and Madagascar was on the agenda amongst other matters.

Fr. Johannes Gorantla, for his part, gave a report of the visitations he made in the last few weeks to nearly a hundred friars from the provinces of India present in Germany, Italy and the United States. Such exchanges are intended to facilitate putting into practice the decisions made by the Definitory last September to regularise the presence of religious from other provinces in the area, and most especially to assure community life which is essential in our religious family. In dialogue with the respective provinces and also with the bishops, steps are being taken so that the apostolic undertakings are sufficiently integrated with community life and prayer, characteristic of the Teresian Carmel.

Fr. Mariano Agruda participated in the annual Conference of Major Superiors from East Asia and Oceania which took place in Seoul, Korea from the 8th to the 13th of April. Formation was the main theme. More recently, he visited various communities of friars and nuns in Korea and had a few meetings with the Secular Carmelites, which is very active and is flourishing in the region. Afterwards, he went to Vietnam where he visited the monasteries of the Discalced Carmelites nuns and the monastery of Cao Thai in Ho Chi Minh. He also went to Cambodia in order to visit the Discalced Carmelites nuns in Phnom Penh. Finally, he was in the Philippines, where he took part in the seminar on formation for prioresses and mistresses of novices in the Philippine Association.

In this way,

The Definitory is following the conclusions and resolutions of previous visitations. Thus, for example, we have commented on the present state of the processes of restructuring

which are being carried out in some European provinces. In Lombardy, the provincial council has taken some decisions to invigorate certain communities by reducing the number of communities. In the Province of Central Italy, the regional superior (il comisario) and councilors chosen by the Definitory have assumed their offices and have begun the initiative to apply the recommendations taken at the last general visitation for the restructuring and revitalization of the province. We have also received information about the discernment which the province of Portugal has undertaken in the same light. Furthermore, the Definitory has received and accepted the provincial council's proposal of the province of Portugal for temporary suspension of the mission in Eastern Timor, given that the efforts made in the last months to consolidate the community in Dili has not yielded positive results.

Fr. Łukasz reported to us about the second novitiate for European students. The project is still in its preparatory stages and is expected that it will take place from July to September 2019. In a few days, at the beginning of July, 2018, a group of students from different provinces will meet together in our community in Salamanca for a few weeks study of the Castilian language as a preparation for the second novitiate, also accompanied by Fr. Łukasz.

At another level, we have also continued to reflect on the present and future of the International College in Rome. Fr. Johannes made a fraternal visitation to the community May 7-9 and noted the good and formative atmosphere present there. Nonetheless, the increasingly reduced number of students sent to the college from the provinces is a matter of concern: we foresee a total of 20 students for next year, spread over the three year course, the lowest number in recent years. We also discussed the situation of the specialization community which continues to be a good instrument to facilitate not only higher academic formation, but also provides experience for mutual knowledge and communion among the younger friars in the different circumscriptions of the Order.

With regard to the rereading of the Constitutions, the process continues according to the set plan. We are coming to the end of the first stage which has been both intense and enriching. With the help of the Study Guides, the communities are reflecting on the final texts of the Constitutions which are of a more juridical nature. The international commission continues to gather the contributions from the conscriptions and is preparing a synthesis in order to draw its conclusions. This material will be presented to the Definitory in September so that it can prepare for the Extraordinary General Definitory which will take place in Goa, India from February 3 to 11, 2019 and which should make a decision about the text of the Constitutions. Meanwhile, we are encouraging all circumscriptions and communities not to slaken their commitment to reinvigorate our charismatic life which the General Chapter of 2015 adopted as the main objective for the next sexennium through the re-reading of the Constitutions.

Following long-standing practice, we have received the three monthly report from the General Bursar, Fr. Paolo De Carli, regarding the state of the accounts and some specific issues related to the administration of the Order's patrimony. Thus, together with the Procurator General, Fr. Jean-Joseph Bergara, we have examined various personal cases of friars in the Order who find themselves in special situations and need help or assistance from the Definitory or the Holy See. We also received prompt information from the Delegate in the Holy Land, Fr. Attilio Ghisleri, on the life of the Delegation and some administrative and economic issues. The laborious operations to protect and make our properties in the area profitable are making headway, especially in the Wadi es-Siah, the cradle of Carmel.

We ended the Definitory just a few days before the beatification of the Discalced Carmelite nun from Paraguay, María Felicia de Jesús Sacramentado (Guggiari Echeverría), known as Chiquitunga, who enjoys great popularity, particularly in Paraguay. The celebration is to take place on June 23. Born in 1925 in Villarica, María Felicia was active in Catholic Action from her teenage years and stood out for her concern for children, young workers,

college students, the poor, the sick, and the elderly. Feeling a vocation to Carmel, she entered the monastery in Asunción at the age of 30 and died just four years later on April 28, 1959 due to a serious illness.

This beatification provides us with an example of a resolute response to God's love and of joyful and generous service to the needy. Pope Francis, in his recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, reminded us that "Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church" (EG 9) and that "We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves." (EG 14).

Thinking of our sister, María Felicia, we hold all Discalced Carmelite nuns before us in a special way. May they continue to bear witness in our times to the beauty of contemplative life, centered on the search for the face of God and unconditional love for Christ. In fact, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published a few weeks ago the practical instruction *Cor Orans* which contains concrete directives to apply the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* to the contemplative life of women. The instruction is an instrument which seeks to help in the necessary renewal and updating of certain forms and structures in order to encourage the fundamental values of contemplative life to be lived out in an appropriate and meaningful way in the present reality of human history and the life of the Church. We accompany our sisters in the reception and application of this guidance in a spirit of ecclesial communion and constant attentiveness to the voice of God.

We keep our Brothers and Sisters of the Teresian Carmel in our prayers, especially those who find themselves in situations of difficulty or uncertainty. Among them we remember especially those who are living in an atmosphere of violence or social or political upheaval (Venezuela, Nicaragua, etc.).

We greet you fraternally,

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