



GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES
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SEXENNIIUM 2015-2021 – LETTER N° 17

Rome, June 16th, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters of the Teresian Carmel,

Fraternal Greetings to you at the end of the quarterly meeting of the General Definitory, celebrated in Rome from the 3rd to the 13th of June, with the participation of Fr General and the seven Definitors.

Our meeting took place immediately after the days of living together and reflection that we shared with the General Council of the Carmelites (OCarm), as a further step in the path of dialogue and collaboration that has been maintained in recent years between the two religious families. On this occasion we were welcomed to the O.Carm Provincial House in Dublin (Ireland), and the central theme of the meeting was the missionary perspective and activity in Carmel today. At the conclusion of the meeting, a short message was prepared to promote missionary interest in the family of Carmel: in harmony with the message of Pope Francis—who has convened an Extraordinary Missionary Month for October 2019 with the motto “Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world”—we recalled that mission consists more of being than doing, and that all of us, as Carmelites, are mission.

Once again in Rome, at the meeting of the Definitory we devoted preferential attention to the recent pastoral visits made by the General and, on his behalf, by the Definitors. Visitations are always intense experiences of fraternal encounter, which serve to foster relationship and communion within the Order, as well as to take the pulse of the plural and varied reality of our family spread throughout the world and embodied in very diverse social and cultural realities.

First of all, Fr General reported on his pastoral visitation to the semi-province of Lebanon, which he personally carried out from the 24th of March to the 16th of April. The semi-province currently has 27 solemnly professed friars and 2 in temporary vows (in addition to 2 bishops), with 7 communities. There are two communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Lebanon, plus one in Aleppo, Syria. The Secular Carmel of Lebanon has 4 communities. The friars carry out an intense pastoral activity: the province runs 4 schools, 2 parishes, 2 retreat houses and 1 spirituality institute. The visitor invited the friars to intensify community life, which is conditioned by the reduced number of members in communities and the large number of apostolic commitments. Some of these themes have been the subject of direct dialogue with the superior of the semi-province, Fr Raymond Abdo, who was present at one of the Definitory sessions.

Subsequently, Fr Saverio was in Israel, where he took part in the celebration of the centenary of the multitudinous procession of the Virgin of Carmel in Haifa. The General

Delegation currently comprises 11 friars, of different nationalities, in addition to the 3 who take care of our parish and school in Haifa, which has been entrusted to the semi-province of Lebanon. During the visitation, there was talk of different aspects of fraternal life and pastoral attention to pilgrims, as well as the need for some restoration work in the church of Stella Maris and the construction of a multipurpose room in Muhraqa.

From Israel, Fr General went to Egypt. In the two communities of this General Delegation there are 6 solemnly professed, one in temporary vows and two applicants. In addition, one solemnly professed and 4 in temporary vows from the delegation are located outside Egypt for studies or other reasons. Following the visitation, the Definitory decided that the initial formation of candidates should take place in Lebanon and that steps be taken to intensify the relationship with the semi-province of Lebanon.

For his part, Fr. Agustí Borrell gave a report on his pastoral visitation to the province of Naples, which he made from the 24th of April to the 17th of May. The province has 16 solemnly professed (with a median age of 64 years), 4 in temporary vows and 2 novices, as well as 7 friars from other provinces who are in the service of the Neapolitan province. The province has 6 communities, 2 of which are formation houses. The pastoral activity is varied: four public churches, a parish, a Marian shrine and two spirituality centres, as well as other personal commitments of the friars. After a few years of moderate numerical decline, the province has experienced in recent times a certain vocational rebirth, which allows them to look to the future with hope. The visitor invited them to restructure in order to respond to the current reality and to ensure that all communities have a sufficient number of friars in order to live the fundamental elements of our charismatic identity. Recommendations were also made for progress in interprovincial dialogue and collaboration with the Order. In the territory of the province, there are 9 monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns, in various situations, as well as 15 communities of Secular Carmelites.

Fr Łukasz Kansy made a pastoral visit to the province of Krakow from the 30th of March to the 18th of May. The province has 180 solemnly professed and 27 in temporary vows, and a total of 23 houses (9 in Poland, 3 in Slovakia, 2 in the Ukraine, 1 in Latvia, 1 in Germany, 2 in the United States and 5 in the Rwanda-Burundi mission). The average age (excluding the mission in Africa) has increased slightly in recent times and is around 53 years.

The province has dedicated resources to vocational promotion and has kept up a moderate pace of new candidates in recent years. Diligent care has also been given to initial and permanent formation. What stands out in the area of pastoral ministry is the good functioning of the two great spirituality centres and welcoming pilgrims in Czerna and Wadowice. One noteworthy aspect is that the province's website is especially well maintained which has positive effects, even for vocational ministry. The visitor exhorted the communities to give more prominence to prayer in common, as an essential value of the life of the Teresian Carmel and, in general, to give importance to community acts. It was also proposed that they carry out specific formation for community superiors.

It should be added that, in the United States, the Krakow province maintains the communities of Munster and the Chicago parish of St. Camillus, currently with 6 and 2 friars respectively. Both were visited in early April by Fr Daniel Chowning. For years, they have served mainly the Polish community in the area and the pilgrims that come to the Marian shrine in Munster. Because of the demographic shift of Polish immigrants in the Chicago area, the friars will need to review and expand their apostolate towards the English-

speaking population and orient their ministry more toward Carmelite spirituality. In the near future, they will leave the parish of St. Camillus.

Fr Javier Mena visited the province of Central America from the 23rd of April to the 23rd of May. Born from the missionary activity of the provinces of Navarre and Aragon-Valencia, the province was erected in 1997, and currently has 12 communities in 6 countries (Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua). It has a total of 46 solemnly professed friars (of which 39 are in the communities of the province), 11 in temporary vows and 3 novices, in addition to 2 bishops. The average age of the solemnly professed is 53 years. It is a young province in the process of consolidation, which has managed to maintain an acceptable flow of vocations. There are currently 23 young people in the various initial stages. It is a province that stands out for its good knowledge and appreciation of St Teresa. A good number of young friars have gone out of province to study, most of them to courses in CITEs.

Pastoral work in Central America is abundant and varied. The province has six “Teresian Schools of Spiritual Promotion” (ESTEPRE), which constitute a valuable initiative of formation in spirituality and our charism, very well used by the Secular Carmelite communities. In addition, the planned Mount Carmel Home in Lepaterique (Honduras) has been initiated so that girls in the villages can complete their secondary education. It is significant that in most parishes there are multiple social initiatives. Also worth noting is the good relationship with the Discalced Carmelite nuns and the communities of Secular Carmelites.

The Visitor invited the province to review its commitment to personal prayer, which is currently conditioned by the preferential dedication to ministerial activities. He also called for a reflection on the fragility of some communities which may have been influenced by the recent departure of friars. The province should consolidate the communities with a sufficient number of friars that allows, not only adequate pastoral activity, but also a good experience of prayer and fraternity. On the other hand, it is necessary to intensify permanent formation and to establish clear criteria on advanced specialized studies of friars.

In another order of things, Fr. Javier gave a report on his visit to the community of the theology student house in Buenos Aires where students from the delegation of Argentina, the vicariate of Uruguay-Bolivia-Paraguay, and the Commissariat of Chile are currently formed. We discussed the current state and future prospects of initial formation in Latin America. Steps are being taken to intensify collaboration between the various circumscriptions in this very important field

From the 22nd to the 28th of April and from the 4th to the 16th of May, Father Daniel Ehigie visited the regional vicariate of Tanzania, part of the Karnataka-Goa Province. It has a total of 22 religious in Tanzania and 6 outside the vicariate. There are 12 novices and 16 students. Of the 22 friars present in the vicariate, 15 are from India, and 7 from Tanzania. The median age is 42 years. Currently, the vicariate has 7 communities. They take good care of initial formation. The formation house is also home to students from Rwanda-Burundi and Malawi, and the number of students is expected to increase for the next course; therefore, the formation community will need to be strengthened and structures adapted. The apostolate is preferably of a parish and school type. The friars have a good relationship with the dioceses and their work is appreciated. Greater attention should be devoted to the pastoral care of spirituality. On the other hand, it must be ensured that communities have sufficient members, as some of them are very small.

From the 27th of March to the 17th of April, Fr Mariano Agruda III made a pastoral visitation to the General Delegation of Japan. It has 7 houses and 20 solemnly professed friars (15 Japanese, 3 Italians and 2 Indonesians) and 2 in temporary vows. The median age is 70 years. In Japan, there are also 9 monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns and 8 communities of the Secular Carmelites. Japan's Christian population is scarce, at just 0.3% of the total population, and is experiencing a rapid decline. The presence of the Order began 50 years ago through the missionary activity of the provinces of Lombardy and Venice. The friars serve 6 parish stations, 7 nursery schools and 2 retreat houses. The delegation is experiencing a period of fragility because of the lack of vocations, aging, and health problems of some friars. Equally noticeable is a weakness of community life, excess of individual commitments, and the lack of a common project. In the current situation, it is essential to be open to the assistance of other circumscriptions in order to revitalize the Order's presence in Japan.

Subsequently, from the 25th of April to the 24th of May, Fr Mariano made a pastoral visitation to the Indonesian Commissariat. The Manjummel Province began a presence in Indonesia in 1982. The commissariat was established in 2011. Currently, it has 10 houses, 5 of which are parishes. There are 47 solemnly professed friars, 49 in temporary vows and 12 novices; 9 friars live outside Indonesia for studies, or at the service of other circumscriptions. The average age of the solemnly professed is less than 40 years.

Indonesia, made up of thousands of islands, has a population of more than 260 million. The majority are Muslims, and Christians make up around 3% of the population. Indonesia is currently one of the three countries in the world with the highest number of priestly and religious vocations, and our commissariat has also received many vocations. Recently, a good number of friars have been sent abroad to continue their formation. It is necessary to make good vocational discernment, as well as enhancing initial formation in all dimensions: human, academic, spiritual, and specifically Carmelite, for which there would have to be good translations of the writings of our Saints. The Commissariat must reflect on its pastoral priorities with a comprehensive vision. The missionary interest and commitment of the circumscription should also be maintained.

Regarding recent developments in some provinces, we discussed some of them which have suffered a sharp numerical decline. In these cases, it is necessary to adapt structures to the new situation, joining with others or changing the status of the circumscription. This is why we have opened a process of dialogue with some of the smaller provinces, so that we can make the most appropriate decisions.

After discussion of the pastoral visitations, we dealt with other issues. As usual, the Bursar General presented the quarterly report on the financial state of the General House, which showed nothing significantly new. Work continues on achieving greater fluidity in communication and management between the General House and the circumscriptions.

With the Procurator General we also addressed various issues that are in process before the various bodies of the Apostolic See, such as the particular situations of friars who need some decree or dispensation, or the efforts carried out on behalf of Discalced Carmelite nuns relating to monasteries or federations. We continue to await the approval of the revised and updated liturgical calendar proper to our Order, which could be imminent

Among other things, the Definitory also addressed the following specific topics:

- We evaluated and accepted the agreement between the provinces of Lombardy and South Kerala, regarding the communities of Bologna

(currently in the hands of the province of South Kerala) and Parma (community with a parish, until now in the hands of the Lombardy province).

- We canonically established various houses in circumscriptions (India: Manjummel province, Canada: Karnataka Goa province, Indonesia, Nigeria).
- We have accepted the request of Manjummel province to start a new foundation in Madhya Pradesh (Bhopal diocese).
- We agreed that the process may begin to establish a community of the province of Kerala South in Cagli (diocese of Fano), in the territory of the province of Central Italy.
- At the request of the province of Krakow, we accepted the suppression of the Reisach foundation in the territory of the province of Germany, which for some years had been taken over by the Krakow province.
- At the request of the province of Warsaw, we granted aid for the construction of the house in Zwola (Poland).
- We analysed the document prepared by the province of Malabar on the religious who are outside the province.

Another topic of discussion in the Definitory was the relationship between the Theological Faculty of the Teresianum and CITEs in Avila. Welcoming the desire expressed for many years by various applications from within the Order and the work done earlier, since the beginning of this sexennium, a long process of dialogue has been carried out between the two centres to settle on recognition of CITEs' courses by the Teresianum. The proposal, upon which much work has been spent, is to convert CITEs into a higher centre incorporated into the Teresianum which can offer the Bachelor's degree in Theology of Mysticism. After assessing the current situation, the Teresianum considered that the project still needs to be matured at a later date and considered it necessary to establish a further two-year extension for reflection. The Definitory hopes that appropriate ways can be found to have in the Order the necessary academic training to achieve an adequate cultural level in the field of theology, spirituality and mysticism.

Finally, we commented on the current state of preparation of the Charismatic Declaration and the revision of the Norms that the Goa Extraordinary Definitory decided to undertake. This is another step in the context of the process of renewing the life of the Order from rereading the Constitutions, which is the central program of this sexennium. In the coming weeks, the General and some of the definitors will coordinate the work of preparing a draft and previous materials, with the help of other friars. A broader consultation will then be held, with the preferential participation of younger friars. The aim is to reach the end of this year with initial proposals sufficiently elaborated in order to be evaluated by the next Provincial Chapters.

It is worth recalling precisely that the time of the Provincial Chapters is approaching, a moment of grace and renewal for all the circumscriptions of the Order, which should be prepared carefully, giving particular importance to spiritual preparation (Norms 207).

During the meeting of the Definitory, we had the opportunity to comment on some issues concerning our Discalced Carmelite sisters. We continue to feel intensely their sisterly closeness and prayer. A good number of monasteries from different regions of the world are immersed in the process of taking in the directives that the Church has given to contemplative life through *Vultum Dei Quarere* and *Cor Orans*, especially as regards federations: Monasteries that were not federated are being incorporated into existing

federations or those being created. The federations are presenting to the Congregation for Consecrated Life their revised or first-time drafted statutes.

We also follow closely the life and activities of the Secular Order, with whom the vocation of the Teresian Carmel joins us. It is a living and active reality which continues to grow and consolidate, both from the numerical point of view and from identity with our charism. At this Definitory meeting we approved the revised statutes of some provinces. The Definitory seeks to maintain and strengthen contact with the Secular Carmel through the meetings that take place during the visitations and especially the selfless advisory and accompaniment work by the OCDS General Delegate, Fr Alzinir Debastiani.

All of us, friars, nuns and lay people, are about to celebrate in a few weeks the solemn feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, of whom we proclaim ourselves her brothers and sisters. May her example and intercession accompany us and guide us on our journey as followers of her son Jesus.

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