



GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

We greet you fraternally at the end of a new quarterly meeting of the General Definitory that took place in Rome beginning on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. As always, we want to make you participants in the main topics discussed so that the whole family of the Teresian Carmel is informed about the life of the Order as we advance day by day in fraternal communion.

To begin with, we discussed the Charismatic Declaration that is being prepared. This was decided by the Extraordinary Definitory celebrated last February in Goa (India), fulfilling the mandate of the General Chapter of 2015. The final text of the Declaration will have to be approved by the next General Chapter, to be held in 2021. Until then, work is being done to include a wide collaboration in preparation of the text. The preliminary version prepared by the General Definitory has already been sent to all the circumscriptions so that they can present their evaluations, comments and suggestions. We have asked, in particular, that this be one of the central themes of the Provincial Chapters who should give it sufficient time and attention.

In the meantime, under the coordination of the Definitory, meetings of young friars are being held in the various continents to deepen the content of the document and to gather the impressions of the participants on the content and wording of the text. During the month of November there was a meeting in Colombia for the younger friars of Latin America, and another in the Teresianum in Rome for those of Europe, the United States and Lebanon. In Africa, there were three meetings, in Nigeria, Central Africa and Malawi, organized by Fr Daniel Ehigie. Similar meetings are planned for India during the month of January. The younger friars from the region of Asia and Oceania will also be able to participate in this consultation. The Definitory has collected and commented on the results of the meetings held so far and the suggestions they have made for improving the text. We particularly appreciated the good atmosphere of fraternity and harmony that was experienced in all of them. The document has been very well received and, above all, the participants in the meetings have expressed the desire to continue on this path of identification with the charism in order to incarnate it in a renewed form in the different places of the world.

A good part of the attention of the Definitory is usually devoted to dialogue and discernment about the different circumscriptions of the Order. In particular, this service is carried out through the pastoral visitations with which we try to accompany and help the friars in the different parts of the world, and to stimulate a sense of belonging to the same family. We also dealt extensively with such visitations during this meeting.

From October 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 20<sup>th</sup>, Fr. General made the Pastoral Visitation to the Washington Province. He visited the four communities of the Province and also the house of formation in Oregon, in the territory of the California province. The provincial delegation of Kenya, already visited by Fr. Daniel Ehigie in April 2018, is also part of the Province. The Province has 37 solemnly professed friars in the United States. Two others live in Kenya and three in the Philippines. In addition, there are 2 friars from the Kenyan Delegation and 1 from another Province serving in the Washington Province. Two thirds of the friars are over 70 years of age. In recent times, thanks to good vocation promotion, there has been an influx of new candidates, to the point that, presently, there are 8 simply professed, 5 novices and 2 postulants.

As far as apostolic activity is concerned, at Holy Hill, the seat of the novitiate and the post-novitiate year, intense pastoral work is carried out, with attention to the parish and the many pilgrims who visit the Shrine. In Milwaukee, they continue to maintain the small parish. Brighton is the seat of the postulancy. The *Institute of Carmelite Studies* and its associated publishing house are located in Washington. Throughout the Province there is a good deal of attention given to the Discalced Carmelite nuns and to the Secular Order.

One of the current priorities of the Province must be accepting young candidates, dedicating for this purpose the necessary resources for good formation. In particular, they need to reinforce the student community at Mount Angel by intensifying the common formation work with the California Province. As for the Delegation of Kenya, it is necessary to promote the apostolate of spirituality and not to limit itself to parish ministry. The mission needs to move towards economic self-sufficiency, progressively decreasing dependence on the Province.

Fr. Agustí Borrell, Vicar General, made the pastoral visitation of the Province of Navarra from September 17 to October 30. The Province of Navarra was officially created in 1706, although the presence of the Order in its territory began at the end of the 16th century. After the ecclesiastical confiscations of the 19th century in Spain, and the disappearance of the Spanish Congregation, Navarra was the first Province to be restored: from the monastery of Markina came the renewed presence in the Iberian Peninsula, and shortly afterwards, thanks to an intense passionate and missionary activity, the expansion to various places in Latin America, Africa and India. The Province of Navarra undoubtedly deserves special thanks from the whole Order for its invaluable contribution to our recent history.

In recent years the Province has suffered greatly from the phenomenon, common to most European provinces, of a considerable and rapid reduction in numbers and an increase in the average age. Presently, the Province has 16 communities in Europe (Spain and Monaco), and a Provincial Delegation in Malawi. In the European monasteries there are 75 solemnly professed friars (3 of them from other Provinces, at the service of the Province of Navarra), and 7 friars from other Provinces who are temporarily present in some community for academic purposes. The Delegation of Malawi has 18 friars. On the other hand, 14 friars of the Province are at the service of other circumscriptions of the Order. The average age of the solemnly professed in the European communities is 77 years.

The Visitation sought to help the Province become aware of the present reality with its limitations and possibilities and invited the friars to face the present moment with hope and openness. The Definitory will offer some concrete indications to advance in the necessary Provincial restructuring, emphasizing the essential elements of our charism and accepting the inevitable reduction of presences.

On October 16, Fr. Johannes began the Pastoral Visitation to the Province of Delhi (India), situated in a territory that includes various states in the north of India where the Christian population is a minority. The presence of the Order began in 1976 as a mission of the Malabar Province, and the Province was officially established in 2010.

At present, the Delhi Province has a total of 42 solemnly professed members, with an average age of 44. On the other hand, it has a good number of candidates in various stages of formation. Presently, there are 9 communities erected, and 7 in process. The friars are in charge of 12 schools, some with a large number of students, and 14 parishes, in addition to some social works.

The educational work, and also the parish activity, are carried out with great dedication and professionalism. In a certain sense, the Province is living in a stage that can still be considered as missionary, taking into account the socio-religious situation of the territory. Little by little, we must move towards a consolidation of our present presence and community life. In this sense, it is good to take steps so that the friars, together with their admirable apostolic service, may live the style of fraternity and prayer that is characteristic of our Carmelite identity.

Fr. Daniel Chowning visited the Province of Ireland-England from 17 September to 16 October. There are 28 friars in the area of Ireland, with an average age of 74 years, distributed in 5 communities. In the area of England there are 3 communities with 14 friars, some coming from the Regional Vicariate of Nigeria or from other circumscriptions. Four more friars are currently living outside the province.

The apostolic service is impressive and varied. The dedication to the pastoral care of spirituality is noteworthy, with courses, retreats, conferences, publications and spiritual direction. There is also good ministerial activity, especially with confessions and the celebration of the Eucharist in some of the Churches; for example, the Church in central Dublin remains a reference point for the sacrament of reconciliation. They also serve one parish in Ireland and two in England.

The province is marked by increasing age and lack of vocations. Fortunately, in some communities they are receiving the collaboration of friars from other circumscriptions. They must face this reality and strengthen some communities even at the cost of suppressing others, and especially with a good vocation ministry.

Later, from November 2 to 9, Fr. Daniel visited the semi-province of Holland. It is currently comprised of 14 friars, with an average age of 80 years. There are 3 communities in Holland, although some of the friars live in residences or alone. One friar lives in Brazil, and another in Rome. The friars do not have churches in their charge. Some of them carry out apostolic activities of preaching, pastoral care of spirituality, or of religious assistance to our nuns.

In view of the growing secularization in the Netherlands, and few vocational prospects, the friars decided some time ago not to accept new candidates and to prepare for the end of the presence of the Order in the Netherlands. They also created a foundation to ensure adequate care for the elderly in the last years of their lives. The situation in which they find themselves has consequences for the way they live the Carmelite life.

From October 9 to November 4, Fr. Javier Mena made a Pastoral Visitation to the Regional Vicariate of Uruguay-Bolivia-Paraguay, which is part of the Iberian Province. Presently, there are 34 friars in the Vicariate, of whom 6 are simply professed, 4 are on leave of absence, and 2 are at the service of the Argentinian Delegation. By nationality, 8 are Bolivians, 5 Uruguayans, 2 Argentinians, 14 Paraguayans and 4 Spaniards. The average age is 45 years. There are 3 communities in Bolivia, 3 in Uruguay and 1 in Paraguay.

At the moment there are 17 young men in the formation process. Both the novitiate (in Florida, Uruguay) and the theologate (in Buenos Aires) are held in common formation houses, which is very positive. It is definitely worth devoting more attention to vocation ministry and to the first stages of discernment and formation (aspirancy and postulancy).

The Vicariate started as such in 2010 and is therefore a young reality in the process of growth. Little by little we are moving towards the possible constitution of an autonomous circumscription. Also, for the economic administration, the advice and help of the Iberian province has been available up until now. We must continue to take steps to achieve sufficient economic autonomy and to ensure that there is an adequate communion of goods between the communities.

The presence of the monasteries of our nuns is significant in the territory of the Vicariate; some of them under the vigilance of the Provincial. Almost all the communities have some concrete pastoral link with some monastery of our nuns, which is a richness to growth in mutual knowledge about the meaning and goal of our own vocation. The Secular Carmel is also present, although it is a nascent reality that needs to be consolidated. The recent beatification of María Felicia de Jesús Sacramentado, “Chiquitunga”, is a gift for the Church and in particular for the Order and the Vicariate.

For his part, Fr. Mariano Agruda reported on his activities during these past two months. He spent most of his time in the Philippines, where he has visited the interprovincial novitiate, met with groups of the Secular Carmelites, participated in some Jubilee celebrations, and visited fraternally various monasteries of our Discalced Carmelite nuns. He also participated in the blessing and inauguration of the Carmelite monastery in Jakarta (Indonesia).

Continuing the dialogue and analysis of the situation in our circumscriptions, we noted that in recent decades rapid growth in numbers has been frequent in some regions of the world, while in other places, the decline has been equally notable. In order to respond to these phenomena and always maintain organizational structures that are appropriate to the reality, we believe it is necessary to intensify the processes of collaboration between the circumscriptions. In some cases, it will be necessary to unite different circumscriptions; in others, it will be good to introduce changes in their configuration as the situation requires. In this regard, we consulted with circumscriptions that have recently experienced a decline in numbers about the possibility of changing their legal status or joining other circumscriptions. Once we received the replies from each of them, the Definitory determined that from now on the circumscriptions of Germany, Flanders, Naples and Oklahoma will acquire the status of semi-provinces. We recall that the same was done previously with Malta, at the request of the friars themselves.

Along the same lines, we analyzed the process of collaboration between the Semi-Province of Lebanon and the General Delegation of Egypt, especially with regard to initial formation, which the Egyptian candidates will do in Lebanon. Steps will also be taken to foster possible future juridical integration of the two circumscriptions.

The Definitory has also analyzed other specific issues in the life of the Order, among which we mention the following:

- We revised and approved the Statutes that will govern the circumscription of the Congo, which is about to become a Commissariat.

- We revised and approved the contract by which the Province of Malabar will collaborate with the Province of Portugal for the direction of the community of Funchal (Madeira).

- We received information about the never-ending laborious steps being taken in Israel to obtain the necessary permits to restore and protect the Wadi-es-Siah, the cradle of Carmel, as well as other properties of the Order on Mount Carmel and in Haifa.

- We received detailed information about the Congress of the African Carmel held in Yaoundé (Cameroon) from October 13-18, 2019 with more than a hundred participants.

- We approved some directives for friars of other provinces who are at the service of the Delegation of Kenya (of the Washington Province), in the house of Nairobi.

On the other hand, the Definitory received quarterly information from the General Treasurer on the economic and financial situation of the General House. We also reviewed with the Procurator General some concrete situations of friars of the Order who are in some kind of juridical process.

On one of the days of our quarterly meeting, we welcomed to the General House the General Council of the Carmelites (OCarm) with whom we shared some topics of common interest. Last September, the Carmelites celebrated their General Chapter in which they elected a new Prior General, the Irish Fr. Mícéal O'Neill, and partially renewed the General Council. During the meeting we had the opportunity to dialogue about their Chapter and on their action plans for this six-year period which they are beginning.

At the end of our meeting, we entrusted ourselves in a special way to St. John of the Cross. May his example and his teaching help us to live today and always as true Carmelites. We invoke in a special way his intercession for the triennial Chapters of our circumscriptions, which are already taking place and will continue to do so in the coming months.

With our desire for a happy Christmas and a new year full of peace and blessing for all the Carmelite family, friars, nuns and lay people, 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