



GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITE  
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## 2021-2027 SEXENNIUM– LETTER N° 9

Rome, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Dear brothers and sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

The most remarkable recent event in the life of the Order was undoubtedly the Extraordinary Definitory that took place in Lisieux from August the 28<sup>th</sup> to September the 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was the first meeting of this kind during the present six-year period, and was attended by the new superiors of the Provinces and other circumscriptions, elected or appointed on the occasion of the chapters and capitular congresses of past months. The assembly met a few metres from the Carmel of Lisieux, the place where Therese of the Child Jesus lived as a Carmelite nun and where she definitively entered into Life. In this year in which we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth and the first centenary of her beatification, our sister reminds us, by her example and with her writings, that we are called to holiness in the simplicity of daily life, doing little things well out of love for God and others, and trusting fully in the Father's mercy.

Nine bishops of the Order, from different parts of the world, attended the Extraordinary Definitory. With them, we had an enriching dialogue about their personal experience and their proposals for the Order at the present time. A few days ago, the appointment of Mgr. Zdenko Križić as Archbishop of Split-Makarska, Croatia, was announced.

Following the Extraordinary Definitory, we held the quarterly session of the General Definitory, which met from September 6 to 16 in Rome. In the first place, the Definitory was concerned with collecting and debating the topics discussed in Lisieux, in order to offer guidelines, decisions and practical proposals. In addition, as usual, we addressed other relevant issues in the life of the Order and for which the General Government is responsible.

### **A. THE EXTRAORDINARY DEFINITORY OF LISIEUX**

Through the usual channels (social networks, website, etc.), written information and graphic material on the development of the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux have been transmitted. A complete synthesis of these days will also be sent shortly. It was prepared with the help of Father Fabio Silvestri, who was moderator of the sessions.

Regarding the content of the main questions discussed at the meeting, the General Definitory has drawn the following conclusions:

#### **1. Restructuration of the Order**

The central topic of the Lisieux Definitory was the restructuring of the Order: types of circumscriptions, forms of collaboration between them, possible union of nearby circumscriptions, etc.

### *a. Types of circumscriptions*

The General Definitory proposed in Lisieux to simplify the current structure, reducing the existing types of circumscriptions. Basically, it is a question of returning to the indications already present in our own law, from which recent praxis had distanced itself. The aim is for the legal status of each circumscription to correspond to its autonomy of life. The specific proposal, which was widely accepted by the Extraordinary Definitory, is that basically three types of circumscriptions would be maintained, one autonomous, one dependent on a Province and one dependent on the General Definitory:

- The *Province* (Constitutions 144-148). It is the historical and habitual circumscription in the Order, present in a specific territory, with autonomy of life and of jurisdiction.
- The *Regional Vicariate* (Norms 158). While it forms part of a Province, it has a certain degree of autonomy, according to the terms specified in its own Statute. The Vicariate is conceived for situations of increase in an area far from the centre of the Province. It is an intermediate step before becoming an autonomous circumscription. Today it can also be useful for decreasing circumscriptions in need of help.
- The *Commissariat* (Norms 155-157). It is a circumscription depending directly on the General Definitory and having its own particular Statute. The current Commissariats and General Delegations may fall into this category. The Commissariat should not be a usual situation, but an exceptional possibility for cases in which for some reason it is not feasible or opportune for a territory to be part of a Province. (“Commissariat” is the name currently used in our legislation, although, taking into account the connotations of the term “Commissariat” in some places, it could be replaced by “General Delegation”).

Although our legislation provides for this possibility, we do not believe it prudent to favour the creation of Semi-provinces, since they maintain a legal autonomy similar to that of a Province despite the fact that they do not usually meet the necessary requirements for it.

On the other hand, it is still possible for the provincial to appoint a delegate for some houses far from the centre of the Province (Norms 220), but this does not mean the existence of a circumscription, as it was understood up to now with the so-called Provincial Delegations.

The simplification to these three basic types of circumscription will be implemented progressively.

### *b. Collaboration between nearby circumscriptions*

One of the means to advance in communion and unity within the Order, as well as to consolidate the presence in the various regions, is through collaboration and even union between neighbouring circumscriptions. Nowadays there are many small circumscriptions, which need help for important aspects such as formation, government or finance.

The Definitory invites everyone to advance in fraternal relationship and mutual aid in the various regions of the world, and to continue taking steps towards the creation of circumscriptions large enough to become Provinces. For this, it is necessary to foster an open and welcoming mentality, which respects cultural and social diversity, while always placing at the centre of interest the charism of the Teresian Carmel that we all share.

We invite the Provinces already constituted to welcome and help the small circumscriptions of nearby territories. Some current Commissariats, Semi-Provinces or Delegations could become part of a Province, first as Regional Vicariates.

### *c. Proposed map of the Order*

On the basis of the above criteria and taking into account the dialogues held in the different linguistic groups during the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux, during these days the Definitory prepared a first proposal for the restructuring of the Order. This draft will be transmitted to all the circumscriptions for evaluation and enrichment with opportune contributions. The new map will be specified and applied gradually as the various situations permit.

## **2. Friars serving in other provinces**

Over the past few years, the presence of friars outside the territory of their own Province has been regularized. This was done on the basis of the fundamental principles of our life-style, set out in our legislation. In order to promote the coherent and unified presence of the Order in each region, it is right and good to maintain the principle of territoriality, so that in each area there is only one major superior.

In this context, in order to help circumscriptions in need and to promote collaboration and solidarity in the Order, it is possible for a religious of one Province to temporarily enter in service of another Province. After reviewing and evaluating recent experiences, the General Definitory considers it necessary to modify and simplify the praxis of agreements between Provinces on this issue. This was explained in Lisieux, and is now formally confirmed.

For a religious to enter in service of another Province, what is stated in our legislation (Norms 135-137) shall be applied, that is, the agreement of the two Provincials and the permission of the General. To this end, a document will be established for each religious, following the model prepared by the Definitory, which is being sent to all circumscriptions.

It is important to consider some fundamental principles and criteria, as set out in the document presented at Lisieux. We recall in particular the following:

1. A religious who accepts to be sent to the service of another circumscription must have a missionary spirit and a sense of family. He will have the real intention of getting to know the local culture and of inserting himself in the circumscription and in the community to which he is assigned.
2. At the same time, the circumscription that receives a religious must have an attitude of true acceptance and offer the appropriate means so that he can know the reality in which he will live and can integrate himself into the circumscription.
3. As a principle a community will not be composed of religious from a single foreign circumscription, without any religious from the local circumscription.
4. The sending of a religious in service of another circumscription will not be linked to any kind of financial compensation.

With regard to this last point, it must be remembered that financial aid to the Provinces in need is a responsibility of the entire Order. This aid can be given between Provinces or through the General Government, which has already established a fund to help initial formation and a fund to help missionary projects.

## **3. The mission of the Order**

Another of the topics discussed at the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux was Mission and the missions in the Order. The aim was, more specifically, to reflect on the criteria for opening new communities or presence in new territories. We collect and highlight some of the most significant at the present moment:

1. *Missionary spirit.* The missionary spirit is a fundamental element in the life of the Order, which we must foster and practice. We are called to spread the knowledge of Christ and the Gospel by the example of life and apostolic activity.
2. *Carmelite identity.* The mission that Carmel can offer to the Church is specific, based on our own charismatic identity. Our first mission is to give personal and communitarian testimony of contemplation and interior life. Every concrete apostolic commitment must take this objective into account. The requests of the local Churches must be evaluated and discerned in the light of the Order's charism.
3. *Prayer-community-mission.* For us, apostolic commitment is not in contradiction with community life or prayer, but all three elements are equally necessary and nourish each other. Every community and every religious is called to live a fruitful balance between prayer, fraternity and apostolate.
4. *New presences.* The expansion of the Order, both within one's own Provinces and in new territories, must be done with an authentic missionary sense, and not for other reasons. Any new presence must take into account the instructions of the General Government and also be coordinated with the other circumscriptions. The expansion of the Order must follow shared criteria. For new presences in the territory of the Province, the initiative usually comes from the Province itself. On the other hand, when it comes to starting a proper mission in new territories, the usual practice is that the proposal and the specific assignment come from the centre of the Order.
5. *The community.* In our Order, the assumption of an apostolic commitment is always linked to the existence of a community. To start a new presence, it is necessary to ensure the effective possibility of forming a community with a sufficient number of members (at least three).
6. *Economy.* Before founding a new community, the financial possibilities of the Province itself must be properly assessed. However, economic profitability is not the criterion when deciding on new apostolic commitments.

## **B. OTHER QUESTIONS DEALT WITH IN THE DEFINITORY**

### **Priorities in the sexennium**

As usual in our meetings, we have reviewed the priority themes of the Order in this sexennium, as established by the General Chapter of 2021.

One of the priorities is the *Declaration on the Charism*: it is an important point of reference when reflecting and making decisions in the Order, in order to live today in an updated and incarnated way our charism of always. Some Provincial Chapters have sought concrete ways for the practical application of the principles expressed in the *Declaration*. We encourage the whole Order to continue to keep renewing our identification with and commitment to the life to which we have felt called.

With regard to initial formation, we have received new information on the work of the commission for the revision of the *Ratio institutionis*. It met in June and is scheduled to meet again at the beginning of October. Once the first phase of collecting material and proposals from the different Provinces has been completed, the preparation of the draft of the new text of the *Ratio* will begin. The text will then be sent to the superiors and formators of the whole Order so that they can evaluate and enrich it.

Regarding the cultural and academic life of the Order, we commented on the conclusions of the second meeting of the international reflection group, which took place at CITES in Avila at the end of June. The reflection focused on the hermeneutics of the texts of our saints, with the perspective of developing a future document on the subject. On a different note, Father Christof Betschart has been appointed “*president*” of the Teresianum Faculty for a new triennium.

With regard to youth ministry, we evaluated the international meeting of young people linked to Carmel that was held in Fatima (Portugal) on July 31, in the context of WYD2023, at which was present Father General. Also, steps will be taken to restart the activity of the international animation group of the youth ministry of the Order. We encourage all circumscriptions to appoint locally a person responsible for youth and vocation ministry.

As for the anniversaries of Therese of the Child Jesus, numerous celebrations and activities are being organised in different parts of the world. We mention, for example, the positive echoes of the International Congress that took place at CITES at the end of August. We also recall the proposal for a personal and community rereading of Therese's texts, with the study guides for this first year, which are still available on the website of the General House, while those for next year are being prepared.

### **Life of the circumscriptions**

The General Definitory dealt with various questions related to specific circumscriptions, among which we cite some of the most relevant.

#### *Fraternal visit to Canada*

Fr. Pius J. D'Souza made a fraternal visit to the Provincial Delegation of Canada, from the Province of Karnataka-Goa, present in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario (entrusted to the Province in 2008 and 2020). He was accompanied by the Provincial, Fr. Silvestre D'Souza. There are at present 21 religious, with 2 erected communities and 6 parish communities. They serve two spirituality centres, one in Carmel Hill (Vancouver) and one in Edmonton. In the region there are 4 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns, and a notable presence of the Secular Carmel, with 29 communities. The main challenges at present are the consolidation of the recent communities, promotion of vocations, strengthening of centres of spirituality and attention to the Secular Order.

#### *Fraternal visit to Australia*

From June 20 to July 12, Fr. Christianus Surinono visited the Regional Vicariate of Australia, of the Anglo-Irish Province, as well as the communities of Manjummel, Malabar and Karnataka-Goa present in the country. The current situation of the Vicariate is an invitation to consider how nearby circumscriptions can help. The relationship between the religious of the different Provinces present in such a vast territory as Australia also must be made more concrete.

#### *Provincial Chapters*

We commented on some questions about the Provincial Chapters held during the months of June and July. The Definitory is revising the Capitulars Determinations of all Chapters to grant them the *nihil obstat*. We recall the obligation to take into account the orientations contained in the *Practical Instruction* for the Provincial Chapters. Some circumscriptions requested that all the solemnly professed friars may participate in the Chapters: it is an exceptional situation and the Definitory considers it acceptable only for circumscriptions with a small number of friars.

### *Malabar*

Fr Pius James D'Souza reported on the developments concerning the Province of Malabar, which continues to be accompanied with special care by the General Definitory. From August the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, a Chapter Assembly was held, in the presence of Father General and Father Pius. The appointment of the Provincial and the Councillors by the General Definitory was confirmed, taking into account the results of the consultation of the religious of the Province during the three plenary meetings presided over by Fr. Pius last June. During the assembly, the Provincial Delegate of Ranchi and the superiors of the formation communities were also appointed, and other important topics of the life of the Province were discussed.

### *Lombardy*

The Province of Lombardy asked for help from other Provinces and for this reason the general pastoral visit was left open. Contacts with the Provinces of Venice and Genoa are continuing. With the accompaniment of the General Definitory, a concrete form of collaboration with these circumscriptions is being sought, without excluding the possibility of a progressive link with one of them.

Regarding the mission of the Province of Lombardy in Cameroon, Fr. Émile M'Bra, of the Delegation of West Africa (Iberian Province), was recently appointed as the new Provincial Delegate.

Likewise, the General Definitory:

- Approved that the Provinces of California-Arizona and Washington and the Semi-Province of Oklahoma have a common interprovincial novitiate in Mount Angel (California).
- We accepted the request of the Province of Krakow and allowed a candidate from Ukraine to make his novitiate in the community of Gwozdawa, due to the exceptional situation in his country.
- Father Antonios Iskander was appointed Delegate of Egypt; Fathers Zakaria Harby and Makhoul Farha, Councillors; and Fr. Jacques Artinian, Bursar.
- In the Delegation of Israel, once Fr. Jean-Joseph Bergara took possession of his appointment as Delegate, the Definitory appointed Fr. Francisco Negral Ramos as first counsellor.
- We discussed about the mission in Iraq, for which some religious have volunteered. However, most of them cannot at present leave their current responsibilities. We renew the call to the whole Order in order to continue maintaining our missionary presence in Iraq and in other parts of the world where evangelizing action is important and necessary.
- We examined the request of the Province of Korea regarding the formation of the candidates from the Popular Republic of China, for which it is requesting personal and financial assistance.
- As requested by the Province of Karnataka-Goa, we have accepted the canonical erection of the communities of Kadanganchi, Kalaburagi (Karnataka) and Gorwa, Vadodara (Gujarat).
- We accepted the demand of the Croatian Province that the community of Gospić could take charge of two small nearby parishes.
- We examined several requests for economic assistance from some circumscriptions. The Definitory is especially helping with the needs of initial formation and missionary projects. Likewise, through the Secretary for Missionary Cooperation, we help to manage the procedures for social and pastoral projects with the entities that offer subsidies.

## **Curia General**

With Fr Juan David Noguera, Procurator General, we brought up to date the dossiers of the friars of the Order whose particular situation requires some kind of process or management, many of them before the various Vatican dicasteries. Fr. Juan David is in dialogue with the superiors of the circumscriptions to guide and facilitate the necessary procedures. In this regard, at the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux he offered some practical indications to the participants.

The Bursar General, Fr. Paolo De Carli, informed the Definitory about some questions related to the economy of the Order, in particular the balance of the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux, and the renovations planned in the coming months in the convent of the Basilica of Saint Teresa in Rome, in the buildings adjacent to the General House and in the Teresianum. We also had further discussions on the possible ways of helping circumscriptions facing economic or administrative difficulties due to the political and social situation in their countries.

The Postulator General, Fr. Marco Chiesa, presented to the Definitory the current state of preparation of the typical Latin edition of the Missal of the Order, updated according to the third edition of the Roman Missal and with the new elements introduced in recent years in our liturgical calendar. This edition will soon be presented to the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Once official approval has been received, the translations into the different languages may be updated. The procedure to request the proclamation of Edith Stein as Doctor of the Universal Church also continues. Some postulatory letters already arrived from various ecclesiastical and academic persons and institutions. They will be part of the dossier to be presented to the Pope in due course.

We can announce two new appointments to the community of the General House, in the coming weeks:

- Fr. Alfredo Amesti Sánchez, from the Province of Navarre, who in recent years was in service of the Commissariat of Peru. He will be the new personal secretary of the General;
- Fr. Juan Pablo Patiño Félix, from the Province of Mexico, has been appointed Vice-Secretary for the Nuns.

We welcome them now and wish them a happy stay in Rome at the service of the Order.

## **Discalced Carmelite Nuns**

Fr. Rafał Wilkowski, Secretary for the Nuns, described the developments in the process for the revision of the Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns (1991). The first contributions are being received from the Federations. It will serve as preparatory material for the meeting of the Presidents or Delegates of the Federations in April 2024.

As usual, we discussed about some monasteries that need particular help, either because of the reduction in the number of nuns or for other reasons. We try to offer them all fraternal accompaniment and appropriate juridical advice in each case. On many occasions we observed the need for a realistic and theological approach when facing different situations, even if they may be painful at times, but always seeking God's will in everything.

## **Secular Carmel**

With Fr. Ramiro Casale, General Delegate for the Secular Order, we discussed particular aspects of the life of some communities in different parts of the world. The Secular Carmel is experiencing a time of growth in many regions. It is part of the Order, and we must all progress in a type of relationship between friars, nuns and laity that takes into account the unity and complementarity of the three branches of the Teresian Carmel.

Fr. Ramiro informed us about the preparations being made for a World Congress of the Secular Order, which would be held in Avila (Spain) in July 2026.

### **Marian life of the Order**

An important aspect of the spirituality and life of the Order is devotion to Our Lady. It clearly needs to be revitalized. The Virgin Mary, Mother and Sister of all Carmelites, is a privileged example of listening to God's Word and of full openness to his will. These attitudes are particularly necessary for us today. She will help us to discern and scrutinize God's will in the present time and to face the future with audacious confidence.

The Definitory, taking up the suggestion of Father General, wishes to foster in the Order the Marian spirit in the fields of theology, spirituality, pastoral work and life. In order to achieve this, it would be helpful to set up a multidisciplinary workgroup: it could reflect on the most suitable objectives, activities and means. Consideration is also given to the possibility of a meeting between those in charge of some important Marian shrines of the Order.

Concerning this, Father General has initiated contact with some Marian centres of the Order, in particular our house in Fatima (Portugal), which from the beginning was intended as an international Marian centre for the whole Order.

We would like to invite the whole Order to deepen and revitalize our experience with Mary and to renew our Marian pastoral service and theology. In so doing, we remain faithful to our original roots (Discalced Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel) and docile, like her, to the Word of God today.

At the end of these intense weeks of the Extraordinary Definitory of Lisieux and the subsequent ordinary session of the General Definitory, we thank the Lord for the experience of fraternal communion and fruitful dialogue that we experienced. As the feast of St Therese of the Child Jesus approaches, we continue to invoke her in this year especially dedicated to her and ask her to help the whole Order to live always in trust and love.

Fraternally

Fr Miguel Márquez Calle, *General*

Fr Agustí Borrell i Viader

Fr Pius James D'Souza

Fr Philbert Namphande

Fr Roberto Maria Pirastu

Fr Christianus Surinono

Fr Martín Martínez Larios

Fr Christophe-Marie Baudouin

Fr Jean-Baptiste Pagabeleguem