



DISCALCED CARMELITE GENERAL DEFINITORY
Corso d'Italia, 38
00198 Rome – Italy

SEXENNIIUM 2015-2021 – LETTER N° 11

Rome, 14th December 2017

Dear brothers and sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

We started the new quarterly meeting of the General Definitory on Monday the 4th of December, at the very beginning of Advent time. Our meeting was marked by the strong call to hope that characterizes the time preparing for Christmas, as well as the whole Christian experience. We sought that this attitude, which is also so Carmelite, would shed light on our discernment and our decisions for the good of the Order, and we sought to transmit this spirit to all the members of the Teresian Carmelite family. With the desire to be witnesses and communicators of hope, we approached the many current issues of the Order.

Throughout these days, there were not lacking motives for joy and thanksgiving to the Lord. In the fraternal ambience of the community of the General House, on the eve of our meeting, we celebrated the XXV anniversary of Fr General's ordination to the priesthood, in the presence of religious from other communities. As well, on the 6th, we attended the Eucharist at which presided our Discalced Carmelite brother, Cardinal Anders Arborelius, in the Roman church of St Mary of the Angels and the Martyrs, as he took possession of this, his titular church as a Cardinal.

With regards to the Definitory meeting, an important part of the work during these days was devoted to reports and comments on our recent visits to individual circumscriptions of the Order.

Fr General took part in the chapter congress of the General Delegation of the Congo (27-30 September). Later on, from the 17th of October to the 12th of November, he carried out a pastoral visit to the Vicariate of Nigeria, of the Anglo-Irish province, and in the following days presided at the Chapter Congress. At the moment the Vicariate has 55 solemnly professed members, 14 in temporary vows and 5 novices. Some of their friars are to be found in other countries, for study, or serving in other areas of the Order. It is a young and growing circumscription. In Nigeria there are 8 communities of friars, engaged in various apostolates: parishes, formation and retreat houses, schools etc. As well, in the territory of the Vicariate there are 3 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns and 8 communities of the Secular Order. During the visit, the friars were exhorted to live and work united, taking advantage of the qualities and capacities of each one, overcoming the divisions of the past. It is necessary to improve the quality of fraternal life and increase the number of religious in communities, reinforcing in particular the formation communities.

Fr Agustí Borrell, Vicar General, made a pastoral visit to the Portugal Province from the 18th of September to the 26th of October. At the moment the Province has 8 communities (including one is the isle of Madeira and a missionary presence in East Timor), with a total of

29 friars in solemn vows (26 Portuguese, 2 Timorese and one Angolan), 2 friars in temporary vows and 4 novices, as well as 2 friars from other circumscriptions helping the Province (one from Venice and one from the Iberian Province). The mean age of those in solemn vows is 62. The Province was called to continue on with the process of discernment, already begun, concerning appropriate renewal which would allow enhancing some priority, present needs. With the help of the General Government, the Province will work out a definite project of restructuring, before the next Provincial Chapter. The Visitor also visited the 9 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns present in Portugal as well as having a meeting with communities of the Secular Order, which have a large membership and which have already begun a fine process of renewal.

Recently, the Portugal Province began a missionary foundation in East Timor, in collaboration with the Iberian Province and the Province of Navarre. For various circumstances the present situation of the mission is very precarious, and because of this they are searching for a way to give it greater solidity with the help of other circumscriptions.

Afterwards, Fr Agustí carried out a pastoral visit to the Lombardy Province from the 6th of November to the 1st of December. At present, the Province has 8 communities in Italy and 2 in the Cameroons. The Province has 54 friars in solemn vows, 5 in temporary vows and 5 novices (among which there are some Cameroon friars and some from other circumscriptions serving the Province). The mean age of those solemnly professed is 67 years. As a conclusion to the visit, the General Definitory considered it necessary to begin a plan of provincial restructuring, which would allow it to be centred on priority aspects such as community life and prayer, initial formation, the spirituality apostolate and the reception of vocations. For this, the Definitory presented to the Province some practical directives concerning working out, in the following weeks, the necessary reduction in the number of communities. The Visitor then visited the 12 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns present in the Italian territory of the Lombardy Province and he was also able to have discussions with the Provincial Council and some of the 12 communities of the Secular Order.

Fr Francisco Javier Mena made a pastoral visit to the Province of South-East Brasil, from the 10th of October to the 18th of November. This is a young Province, which was officially established in 2003 and owes its beginning to the missionary activity of the Roman, Tuscan and Dutch Provinces. At present it has 9 communities with 51 friars in solemn vows, 9 in temporary vows and 6 novices, with a mean age of 53 years and a good vocational influx. In the territory of the Province there are 42 monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns, organized into three associations. Fr Javier visited various of these monasteries and, as well, had a meeting in Belo Horizonte with a large group of nuns from the St Joseph Association and in San Pablo with the nuns from the St Teresa of Jesus Association. The Secular Carmel has also a strong presence with 1,200 members, organized into 19 established communities and 40 in the process of formation. The Province has good vitality and many possibilities. However, it is advisable to strengthen aspects such as group sense and provincial identity and to work out a provincial project that can be applied and evaluated. In this regard, it is advisable to establish priorities in order to regulate better the way the apostolate is carried out. At the moment it is identified very much with parish apostolate, to the detriment of the apostolate of spirituality. There is also a need to take care of initial formation by thinking, as well, of a greater collaboration with other circumscriptions.

On the other hand, Fr Javier took part in the Chapter Congress of the Delegation of Venezuela, celebrated in Caracas from the 20th to the 24th of November. The religious of the Delegation appreciated especially the fraternal support and help received from the Order in

this stage of grave difficulties –political, social and financial– that the country is going through at the moment.

Fr Johannes Gorantla gave a report on the course for formators in Alwaye, India, which took place during September and October. Thirty-seven actual formators from all the Provinces of India took part. The course was very useful. He then went on to tell us about the pastoral visit he made to the Kerala-South Province from the 27th of September to the 21st of November (and afterwards to their communities in Italy and Germany). At present the Province has 11 communities in Kerala, 10 in the Vicariate of Kolkata, 2 in Italy and 2 in Germany. There are 113 solemnly professed members, 34 in temporary vows and 8 novices. In the Province there are 4 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns, as well as 15 communities of the Secular Order which have more than 2,000 members. The Province, officially established in 2001, has had notable growth in recent years, and continues to enjoy a good vocational vitality, although more stringent discernment needs to be made. Particularly important is to improve the initial formation, endowing it with more suitable religious and the necessary resources. In general, it is advisable to make the effort to raise the cultural level of the Province, for example, by putting an emphasis on higher studies and permanent formation, which also includes formation for government. The friars maintain a high level of activity in the apostolate, as well as a remarkable missionary sensitivity. Since they are a young Province, it seems advisable that they receive assistance from the General Government during the electoral process and the Provincial Chapter. The Visitor invited them to revise some aspects with regards to the economy, to encourage certain elements such as maintenance of buildings, the financial autonomy of the houses, the dedication of resources to formation, appropriate economic development of the Vicariate and, above all, fidelity to the vow of poverty. In the Vicariate of Kolkata there are at present 31 solemnly professed friars, 21 in temporary vows and 4 novices. Missionary work is abundant and demanding. The geographical area is very widespread and, as a result, communications can be difficult. It would be convenient that the number of friars in communities were higher. Dedication to the specific apostolate of the Order should also be encouraged.

Fr Daniel Chowning made a fraternal visit to the Flanders Province from the 20th of November to the 2nd of December. At present the Province has 27 religious, with 4 communities in Flanders and one in Sweden. Fr Daniel also visited 5 communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Flanders, Denmark and Sweden. The Flanders Province is going through a situation of ageing friars and lack of vocations, in the context of a strongly secularized society. In their apostolate, what stands out is the spirituality centre in Rustpunt, and the presence of a community in Sweden, which has a notable Carmelite apostolate. Fr Daniel also informed us about his recent fraternal visit to the community in Munster (Indiana, USA), belonging to the Krakow Province, which takes care of a Marian sanctuary and a parish in Chicago.

During recent weeks, Fr Mariano Agruda has been in Japan and Australia, with a brief stay in Hong Kong. These are rich societies, where Carmel and the Church are losing presence and strength in a rapid manner. Fr Mariano took part in the Conference of Major Superiors of East Asia and Oceania (Tokyo, 23-27 October), which is encouraging mutual collaboration between the individual circumscriptions. The General Delegation of Japan, with few local vocations, depends on the valuable help of friars from Indonesia. In Australia there are at present 14 friars, as well as a community from the Manjummel Province and one from the Malabar Province. Fr Daniel also had a meeting with the Federation of Our Lady of the Southern Cross for Discalced Carmelite nuns from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, with nuns attending from Indonesia, Samoa, Tonga and Wallis and Fortuna. Many of

them were preoccupied for the future in a strongly secularized atmosphere. He also met with delegates from the Secular Order in Australia. In Hong Kong he conducted a formation meeting with the community of the Secular Order.

Fr Daniel Ehigie made a fraternal visit to the Vicariate of Tanzania, of the Karnataka Goa Province. The friars have achieved many projects and initiatives. They have been entrusted with a large number of parishes and manage some schools. The formation houses are well attended and receive students from other nearby circumscriptions. Community life suffers limitations deriving from the quantity of commitments in the apostolate and the reduced number of friars in the communities.

Afterwards, Fr Daniel visited the West African Delegation, of the Iberian Province, in the countries of Togo, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. The Delegation is in a stage of growth, with a good number of vocations and a preferential dedication to the various stages of formation. Their pastoral activity is varied: parishes, schools, hospitals... They also attend to the two communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns in the Ivory Coast, as well as promoting the Carmelite charism among the laity, with whom they are forming some communities of the Secular Order.

He went afterwards to Senegal, where the Avignon-Aquitaine Province has a presence. The community lives in the monastery of Keur Mariama (Kaolack). They carry out a good work of spiritual accompaniment and the Order's specific apostolate. In Senegal Fr Daniel took part in a meeting of the Conference of Superiors of French-speaking Africa and Madagascar (November 7-9). This dealt with topics such as initial formation, publications, permanent formation, spirituality centres....

One of the recurring topics in the Definitory's discussions has once again been the urgency, which we consider is common throughout the Order, of giving preferential attention to initial formation. We are convinced that the opinion expressed in the recent CICLSAL document *New Wine in New Wineskins* is also valid for us: "Despite all the effort and hard work put into formation, it does not seem to reach and truly transform the heart of people. There is the impression that the formation process is more informative than it is performative. ..." (n. 12).

It is necessary to employ the best resources in the receiving and accompaniment of candidates in forming part of our family. It is essential to choose the most suitable religious for the task of formation, knowing that their "main mission is to convey to those entrusted to them 'the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished'" (*New wine* 16). In this respect our Norms say: "The superiors are to select carefully from among the religious the best and most experienced educators and are to relieve them of tasks that cannot be reconciled with the work of formation. If they prove suitable, they should be continued in this office as long as possible (NN 71).

Formation cannot be reduced to the academic study of theology or to a theoretical knowledge of Carmelite spirituality. Above all, formation must be a progressive initiation into the lifestyle of our charism which constitutes our identity as Discalced Carmelites. As our constitutions indicate, "A genuinely Carmelite formation of its members is of paramount importance for the vitality and future of the Order. It must embrace the candidate's whole being so that with an awareness of God's gift he gradually grows to full human and Christian maturity" (CC 108). For this it is essential to have a community environment that offers a real testimony to prayer and fraternity. The religious being formed ought to be able to assimilate and interiorize the values characteristic of our charism, and this is only possible if they are received by a community which lives and transmits them.

In its previous meeting, the General Definitory, following the directives of the Extraordinary Definitory in Ariccia, paid attention to the question of the presence of religious outside the territory of the own Province, and sent to all the Provincials some directives on the way to proceed from now on and how to regularize the irregular situations already existing. We have received the first reports and concrete petitions, and we hope to have in the coming weeks the necessary data to analyse the individual typologies of presences, such as contracts with dioceses, and to continue dialogue in this way with the Provinces, so that always the essential elements of our identity coming from our charism are respected and encouraged.

In relation to the missionary expansion of the Order, we have observed that some of our present foundations are in difficulty with questions about their future. We encourage the Provinces to maintain and develop the missionary spirit, which is fundamental to our charism. At the same time, we feel the need to seek adequate discernment before opening new presences, by making a good calculation of the necessary resources and the available forces. An indispensable element is adequate preparation of the missionaries. To carry the Gospel and implant the Order in a new territory is a serious responsibility, which cannot be accomplished without the necessary premises. The current ease of transferring and even of becoming established in new places is surely having a lowering effect on the necessity for preparation and the effort of inculturation, without which the mission has no meaning and does not produce the expected fruits.

We discussed in the Definitory some questions related to the Teresianum. We received information on the number of students enrolled in this course at the individual levels, as well as the present situation of the teaching staff. It would certainly be desirable to have a greater consistency both of students and professors, towards which we are working. At the same time we commented on some projects already in progress or being studied: the electronic edition of *BIS (Bibliographia Internationalis Spiritualitatis)*, the recognition of CITES as an incorporated institute, the remodeling of the Aula Magna, etc.

On this occasion we also received the quarterly report from the General Bursar on the financial situation, recent figures and forecasts for the future. The financial state remains stable, although the resources for investments and help are limited. We must be particularly grateful for the sensitivity of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, whose generous donations allow, among other things, the good functioning of the fund for poor monasteries. Bearing fruit also is the fund for missions, in the care of the Secretariat for Missionary Cooperation, which serves to support definite projects in missionary territories of the individual circumscriptions of the Order. However, we can state once again that the financial support from the Provinces for the missionary fund continues to be scarce.

It was in this very meeting of the Definitory that we proceeded to appoint a new General Bursar, Fr Paolo De Carli, from the Venice Province, whom we thank for his willingness to take on this demanding responsibility. At the same time, in the name of the whole of our Order, we expressed to Fr Attilio Ghisleri our sincerest recognition of the generous and competent service which he has given to the Order in his more than twenty years as Bursar General. We also thanked him for accepting his appointment as General Delegate to Israel, a new and important service to the Order, which will begin in the coming weeks.

With the Procurator General, Fr Jean-Joseph Bergara, we commented on particular cases of religious from the different circumscriptions of the Order, upon whom the Definitory must make a pronouncement, or make arrangements before the corresponding Vatican bodies. We renew the request that the personal situations of all be treated with charity and justice,

diligently following the established norms and seeking the good of those involved and of the Order and the Church.

Once again, we received a visit from the Bursar of the Israel Delegation, Br Fausto Spinelli, with a group of architects who are working on a plan for rehabilitating the Wadi es-Siah and our property in Kikar Paris (Haifa). They brought us up to date on recent efforts and the immediate prospects for these projects, so necessary to preserve and restore dignity to places so iconic for the Order.

At the presentation of the project for Wadi es-Siah was present the General of the Carmelites, Fr Fernando Millán, together with his General Council, who were taking advantage of the meeting we share with them every six months. Besides this question, we discussed with them other topics of common interest, such as the International Marian Congress celebrated in Fatima (September 2017), the next World Youth Day (Panama, January 2019) and the meeting of the Latin American Association of Carmelites (ALACAR) (Santo Domingo, October 2018). We also gave them a brief resume of recent news in the life of our Order (Extraordinary General Definitory, rereading the Constitutions....), and for their part they told us about the recent congress of Carmelite schools (November 2017) and the beginning of preparations for their next General Chapter, to be celebrated in 2019.

The secretary for information, Fr Emilio Martinez, presented a project for preparing an application for mobile phones which will give access to the Liturgy of the Hours proper to the Order, which the Definitory favourably received.

The General Definitory, among other things, took the following decisions:

–We approved the modifications presented for the Statutes of the General Delegation of the Congo and the General Delegation of Venezuela.

–At the petition of the Congo Delegation, we accepted the canonical suppression of the Chèvremont monastery, in the diocese of Liège (Belgium).

–We accepted the petition of the Karnataka-Goa Province to create a spirituality centre in Benoni (South Africa), for the purpose of encouraging our specific apostolate. The community will be reinforced shortly by two new friars.

–We approved the statutes of the Secular Order in the Commissariat of the Caribbean

Our meeting finished on the eve of the feast of St John of the Cross. May he, the first Discalced Carmelite friar, serve as a model for us and be our intercessor in our desire to continually renew our life in the light of our Teresian charism.

We send fraternal greeting to all the members of the Teresian Carmelite family, desiring for the whole Order a merry and holy Christmas and a New Year full of the Lord's peace.

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