



=GENERAL DEFINITORY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES
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SEXENNIIUM 2015-2021 – LETTER N° 20

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

Receive our warmest fraternal greetings. We have just finished the quarterly meeting of the General Definitory, and we wish to share with you again our reflections and decisions. In the present circumstances, we remember in a special way those who in one way or another are affected by the Covid-19 epidemic which is having direct or indirect consequences for a great part of humanity, and also for our Order.

As usual, the first item on the agenda of our meeting was a discussion on the situation in some circumscriptions based on the Visitations made by the General or, in his name, by the Definitors.

Father General made the pastoral visitation of the Caribbean Commissariat from January 4 to February 1. This is a recent circumscription, born as the Provincial Vicariate of the Province of Castile in 1993 from the merger of two Provincial Delegations: the Delegation of Cuba, which began in 1880, and the Delegation of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. It was erected as a commissariat in 2010.

The Commissariat currently has 29 solemnly professed members (26 ordained friars, 2 deacons, and 1 brother). The average age is 51. Presently, it has no novices or simply professed friars. There is one postulant and two Cuban aspirants in Havana. Two of the friars are temporarily serving outside the Commissariat. There are 9 communities, distributed in four countries: Dominican Republic (4), Cuba (2), Puerto Rico (2) and the United States (1). From a pastoral point of view, they serve 10 parishes, 2 houses of spirituality and 1 school; in addition, two of the communities are houses of formation.

The Commissariat presents good opportunities for the future. Vocations, although they have decreased, are not lacking, and it is therefore necessary to invest in vocational promotion and in the reception of candidates. In this regard, there is need for good formation communities. As for the apostolate, it cannot be limited to the celebration of the Sacraments but must be oriented to the transmission of the richness of our Carmelite-Teresian tradition. In general, the Commissariat must continue to reinforce the characteristic elements of our charismatic life, strengthening community life and prayer. Cuba continues to be a good missionary opportunity.

The visitation concluded with the celebration of the triennial Chapter of the Commissariat, presided over by Fr. General. During the Chapter some decisions were taken to implement the guidelines of the visitation, namely, to reduce the number of communities in order to reinforce those considered to be a priority, and to leave the pastoral service in some of the parishes.

Fr. Daniel Chowning made the pastoral visitation of the Semi-Province of Flanders from February 4 to 28. Currently, it has 24 solemnly professed friars and one novice. Seven (7) friars, for health or other reasons, live outside community. The average age is 65. The Semi-Province has 4 communities. Two of them (Ghent and Bruges) are linked to a spirituality center that welcomes people interested in various spiritual practices. The challenge is to offer programs in Carmelite spirituality in a context where many people no longer engage in traditional Christian practices. The community in Norraby (Sweden) has a small spirituality center. They also minister to our Discalced Carmelite Nuns (Glumslöv) and to the Secular Carmelites. The fourth community, located in Berchem (Antwerp), is dedicated to parish ministry.

The friars live and minister in European regions strongly influenced by the secularization of society. Nevertheless, many people manifest a thirst for spirituality and are searching for an interior life to which the Carmelite tradition can certainly offer a good response. One of the main difficulties of the Semi-Province is the lack of vocations. Their present situation invites them to reevaluate their ministries and presence in order to offer adequate service according to the realistic possibilities of the friars. In the midst of all this, it would be good for them to strengthen their presence in Sweden, which has an interesting missionary dimension.

From 5 to 31 January, Fr. Daniel Ehigie visited the Provincial Delegation of West Africa, which is part of the Iberian Province. The presence in Burkina Faso began in 1992 through the missionary activity of the former Province of Aragon-Valencia, and with time it extended to other neighboring countries. Currently, the Delegation has three communities: Dédougou (Burkina Faso), Gonzagueville-Abiyán (Ivory Coast) and Lomé (Togo).

Presently, there are a total of 22 solemnly professed friars (and 6 more outside the Delegation because of studies), 12 simply professed, 1 novice and 4 postulants. The average age of the solemnly professed is 41. The primary concern is initial formation, and three houses are formation communities. In this regard, it seems necessary to build or prepare a house for the novitiate, since the old monastery of Discalced Carmelites in Moundasso is now being used provisionally. In the area of pastoral ministry, they have parochial, scholastic, and social activities. The work they carry out is highly appreciated, although they need to be careful to avoid an overload of work.

From February 9 to 28, Fr. Daniel also visited the Provincial Delegation of Cameroon, belonging to the Province of Lombardy that began the mission in 1984. Presently, the Delegation is comprised of friars from different backgrounds: among the solemnly professed there are 3 Cameroonians, 2 Italians (from the Province of Genoa), 1 from the Congo, and 2 from Nigeria. In addition, 2 friars from Cameroon are in Italy and 1 in the Central African Republic. On the other hand, there are 3 simply professed Cameroonians, 4 novices, and 10 postulants. The average age is a little more than 30 years. The Delegation has two communities: Nkoabang, a parish house, and Nkolbisson, a theological seminary for Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

After a period of some difficulty, the Delegation is continuing its process of consolidation. Some aspects of the life of the Delegation require special attention: living together with confrères from other countries and with different temperaments, relationships with the Province and collaboration with other circumscriptions, attention to initial formation, charismatic communion with the laity, economic autonomy, and administration of property.

Fr. Daniel also reported on the meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of English-speaking Africa (Kiserian, Kenya, 2-7 February 2020). An evaluation was made of the Fourth African Teresian Congress held last October in Cameroon, which was positively assessed. There was also a discussion regarding Fr. General's letter to the provincial chapters and on the

Charismatic Declaration. They reflected on how to promote collaboration among the circumscriptions, including those of the French-speaking zone.

For his part, the Vicar General, Fr. Agustí, accompanied some Italian circumscriptions during these past weeks in the present stage of preparation for the triennial Chapters. In particular, he made a fraternal visit to the Commissariat of Sicily where he visited all the communities, spoke to each of the friars, and took part in the Plenary Councils of Central Italy and Naples.

In keeping with current practice regarding pastoral visitations, we discussed letters that some circumscriptions have sent to the Definitory regarding the implementation of the guidelines and decisions from their last general visitation. We reminded everyone that they must send a report one year after the visitation.

On the other hand, the Definitory officially erected the Commissariat of the Congo which has been designated the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo. The Definitory approved the definitive version of its Statutes. It also revised and approved the new Statutes of the Commissariat of Sicily and approved the revised Statutes of the Secular Carmel of Korea.

One concrete issue that constitutes a sign of future hope is the project of the Order's mission in China which has been entrusted to the Korean Province. Already, three Chinese candidates have begun their process of initial formation. Other circumscriptions are collaborating in this process. The plan is that the candidates will make their postulancy in Singapore, the novitiate in the Philippines, and their theological studies in Taiwan. The Definitory approved this formation program and the agreement on collaboration between the three circumscriptions. Collaboration between the circumscriptions of East Asia and Oceania is also taking place in initial formation in the Philippines and in the care of Filipino and Vietnamese immigrants in Japan.

All the circumscriptions of the Order are celebrating the corresponding Chapters or congresses during these months. Some have already taken place, especially in Latin America, and in some, the General or one of the Definitors has participated: Fr General in the Caribbean, Fr Javier in Argentina, Peru and Chile, and Fr Mariano in Japan. Other chapters will be held, God willing, in the coming weeks. The Chapter is always an important moment in the life of the circumscriptions which has the responsibility of making the most appropriate decisions for the new triennium and of choosing the friars who will be responsible for implementing them. On this occasion, one of the fundamental elements to consider is the Charismatic Declaration that the Order is preparing. All the Chapters are called to analyze it seriously and to enrich it with their contributions.

Keeping in mind the current situation of uncertainty due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus and the restrictions of travel adopted in many countries, the Definitory has established that the Councils of each circumscription are free to change the dates previously approved for the celebration of the Chapters and to set new dates when possible, depending on the evolution of events.

With regard to the Charismatic Declaration, we continue to receive valuable comments and suggestions. For example, during the month of January two meetings of young friars from the Indian provinces took place in Trivandrum and Mysore, in addition to those already held in America, Europe and Africa. Fr. Johannes Gorantla was present at both meetings as organizer and animator in the name of the Definitory and has now presented the conclusions and contributions of the participants. The European formators, too, in their annual meeting held in the Teresianum at the end of January, made their assessments and observations on the text of the Declaration.

The Definitory is gathering all the contributions received and will integrate them into the current text of the Declaration during the coming months. The revised version will be presented to the Extraordinary Definitory, scheduled in Mexico from August 29 (arrival) to September 6 (departure) of this year 2020. During these days we began to prepare the program for this meeting, the principle aim of which, is preparation for the next General Chapter of the Order planned from May 1-22, 2021 in the locality of Nemi (Italy).

The topic to which we have dedicated more time and attention during these days is the important question of the presence of communities and friars of one circumscription in the territory of another. This is a recent development in the history of the Order and in recent years it has taken on such considerable dimensions that it is significantly modifying our territorial configuration. Following the discussion held in the Extraordinary Definitory of Ariccia in 2017, the Definitory already made some concrete decisions in this regard. Taking into account the accumulated experience, we have now come to a new discernment in light of our legislation and have concluded that it is necessary and urgent to make new decisions.

Our Constitutions, following the secular practice of the Order, determine that each Province has its own exclusive territory. There is no provision for communities of different circumscriptions in the same territory, except in very exceptional and justified cases. Thus, in principle, all friars present in a territory should be under the jurisdiction of the local provincial. In this regard, the possibility is foreseen that friars of one circumscription may be transferred to the service of another circumscription, always with the approval of the General Superior (Applicative Norms 135-137). We understand, therefore, that it is not possible to grant any permission for a circumscription to found or assume a community in the territory of another circumscription, or to initiate any type of presence of friars in the service of a diocese outside its own territory.

The Definitory has prepared a detailed statement on this question which contains juridical considerations, the current data, and the corresponding determinations. This document will be sent to the Provincial Chapters who will have to specify the way in which these determinations are to be applied in order to regularize the present anomalous situations.

The General Bursar, Fr Paolo De Carli, updated us on the economic and financial aspects related to the Definitory and the Generalate. On this occasion, we analyzed the final accounts for 2019 which show a slightly positive balance sheet. Most of the income comes from contributions from the provinces and monasteries, as well as from the activities of the members of the community and the Definitory. The largest expenses have to do with the different areas related to the management of the Generalate and the various responsibilities of its members. Moreover, a considerable part is destined for the formation centers of the Center of the Order in Rome (Teresianum, International College, Seminarium Missionum). One element to be aware of is the fiscal pressure on religious entities, which in Italy and in other countries has been increasing notably in recent times with direct consequences on our economic activity and our patrimony (taxes, management, inspections, etc.).

We also reviewed together with the General Procurator some concrete situations of friars of the Order who are in some kind of juridical process or irregular situation. We emphasized the need for superiors of circumscriptions to take the necessary steps to regularize pending cases as soon as possible.

At the end of this new meeting of the Definitory, we are preparing to participate with the entire community of the Generalate in the community retreat we hold every year during this season of Lent. We ask everyone's prayers that this may be a good opportunity to renew ourselves and to listen to the Word of God. For our part, we ask the Lord that the whole Order and each of its members (friars, nuns and laity) may live this time of preparation for Easter with

intensity and be more attentive each day to the voice of the Lord and available to recognize and accept His will for us.

Fraternally

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