



**REPORT OF THE PRIOR GENERAL
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2019**

« As a contemplative fraternity, we seek the face of God also in the heart of the world. We believe that God has established his dwelling in the midst of his people and, therefore, the Carmel fraternity feels a living part of the Church and of history: an open fraternity, capable of listening and allowing itself to be challenged by its own environment, willing to pick up the challenges of history and to give authentic answers of evangelical life, based on its own charism, solidarity and also willing to collaborate with all the men who suffer, wait and commit themselves in the search for the Kingdom of God » (Constitutions n . 21).

« The charism is unique in its essential elements. Its universal application requires that a limited and regional vision of the Order be overcome, and requires a constant effort to express and specifically embody the charism in different cultures, times and places. There must always be an intimate link between the unit that derives from the identification with the Carmelite charism in its essential aspects and the pluralism coming from the diverse cultures, which enriches its diverse expressions” (RIVC n. 4).

Dear brothers:

First of all, I would like to give you the warmest welcome to our General Chapter. The Chapter is not only the most important instance of government in the life of the Order, but also the most important moment in the life of a community like ours (whether local, provincial or general). It is a privileged time of discernment, of shared reflection, of fraternity, lived, expressed and celebrated, a time of grace in which we listen to the Lord's will and discern together the ways of putting that will into practice, living and sharing the values of the Kingdom in the midst of the society in which we lived and which we love and serve as Carmelites.

In other words, a chapter is not just an administrative, bureaucratic or merely canonical process; it is a time of profound spirituality, of openness and reflection, of



attention to the signs of the times and of hope in a future that is always in the hands of God.

So, I invite you to live this General Chapter 2019 with responsibility (aware of its importance), with generosity (each contributing according to his role) and with the joy of a community of brothers who share (none the less!) a common charism, a gift of the Spirit for the whole Church, a living tradition and a fertile spirituality that leads us to contemplate in the reality that surrounds us (even in difficulties and problems) the signs of the loving presence of the Lord in our lives.

I will make my own the words of Pope Francis at the beginning of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2014: *“Speak frankly and listen humbly (...). Dear brothers, let us all collaborate so that the dynamics of synodality are clearly affirmed.”* In a particular sense, we, Carmelites, (mendicant orders) are masters of synodality because of our chapter dynamics. On several occasions I have pointed out that it is not only a form of government (as valid as others), but rather it is a "chapter culture" or even a "chapter spirituality". In our orders it is emphasized, with the ancient wisdom of the mendicant life, that God speaks within the community, through the brothers summoned by the prior. It is a very beautiful dynamic, but it demands great human and spiritual maturity. We hope that our 2019 General Chapter will be a time of grace in which the brothers gathered together discern, seek and - with creative fidelity - put themselves at the service of the Order and the Church.

The theme chosen for this Chapter is: *"You are my witnesses" (Is 43,10); from one generation to another: called to be faithful to our Carmelite charism.* As we did in the 2013 General Chapter, we have started from a sentence of our Constitutions. The reason for choosing this topic is as follows: the Order has grown geographically in the last twenty years. In many emerging areas, a young, enthusiastic and vibrant Carmel is springing up. Given this situation, we must ask ourselves if our formation is really conveying the fundamental values of our charism. It is an important and very beautiful challenge in which we must combine a solid formation, well rooted in the Carmelite style and ethos, but also open to cultures where Carmel is growing, so that the charism is really meaningful, so that it is "incarnate" and transforms these realities.

This challenge is not only relevant to "mission" areas (to use a more traditional expression) or to areas where Christianity is a minority. It has become more important to face this challenge also in areas where Carmel has existed for centuries. Perhaps because of the precariousness of some Provinces in the western world or due to some confusion between Christian spirituality (always liberating and committed) and discarnate spirituality (simply "being well" or relaxed), formation (although it is very well described in the RIVC in all its stages) needs to be constantly reviewed to help the Carmelites of today and of the future.



This challenge (which we should not be afraid of) will lead us to a healthy debate, in which issues such as inculturation, formative processes, the dynamic understanding of our charism, creative fidelity, authenticity, etc. will come into play. I hope that this General Chapter may give rise to some guidelines and inspirations for the near future of our Order, so that we respond with courage and determination to this exciting challenge.

As I did in the Chapter of 2013, I have divided my report to the General Chapter in nine parts to help you organize the information and read it quickly and systematically.

1. Formation and cultural life

In this area, we continued developing a series of courses and programs promoting both initial and ongoing formation, following the criteria of the Ratio (RIVC). Logically, these programs and courses are no substitute for formation in the respective geographic areas, but are only one support, apart from being an international experience - contributing to complete and enrich formation in the respective Provinces, Commissariats and Delegations of the Order.

As was done in the previous six-year term, we have opted for a method that we could describe as “mystagogical”, helping the participants to enter both theoretically and experientially the spiritual experience of the figures or topics discussed. The Counsellor for Formation, Fr. Benny Phang Khong Wing will present in more detail the various courses that have been developed in these years.

Likewise, we have tried as a General Council to encourage the superiors of the different realities of our Order to invest in formation and to consider formation as a true priority. We are well aware of the difficulties faced by some provinces in finding suitable personnel to carry out formation or to release personnel for formation when so many other apostolates or jobs seem more urgent and important. However, I believe that formation should be considered the primary mission, because it relates to our future and to the quality of religious Carmelite life. As you have heard me say many times, when I talk about formation I do not mean only the academic (which, without a doubt, is very important), but a formation that integrates several dimensions, human, spiritual, academic, psychological, etc. In this sense, we have insisted, in line with what the Church is strongly recommending, that our formation houses be healthy environments in every way and that the protection of minors and vulnerable adults be one of the important criteria that must be taken into account in discerning formation experiences.



In this area, as in others, we must not forget that all local and provincial communities are formative and that the task of forming future Carmelites is not limited exclusively to whom this ministry is entrusted.

Nor should we forget the importance of ongoing formation [permanent formation, PF]. We must sincerely acknowledge that it has been neglected in certain areas of the Order. After the Second Vatican Council, there was a great enthusiasm for PF in the Church and courses, programs, training plans were organized at all levels (local, provincial, general, diocesan, etc.). But it is fair to recognize that this enthusiasm has been dwindling for various reasons. There are those who point out that PF is today the “the Achilles heel” of religious life. This lack of PF is both a symptom and a cause of the weakness of religious life in our times. PF is essential for the quality of our religious life, our mission, our preaching, our reflection on our identity. PF is first and foremost an attitude of openness to the future and generous service - as Carmelites - to the people of God.

Although it is not a very frequent case, I would like to point out that some Provinces, monasteries, congregations, etc ... have a somewhat ideological, monochromatic PF, centred on the same people and the same issues and approaches. In short, it is the opposite of the very notion of "formation". With critical humility, with the desire to move forward and to grow, we must listen to various sensibilities that, even in disagreement, enrich and question us. In other entities of the Order, there are individuals responsible (informally!) to going to all congresses, meetings, courses, etc., so it is obvious that the formation of the group suffers negatively.

Finally, with regards to PF, I would to stress that sometimes Carmelite formation is limited to the novitiate and, once our young people begin their philosophical and theological studies, there is no more Carmelite formation (perhaps throughout their whole life). This entails large charismatic deficits in later life (deficits that sometimes are unknown even to the person himself). Without bad intentions, these shortcomings sometimes have negative consequences on the operation of a Province or a Commissariat.

I would also like to highlight the importance that some international centers have had in the global task of formation in the Order (which have welcomed students from other Provinces with great generosity) and, above all, our San Alberto International Center in Rome (CISA). CISA has developed an excellent programme as regards hospitality, formation and living together in the international context of the Order. I thank the Prior (Fr Míceál O'Neill) and the Vice Prior (Fr Noel Rosas), the Treasurer (Br Jan Wozniak) as well as all the members of the community of CISA, for their valuable contribution so that this could be possible.

In fact, throughout these six years there have been many Carmelites who have done their masters or doctorate degrees in various Roman Athenaeums, while living in



CISA. In this regard I wish to highlight the great work of the *Regens Studiorum* (first Fr Mark Attard and in this last year Fr Giovanni Grosso) who have guided our students and have kept the General Council informed about the studies of our brothers.

There is no doubt that at this time formation remains the "great challenge" of the Order and of religious life in general. Finding good formators ("forming formators"); that our communities be formative and attractive communities; cooperation between Provinces (especially important in "mission" lands); prioritizing formation over other seemingly more urgent ministries ... are just some of the challenges we must face for the future of the Order.

Regarding the cultural life of the Order (at a general level, that is, without counting the multiple initiatives that are carried out in the Provinces), I would like to highlight, among other possible ones, some data that may be significant:

1. For some years (and after many discussions in various committees with regards to systems, programs and methods) Fr Ton Van der Gulik has put on the internet the catalog of the Carmelite Library, so it is available for scholars and researchers.
2. I would also like to highlight the excellent work done in moving all the documentation corresponding to the period 1935 -1965 from the Current Archive at the Curia to the Historical Archive at CISA. With this, the documents of this interesting period that includes, among many other events , the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the Second Vatican Council, can now be consulted.
3. In the same way, the Archives of the Postulation were transferred to the Historical Archive at CISA. These documents can now be better preserved and can also be consulted.
4. The General Archive has also organized the so - called "Study Grant Emanuele Boaga", a prize that is awarded to a historical research project related to the "res carmelitana" and is dedicated to the memory of Fr Boaga. It is a way to encourage Carmelite studies that is paying off very well and that, in addition, is connecting a series of young scholars and researchers.
5. A work that may not have received the echo it deserves (although, without a doubt, will bear fruit in the near future) is the publication of the old Constitutions in *Edizioni Carmelitane*. It is a great work and a treasure that will help us better understand our history and the understanding that the Order had of itself in various periods of its history.
6. In CISA, several series of conferences on Carmelite themes have been developed in relation to the various centenaries that we have been celebrating or other topics of interest. In these meetings the *Institutum Carmelitanum* has actively collaborated .



7. All the works published by *Edizioni Carmelitane*, which make up a true arsenal of Carmelite studies in many different fields, deserve special mention. Together with *Carmelus*, *Analecta* and *Carmel in the World* they contribute decisively to deepening our understanding of our charism, our history and our identity. In addition, all these publications become our "business card", a humble but valuable showcase of Carmelite studies of a certain academic level and high dissemination. The publishing world (and especially publishing in the religious field) is going through complex times. Probably in the not too distant future we will have to look for new formulas, but, in any case, there is no doubt that today we can show with satisfaction a huge work of historical, spiritual and theological and even biblical research that has grown throughout the last decades. Hopefully, a misunderstood pastoral activism or lack of appreciation for academic research will not damage this huge editorial and cultural work.
8. It had a special relevance the course about the administration of cultural heritage of the Carmelite Order, held in Rome in march of this year, 2019. Various participants from all the Carmelite family who have the responsibility of conserving and disseminating our cultural heritage took part in this meeting.
9. In the inescapable task of studying and deepening our charism, as well as in discerning its significance for the Church and today's society, I believe that the commissions for "Justice and Peace" (JPIC), Liturgy, as well as that of "Evangelization". have played an important role. From three different, but complementary, points of view, these three commissions have helped us rethink our mission and our presence. My thanks to Fr Conrad Mutizamhepo, Fr Michael Farrugia¹ and Fr John Keating and the members of the respective commissions.
10. Finally, I would emphasize the service of our Order to the dissemination and study of the Word of God, both at an academic level (*Biblicum*, Heidelberg), and also the famous *Lectio Divina* which has been spearheaded by Fr Bruno Secondin († 2019) in our church of Santa María in Traspontina for more than twenty years. Also, our website is one of the most visited in the religious world to because of the *Lectio* which is highly praised for its depth and brevity, which makes it very useful for the apostolate and meditation.

2. Structure and administration of the Order:

As I noted six years ago, in some parts of the Order it becomes very necessary (and will be more so in the future), the restructuring of our presences. Although this is usually translated into "popular language" in "closing houses" or "joining provinces",

¹ My thanks also to Monsignor Francisco de Sales Alencar Batista who was the president of the commission "*ad Liturgiam et orationem proprias elaborandas*" until he was appointed bishop in 2016.



I think it is a much more complex process that will test our ability to change, our flexibility and also (why not say so) our availability as religious. Without wanting to go into an in-depth analysis of the religious crisis in the western world (Europe, the United States and, in some way, Australia) it seems clear that in the near future (very close!) we will have to rethink our presences. My experience is that - not in a few cases - this reflection is being postponed too much and we will take measures when the situation is already desperate.

In this regard, I highlighted in my report to the General Chapter of 2013 our satisfaction with the new Province of Blessed Tito Brandsma (in Germany), whose erection took place in December 2012 and informed you about the process of unification of the Provinces of Aragon and Valencia and Castilla in Spain that was already well ahead²[2]. The union of these Provinces occurred and, in both cases, (Germany and Spain) I believe that the union has worked reasonably well. In the provincial chapters of Catalonia and Betica the union with the new Province was voted unanimously and work is being done in this regard. I think that in other areas we should start reflecting on this issue that often takes second place so as to avoid it.

To be in favour of the union of Provinces or not, does not mean that we are better religious or better or worse Carmelites. Certainly, it is a questionable issue. I am well aware, moreover, that in some situations the union seems complex and involves different kinds of difficulties. But it is also true that these processes show some of the criteria that ultimately move our lives and the values that really guide us. If national, political, racial, economic, a lifestyle or another, prejudices, etc., prevent two Carmelites from living together ... then something is not going well.

As I have pointed out on certain occasions, these unions are not a “panacea”: the problems continue and new problems arise. However, the union helps open horizons, to rethink with more possibilities our presences, to work together.

We must not forget that this affects a part of the world (a very important part of the Carmelite world), but that the reality that is lived in other areas is very diverse. Our analysis cannot be too Eurocentric because, unwittingly, we may be transmitting a certain pessimism to other parts of the Carmelite world where the situation is very diverse. Our analysis, our assessment, our discourse cannot be monophonic but polyphonic, to use a musical metaphor.

Without doubt, even in other parts of the world we have to rethink our organization according to the new challenges and diverse situations. In this sense I would like to present the possibility of creating new General Commissariats and Provinces which facilitate the administration of the Order in big geographic territories. Precisely, my last signature as Prior General was signing of the decree of the erection of the new General Commissariat of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and Saint Albert

² To these two processes should be added the unification of the Italian Province that took place almost thirty years ago.



of Jerusalem in India. Without doubt this is a good news and a sign of hope and life for all the Carmelite family

I cannot miss mentioning the fact that in Africa we are still working with very good results on collaboration between the different presences on two axis as asked by the 2007 General Chapter which changed the geographical structure of the Order creating a Councilor for Africa. For one part we have the mostly English-speaking countries (Zimbabwe, Congo and Tanzania) and Mozambique and the other part we have the French speaking countries (Congo, Burkina Faso and Cameroon). There is collaboration in formation (joint novitiates, student exchange etc.) yet I believe that in the future there could be more administrative unity. Without doubt this issue has to be studied in the years to come.

In this framework of the administration and government of the Order, I would like to remind you that in December 2015 the protocol or regulation for canonical visits was approved by the General Council. The protocol was developed following a kind of “oral tradition” that was not always clear. The objective of this protocol is not to create new norms, but to facilitate and improve this wonderful instrument of discernment and encounter that are the canonical visits. I have talked about this in more detail in all the provincial chapters of recent years.

Also, in 2015 the “Standards of conduct for the entities dependent on the Curia” were approved by the General Council. As you can understand, this is a very important issue in which the entities dependent on the Curia must be at the forefront in the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults. Every Carmelite presence must be a healthy environment, with mature, transparent and authentic human relationships. These rules are intended to be an aid (with their corresponding normative character) in creating such environments.

Finally, I would like to remind you that the 2013 Chapter established an “ad hoc” commission to examine the entities dependent on the Curia and their functionality, especially for the cultural promotion of these entities. The commission was created and chaired by Fr Frederick Tillotson, O.Carm. This commission interviewed all those involved in these entities and made a series of very interesting suggestions that I believe will help future general councils. To give just two examples: it recommended the creation of a space (always to the extent of our possibilities) for the entities directly related culture in the CISA. We are already working on this recommendation. It also suggested that the community of the Curia should have greater privacy and its own space, beyond the offices, rooms and spaces open to the public. As I told you at the General Congregation of Fatima, it will be necessary to see “ *how (and to what extent) some of these suggestions can be implemented progressively and taking into account our economic possibilities,*” once the *Domus* issue is closed and taking into account the new economic situation that will arise.



3. Carmelite Family

I would like to start by emphasizing that, in recent years, there has been some reflection about the notion of "Carmelite Family". In several international meetings and especially in the General Congregation of Niagara in 2011, we have had an interesting debate about this notion. On the one hand, there were those who thought that the notion that appears in number 28 of the Constitutions of 1995 (and already before in number 16 of those of 1971) was too vague, somewhat imprecise. On the other hand, some brothers were opposed to following a reductionist criterion, underlining the need for this notion to be inclusive and broad so as not to numb the work of the Holy Spirit, who ultimately is the one, who generates in us the gift of the Carmelite charism

The commission responsible for the revision of our Constitutions, has followed a very interesting intermediate position, while keeping the notion open it outlined a better profile from a theological and spiritual point of view. In addition, the text shows the sympathy that the Order has for this idea of "Carmelite Family" which, no doubt, we will have to continue to deepen in the coming years. I believe that, if this wording is accepted, it will help to better understand what it means to be a Carmelite in the modern world and to live this ecclesial charism with a certain coherence and generosity.

Personally, I confess that I am an enthusiast of this idea which I believe we cannot do without, but I also confess that in various areas of the world I have detected two risks in this area. I usually explain it with the terminology with which the Council of Chalcedon defined the ontological constitution of Christ: "a person with two natures: human and divine." Both natures are united "without separation or confusion." Something similar occurs in the Carmelite Family. We live the charism together, without separation, but this does not imply a confusion of states, vocations or missions. For one part, the risk of those who forget "without separation" (those who think, that the Carmelite family is something of the post - conciliar period, probably already superseded, an ornament, a romantic idea). Behind this opinion, perhaps there is a dangerous and very little fraternal neo - clericalism. They think that the charism is our possession - of the friars - and they forget that the only owner of the charism is the Spirit.

The other risk is of those who forget the "no confusion" (we are the same, there are no specific vocations). This view does not really into account the deep sense of laity and unknowingly uses certain type of clerical parameters (the laity become religious). It is not a dramatic issue (I would not like to give it any negative tone), but I think we should continue to reflect and calibrate well the meaning, mission and identity of the Carmelite Family in various parts of the world. This study will be part of our thanksgiving for this gift of the Spirit to the Order and to the Church.



Now I will briefly point out some questions concerning the most relevant groups of our Carmelite Family.

a. Speaking of the Carmelite Family, there is no doubt that our contemplative nuns occupy a very important place in it. These six years have been marked, no doubt, by the publication of two important documents that will guide the cloistered life in the coming years: the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* on the contemplative female life of 2016 and the Instruction application *Cor Orans* of 2018. As you have already seen (and P Mario Alfarano will explain more precisely.) these two documents involve a number of very important consequences for our nuns on topics such as federations, formation, the autonomy of monasteries, canonical visits, the role of the Federal Mother and federal assistants, etc. ... Fr Mario and myself have tried to encourage our sisters to assume this new time as a true *kairos* for the cloistered life, as a period of transformation and renewal that, if we are faithful and docile to the Spirit, can open new paths and very interesting possibilities.

In this sense, it should be noted that Fr Mario has already begun the process of reviewing the Constitutions of the nuns with the aim of making it a process of broad discernment in which all the monasteries participate as much as possible.

I would also like to point out that in recent years some new monasteries have been founded in "mission" areas such as Mutare (Zimbabwe), Azua (Dominican Republic), Barinas (Venezuela), Sao Joao del Rei (Brazil), in San Fabian (Philippines) and in Vung Tau (Vietnam). A few days before this General Chapter, as you have seen in Citoc, I had the great honor of inaugurating the new Khongolote monastery in Mozambique, the result of the collaboration of several monasteries (Machakos and Moncorvo) and the brothers of the Pernambucan Province and the Commissariat of Portugal. To all of them I want to show my deepest gratitude for their collaboration in this beautiful project. There is also the project - very advanced and already approved by the General Council - of a third monastery in Kenya (Kitui). Without a doubt these are signs of hope and a demonstration of the vitality of the cloistered Carmelite life. However, we must also note that some monasteries have been closed in Europe: Piedrahita (Spain), Rocca Gloriosa (Italy), Tafira Alta (Spain) and Beja (Portugal).

As regards our nuns, I would like to highlight two other very important developments of these years. First, the document prepared by the Fr Mario Alfarano and approved by the General Council on new foundations, it provides a set of very useful guidelines, both for the mother community, and the community being founded (a theme which was not so clear). As you can imagine, it is a sign of hope that hopefully is used frequently in the future and shows, as I said above - that there is vitality in the cloistered monastic life.

The second, and in relation to the above, is the “*Sponsor a monastery*” campaign that aims to help some new foundations. The response has been quite generous and enthusiastic and therefore I want to publicly show my gratitude



to all who have participated, inviting you to participate in future campaigns of this kind.

b. Carmelite sisters: As you know the Order has fourteen congregations related to it. It is an army of women – worthy of the expression – who take the Carmelite charism to very diverse fields such as education, health, missions, etc. I think that these female congregations are a true treasure for our Carmelite family and, therefore, I have always tried, as far as I can, to visit and accompany them on many different occasions.

As was done in the other six years, also in this period we had a meeting of the superiors general of the female congregations that took place in Focene (Rome) in October 2016. In that meeting, Fr Mario Alfarano participated as Delegate, together with Fr Bruno Secondin and myself. At the end of the meeting - taking advantage of the coincidence of dates - the superiors went to the canonization of Elizabeth of the Trinity in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

One of the conclusions of this meeting was the need to continue strengthening our ties with the Carmelite sisters. I think it would be interesting to continue deepening this issue and identify fields of mission, study and reflection, prayer and celebration, vocational promotion, etc., in which our collaboration could be more intense. In fact, in the many places where there is a close collaboration with the sisters, the fruits tend to be many and very valuable and that collaboration shows more clearly and palpably what our Carmelite family means. In my report to the 2013 General Chapter I was referring to an experience that I consider very interesting and significant: that it takes place in Caririaçu (Ceará, Brazil). It is a Carmelite inter-congregational community (*Comunidade Intercarmelitana "Fonte de Elias "*), formed by sisters of various female congregations and a tertiary. As I indicated there, *"it is a "pilot experience" that can help us think of closer forms of collaboration between the various branches of the Carmelite family."*

Although they really should be included in another group, I want to mention our sisters of the Donum Dei Missionary Family (FMDD). In the report to 2013 Chapter I talked about the suspension (which would later be repealed) of number 86 of the so-called Third Order Rule by CIVCSVA. For various reasons, the Vatican Congregation ordered an apostolic visit that was carried out with great seriousness by the visitors (among which was Fr Michael Farrugia, our Procurator General) and with great openness and spirit of collaboration by the FMDD. The charismatic identity of FMDD was not an issue, but rather it's canonical status. Among the conclusions of this visit (and summing up a lot) it was recommended that the FMDD be converted into a Society of Apostolic Life, which in the opinion of the Congregation corresponds better to their life style and internal structure. The FMDD has subsequently carried out an enormous study, reflection and adaptation work to follow the directions of the Congregation. Fr Michael - to whom I publicly show my gratitude for the effort and



fraternal spirit with which he has led this issue - has accompanied the sisters and we hope that, shortly, the Carmelite Family will have its first ever Society of Apostolic Life. In case of any doubt, the Missionary Workers are and will continue to be part of our Carmelite family, more so with this new canonical status.

c. Hermits: As I informed you in my report to the General Chapter of 2013, CIVCSVA indicated to us some years ago that we could not have hermits under the direct jurisdiction of the Prior General or the local superiors. However, the Congregation recognized the fact that: "*Historically, some religious institutes had hermitic or semi-hermitic types of life, as indicated in their Constitutions, but they always remained within the scope of religious life, and within an institute*"[3]. On that occasion I had pointed out that, however, there were two ways for Carmel to continue to accept experiences of hermitical life (provided they are serious and well founded): they can be hermits in the full sense of the term (followed and controlled by the local bishop before which they make their profession as hermits and with some kind of spiritual connection with Carmel), or it can also be Carmelite religious in whose Province there is the possibility of having a house that maintains a quieter type of life, more austere, with manual work, etc. In this second case, the Province can protect this type of experience by including them in the provincial statutes and thus giving them a certain legitimacy. In any case, serious discernment is always necessary before approving such an experience.

I would like to conclude this section by noting that among the proposals for the revision of the Constitutions prepared by the Commission, there are two new numbers that somehow include the possibility for groups or individuals to maintain the eremitical dimension of our charism.

d. Third Order and Carmelite laity: During these twelve years, the Carmelite laity has continued to grow in various parts of the world. There are numerous new sodalities of the Third Order of Carmel that have been instituted in various countries and, moreover, there is a certain revitalization of the TOC in countries where it seemed that it was languishing. In many different forums I have insisted on the need to encourage and accompany our tertiary brothers (even where they are small groups and older in age), to enjoy our common belonging to the Order and to enrich each other. I have seen with satisfaction that in some places the TOC (without losing its traditional and devotional forms) acquires new social or cultural commitments and seeks with a healthy creativity, new ways of expressing the spiritual wealth that it has treasured for centuries. In a few cases, the TOC generously collaborates with our missions and promotes the missionary sensibility of Carmel in various ways.

Together with the TOC, other groups of Carmelite lay people have been developing that emphasize various aspects of our spirituality (fraternity, prayer, solidarity or the Marian element). Among them, I would like to highlight the prayer groups and workshops, the Carmelite youth groups, the various Carmelite NGOs that



help the most disadvantaged and the alumni groups of our schools that in some countries are very active.

With the inspiration of the theology of the laity of Vatican Council II, with a strong sense of family, with the conviction that the Carmelite charism has much to say to the laity of the 21st century, I would ask you to continue working generously with our laity and that together we continue to reflect and discern about our charism and our mission.

e. Carmelite bishops: Throughout this sexenium, three of our brothers have been called to the ministry of the episcopate. It is curious how we received news of their nomination as bishops of their respective dioceses by Pope Francis in less than three weeks. The three brothers perform their respective ministries in Cajazeiras, Brazil (Francisco de Sales Alencar Batista), in Mutare, Zimbabwe (Paul Horan) and in Malang, Indonesia (Enrico Pidyarto). I believe that, as a Carmelite Order, we can feel a certain family pride in these appointments that do not cease to imply an important ecclesial recognition and an example of our service to the local churches. There is also the case that the three dioceses (for various reasons) are very close to Carmel.

Likewise, it should be noted that Monsignor Joao Costa (who was bishop of Iguatú) was appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Aracaju in December 2014 and titular Archbishop of said Archdiocese in January 2017.

The Order currently has thirteen bishops: six in Brazil (two of them emeritus), one in the United States (emeritus of Sicuani in Peru), two in Italy (one of them emeritus), one in Portugal (also emeritus), one in Zimbabwe and two in Indonesia (one of them already emeritus).

I want to highlight the fraternal closeness of these brother bishops with the Order. They are Carmelites at heart and we feel that they are part of our family. Several of them, after finishing their ministry, have returned to convent life with great availability or offered to go to a Carmelite mission.

From the General Chapter we wish them all the best in their episcopal service and ask that Our Mother of Carmel guides and enlightens them in their ecclesial work that lies ahead.

4. Relationship with ecclesial organizations

I would like to point out that throughout these six years we have had a fairly fluid, and in some cases even cordial, relationship with ecclesial organizations especially related to consecrated life. As I did in the first six years I have participated faithfully in the assemblies of the Union of Superiors General (USG) that take place regularly every six months (May and November of each year). In this sexennium we have had the great experience that in two of these assemblies we meet with His Holiness Pope Francis. The first was in November 2013 and in that meeting the Pope announced that 2015 was going to be the year of Consecrated



Life . In this meeting (which I reported in detail in all the provincial chapters of the triennium) the Pope used the famous phrase “*Wake up the world!*” Which has become a kind of slogan and challenge for the consecrated life of our times. The second meeting took place in November 2016 and in it, the Pope insisted on some of the ideas that define his pontificate and showed his trust and his closeness to religious life.

Also, during these years, we have maintained a fluid relationship with the Vatican Congregation for religious life (CIVCSVA). Fr Michael Farrugia, as Procurator General and occasionally Fr. Mario Alfarano, as Delegate for the nuns, have maintained contacts at very different levels to deal with sensitive issues. Likewise, Monsignor Rodríguez Carballo, Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation, has participated in several meetings of our nuns (in Madrid and in Rome) to advise on the *Vultum Dei quaerere* and *Cor orans* documents and on the practical implications of these documents.

I think that - today more than ever - this spirit of collaboration with CIVCSVA is necessary, given the difficulties that consecrated life is going through, especially in certain areas of the world.

5. Economic issues

In the field of economy, we can say that in certain way, this six - year period has been somewhat "anomalous" because, in June 2017, Fr Carl Markelz was elected Vice Provincial of his own Province (PCM) and he thought it was appropriate (after asking for permission from the Prior General) to accept that assignment. In the plenary meeting of the Council in September of that year, various possibilities were studied to designate a new treasurer, but they proved fruitless. With less than two years to go to the General Chapter, some of the consulted provincials found it impossible for a person who would probably was doing an important job to move to Rome (perhaps without knowing Italian) only for a reduced period of time (until the General Chapter). However, the Council tried to find a candidate with the minimum necessary qualities. In view of the difficulty in finding such an available person, since we were in the process of negotiating the future of *Domus Carmelitana* (a process that, as you can imagine, was quite delicate) and after making a series of pertinent consultations, the Council asked Fr Christian, to accept to be responsible for the economy of the Order up to the general chapter as *Amministratore pro tempore*. Although Fr Christian already had enough work, with great generosity he accepted that assignment and I publicly thank him. He has carried out this work with the seriousness and responsibility that characterize him.

That said, I would like to highlight two issues that seem to me to be of particular importance before arriving at a final consideration.

a. First, I would point out that the general economy "of the Curia" (although this term is a bit imprecise and insufficient) has been maintained with the same



dynamics of other years. As you know, our Curia does not have fixed sources of income and, for this reason, the general budget is divided - for many years now - between the Provinces, according to a percentage established by the General Council following the indication of the Economic Commission and after a detailed study of certain parameters. At the beginning of the sexennium, Fr Carl and the economic commission indicated that the percentages should be changed slightly to better adapt them to the reality of the Order. I thank you all for your understanding and responsibility in this matter.

Precisely to provide the Curia with a fixed income, and also thinking of supporting new missions, previous councils created both the *Society of the Little Flower* (SLF) and the *Domus Carmelitana*.

The SLF has been collaborating regularly with the Curia, although in recent years, donations have declined considerably for various reasons. The new European legislation, the possibility of the so-called *Brexit*, the increase in shipping costs, etc., have caused this decrease. However, the help of the SLF is still very important to help some missions and to collaborate with the training of some young people from emerging areas in CISA. I thank those who have worked in this period in the SLF for this service to the Order and the missions.

As regards the *Domus Carmelitana*, and without going into details that will be made with more competency and precision, by Fr Christian Körner and the Fr Michael Farrugia, the results have not been as expected. At the beginning of the sexennium, Fr Carl Markelz drew up a plan that would reimburse the debt to the Provinces by 2029, but always hoping that there were no unforeseen events. To carry out this plan, Fr Carl asked the Provinces with which the Curia has this debt, to forgive the interests for five years. Except for three Provinces, the rest did so and I thank them publicly for their generosity.

At the same time, certain cases which happened in Rome, led us to hire an audit firm. Although it did not detect serious things, it drew our attention to some points. Because of this (among other things), the Council initiated contacts with a leading hotel company with the idea of completely changing both the management of the *Domus*, and its status and relationship with the Order.

In this process we wanted to maintain three criteria:

a. Transparency: although it was not mandatory, we reported all the steps to the Vatican Congregation (CICVSA), as well as to relevant government agencies (mainly the *Comune de Roma*). Certain deficiencies became apparent and they had to be addressed as the process progressed. As much as possible (and guided by our lawyers), we also transmitted this information to the provincials, as well as to the CISA community.

b. An ethical management at the level of taxes, fees, management, etc.



c. The desire that the jobs of *Domus* employees be maintained, to which the company partially agreed, but in a satisfactory manner. This has been greatly appreciated by *Domus* employees .

It has been a long and arduous process, with a lot of work. I want to publicly thank those who have collaborated on it (in a first phase, Fr Michael Farrugia and Fr Carl Markelz and in a second phase Fr Michael Farrugia and Fr Christian Körner), as well as our lawyers. I hope that this operation (of which, I repeat, the Procurator General and the *Amministratore pro tempore* will speak with greater competence in their reports) will give peace of mind, stability and a certain economic security to the future council.

b. Second, I would like to share with all of you a concern that has appeared on many occasions in our council meetings and in some provincial chapters. I refer to the difficulty of some provinces of maintaining their respective missions in emerging areas. In the coming years this difficulty will become more acute. For this reason, we have insisted on the need for these missions - despite the obvious difficulties - to have a certain self-financing. We have also insisted that the provinces, as far as possible, draw up economic plans that can guarantee a certain stability for the coming years.

Although this problem is serious and on more than one occasion it takes away our sleep, it should not tarnish the joy of the mission that - when carried out with enthusiasm, generosity and joy - is always a source of blessing. Let us hope that, together, with economic efficiency, but above all with missionary generosity, we will be able to ensure the basic structure of our missions.³

6. Colleges and Youth

Following the proposal made in the 2007 General Chapter, a task force for Carmelite schools has also been created during this six-year period. This group prepared the second international congress of Carmelite schools that took place in Rome in November 2017 and in which representatives of 35 Carmelite schools participated. It was a very interesting meeting in which the Carmelite presence in the educational field and the challenges we are facing in this field in various parts of the world were analyzed. The meeting was very helpful and took place in a festive atmosphere. The participants showed their desire to continue deepening their mutual knowledge of our schools and to draw possible lines of collaboration.

I think this is an area of work we have to take seriously, because it allows us to get in touch with thousands of young people and their families. It is true that in some provinces there is no tradition of working in schools . It is also true that in some

³ Perhaps we should also rethink whether this is a "basic structure", at least in certain cases it could be easier. It is not about demagoguery and we should not be afraid to use all the necessary means to serve the people of God as well as possible, but a type of mission called "kenotic" or "insertion" might also be convenient. It is a subject to be studied in the coming years.



of our schools (especially in Europe and North America) we encounter many difficulties for religious to work in this field. Moreover, the legislation of some countries tends to corner and financially suffocate religious schools. However, despite all these difficulties, we can talk about a fruitful and significant presence of Carmel in the field of education.

Our schools can be (besides being educational centers of the best possible quality), areas of encounter with other sensibilities and religions, places of humanization, centers of culture and solidarity, and also places where the believer can know his faith and mature in it. I have always defended our Catholic and Carmelite identity in schools, to be lived without complexes and transparently. This identity (if authentic) is inclusive, welcoming, respectful of other vital positions and other religious attitudes with which basic values can be shared.

In this sense, I think we have made little progress in the study of a Carmelite "style" of educating. A reflection is very necessary, whether about a Carmelite "ethos" of education or about a "Carmelite pedagogy" (expressions that may sound rather imposing), yes at least, about a series of basic convictions that, from our charism and spirituality enlighten us in the task of education.

As regards youth, I would like to mention that - as has been done since Sydney 2008 and later in Madrid 2011 and Rio de Janeiro 2013 - also in this six-year period we have participated in the two World Youth Days that have taken place in Krakow 2016 and Panama 2019. In both cases there was a large group of young people from different backgrounds, taking into account the difficulties of calendar travel, etc. Although there is no lack of critical voices with these meetings, I think that, as an Order and as a Carmelite Family, we must be in this youth forum where meetings, questions, challenges, etc ... are always raised around faith. I think that not being there (taking refuge in higher and somewhat elitist spirituality) would be a serious irresponsibility.

7. **Beatifications and canonizations**

When Fr Giovanni Grosso was elected prior provincial of the Italian Province, we asked who could be Postulator. It is not easy, since you must speak Italian, live in Rome, succeed at the required course, master canonical practices and be sensitive to these issues. After several attempts to bring a brother to Rome for this service, we chose to ask Mrs. Giovanna Brizi to assume it, at least provisionally for a few years. In the Congregation they accepted her very well, she is very professional, and I think she is doing an excellent job as we can already observe. I confess that I had my fears at the beginning for possible prejudices in certain mentalities (being a layperson, a woman, etc.), but I think it has been a great choice and, at least for now, this position is well covered. Professor Brizi has updated several historical causes, has contacted all the Carmelite Family groups involved in the process of beatification and canonization, has worked on the question of "*reponatur*" of certain



processes and has tried to give a pastoral approach to the various causes that the Order is carrying forward.

Throughout this sexennium we have celebrated the beatification of the Carmelite martyrs of the Spanish Civil War that took place on October 13, 2013 in Tarragona (Spain). The beatification took place within the framework of a solemn celebration presided by Cardinal Angelo Amato, in which five hundred twenty-two martyrs of the twentieth century in Spain were beatified, of which nineteen were Carmelites: nine belonging to the Province of Castile (Alberto María Marco Alemán and his fellow martyrs) and ten to the Bética (Carmelo Moyano and his fellow martyrs).

In this way, these two groups joined the group formed by sixteen Carmelites from the Province of Catalonia (which was General Commissariat when the events of 1936 occurred) and a cloistered nun from the Vich convent, beatified in Rome in October 2007.

For this reason, I sent to the entire Order and to the Carmelite Family a letter entitled: *Thank you for the martyrs who give to the Church ...* using a phrase from Pope Francis to the Superiors General in the meeting he had with the USG in November 2013. The letter is dated on the first anniversary of this beatification, since, due to the proximity of our General Chapter, it was impossible for me to prepare it before.

Thus, only a group of martyrs of the Spanish Civil War remain to be beatified. This is the group from the Province of Aragon and Valencia, whose cause is linked to the martyrs of the Diocese of Segorbe Castellón and it is already well advanced.

There are other causes that are also advancing, with the slowness of these processes, something that, on the other hand, is logical given the necessary study (detailed, thorough, scientific) of the candidates' biographies. Among them, and even at the risk of forgetting any, I would highlight the advances in various phases of the following causes: Avertan Fenech, Dom Gabriel Paulino Bueno Couto, Bartolomé Fanti Xiberta, Elia Carbonaro, Amata Cerretelli, Jean of Saint Samson (a long-awaited "historical" cause), Maria Maddalena Mazzoni Sangiorgi, etc ...

Among them, the possible canonization of Blessed Tito Brandsma, who is very popular throughout the Carmelite world. There have been several cases of possible miracles, but the most documented took place in Boca Raton in Miami (USA). The diocesan process was very slow, but it was carried out thanks to the collaboration with the agencies of the diocese. The entire dossier arrived in Rome and was translated into Italian, with not few difficulties, dealing with extensive handwritten material mostly with medical terminology and quite complex.

As I am writing this report, the "review" of the presented documents has been concluded. Now the process will be given to the medical and theological commissions



to be studied by them. Let us hope that soon the Church can solemnly proclaim Fr Tito Brandsma a saint. We are convinced that his witness as martyr, his spirituality and his life can be a great inspiration for the Church, not only in the Netherlands but throughout Europe and the world.

I would also like to underline the work that is being carried out to "reactivate" some historical causes (the so-called "*reponatur*"). These are causes that for some reason (certain doubts, doctrinal problems, possible canonical impediments) were stopped at a certain moment. The Postulator, in collaboration with some Carmelite scholars, is working on these causes and perhaps in the not too distant future we can see the first fruits of this work.

In any case, you will be informed in more detail and above all with more accuracy and competence by the Postulator in the coming days about these processes.

8. Relationship with our Discalced brothers

Also, during this six-year period 2013-2019 we have maintained a close relationship and collaboration with the General Council of our Discalced brothers. As we have been doing for more than 25 years, we have held with regularity the two meetings a year (once in each Curia) and also a broader meeting of living together, prayer and discernment that takes place every three years: the first of these took place on Mount Carmel (from November 27 to December 2, 2016), in which we fundamentally studied the issue of the relationships between consecrated life and particular church. The reason for choosing this topic was the new version of the *Mutuae Relationes* document, which appeared to be in an advanced stage of elaboration in the corresponding Vatican congregations (although, at least until the moment in which I prepared this report, it has not yet been published). The reflection was led by Fr Agostino Montan, from the Congregation of San José (Josefinos de Murialdo), professor at the Pontifical Lateran University, and an expert in this matter. The second meeting took place in Dublin (from May 27 to 31 of this year) and had as its central theme the missionary aspect of the Carmelite charism. In this case, the reason (for choosing this theme) was the convening of an extraordinary missionary month that will take place in October 2019. Since our council could not prepare anything for this month, to be held immediately after the General Chapter, we thought that our meeting could at least be an occasion to reflect on this fundamental aspect in the life of the Church. Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, theologian of the Jesuit center for faith and justice helped us in our reflection. Fruit of this meeting was a brief, but dense message that we sent to the whole Carmelite family in relation to this issue, entitled "We Are Mission: Because We Are God's Love Poured Out" and to which you have had access through Citoc and various social networks.

Also, at local and regional levels, different meetings have been celebrated and there has not been lack of examples of collaboration between the two branches of Carmel. No doubt, because of their magnitude the assemblies of ALACAR



(Latin American Association of Carmelites) held in various places in Latin America every three years deserve to be highlighted. In this six - year period 2013-2019 there two assemblies have been held: one from 26 to 31 of October 2015 in San Salvador (El Salvador). It was the IV Assembly of ALACAR and had as theme “Therese of Jesus: woman, mystic, prophet. A window of hope for Latin America.” The second (corresponding to the V Assembly of ALACAR) took place in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from November 6 to 11, 2018 and had as theme: “*The martyrs of yesterday for today's Latin American Carmel: Edith Stein, Tito Brandsma and Monsignor Romero*”. This assembly of ALACAR was preceded by a meeting of both generals with the cloistered Carmelite nuns of the two orders in which some questions regarding the *Cor Orans*, the Implementation Instruction of the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* on the contemplative female life that had been published shortly before.

In both meetings we visited the Carmelite communities in the area and on both occasions there was an excellent atmosphere and high participation. At the last ordinary meeting of the two general councils, it was decided that from now on the assemblies will be held every four years, instead of every three, given the abundance of meetings of various kinds that are held today.

Mention should also be made of the so - called *Carmelite Forum* and *Carmelite Symposium* meetings that are held in various parts of the United States. These meeting have been taking place for over thirty years and various Carmelite issues are addressed and speakers from the various branches of the Carmelite family, O.Carm. and OCD are invited.

With great success the excellent work of the joint CIBI (*Carmelite Institute for Britain and Ireland*) has continued. CIBI offers *online* Carmelite spirituality and history courses which are very frequented in the English speaking world. At the last meeting of both councils in Dublin, the director of the institute Fr Patrick Mullins, O.Carm. offered a detailed report of the operation and possibilities of the Institute.

On April 21, 2015 I was invited to the General Chapter of our disalced brothers in Ávila, where I gave a presentation on some challenges of the current religious life and where I had the opportunity to exchange opinions and points of view with the participants. Similarly, Fr Saverio will accompany us on the 24th of September in our chapter.

Throughout this six-year period, we have also shared a series of celebrations on the occasion of the various anniversaries and centenaries that Carmel has celebrated in this period. Thus, in 2014 we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Albert of Jerusalem with a course at CISA (in which several experts participated) and a solemn Eucharist in our Church of Santa Maria in Traspontina, presided by his Beatitude Fouad Twal, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Fr Saverio Cannistrà and myself concelebrated. It was a beautiful celebration, full of symbolism. Also, in



2014, we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the death of Fr Jerónimo Gracián with a solemn Eucharist in Brussels, where he died, and with a course organized by the group “Texts for a Millennium” in Madrid (in the community to which he belonged). In 2015, because of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of St. Teresa of Avila, I participated with Fr Saverio Cannistrà and the Bishop of Avila both at the inauguration and at the closing of the centenary. Very interesting celebrations and initiatives were shared throughout the Order. Finally, on the occasion of the 100 years of the apparitions of Fatima, we also share a small congress on Carmelite and Fatima Mariology and a solemn Eucharist, presided in this case by Monsignor Vitalino Dantas, O.Carm. and concelebrated by both Generals.

With regards to other things, I would like to highlight the joint meeting of our young people during the World Youth Day of Panama, which I mentioned above. As we do not have a presence in this country, our discalced brothers from Central America welcomed us in an extraordinary way and the joint meeting was a celebration in which we shared the faith, the Carmelite charism in its various modalities, the enthusiasm of the young people and the joy of being family.

The joint celebration of the Jubilee of Mercy with the pilgrimage to the Holy Door by the two General Councils together on June 11, 2016 was another very beautiful occasion. In an atmosphere of prayer, the members of both councils crossed together the Holy Door and prayed that Carmel of the 21st century be really a sign of God's love and mercy towards all.

I think that, looking back, it has been something very beautiful and very fraternal to be able to share these special moments for the entire Carmelite family.

Finally, I would also like to share with you the difficulties that have been encountered for the possible restoration of the ruins of the first Carmelite monastery in the Wadih en Siah. This topic has appeared in many of our joint O.Carm.-OCD meetings and I have reported on them about it in the provincial chapters (especially in relation to the municipality of Haifa and the Israeli agencies responsible for cultural, historical and artistic assets).

In fact, in recent years various possibilities have been considered for this restoration, but, on various occasions (due to these administrative problems), these projects could not be carried out, despite the fact that several studies had already been carried out. As I reported in the General Chapter of 2013, at the meeting on Mount Carmel, in November 2010, the Superior General requested our collaboration to try again this restoration, creating an international commission of which Fr. Raúl Maraví O.Carm. was a member. This commission met several times and a final project was presented to the local authorities for their approval.

To collaborate with regards to the expenses of all these studies and projects, both generals sent a letter to the entire Carmelite Family asking for the economic collaboration of all for this beautiful objective: that this emblematic place, origin of



our history can be appreciated and preserved with dignity. I can say with satisfaction that the universal Carmelite Family (in all its groups, branches, Congregations, etc.), generously collaborated with this very important project for Carmel and I believe that - beyond the figures - it is also a testimony of fraternal collaboration looking towards our common origins .

In short, I can share with you that at all times we have had a very fluid and fraternal relationship with the General OCD Council and has been a very beautiful and enriching experience.

9. Final considerations

At the end of this sexennium (and twelve years as prior General of the Order), I would like first of all to express my gratitude to all who work with enthusiasm, with simplicity, with joy and with generosity for the Order, for the Carmelite Family and for evangelization. Although we are experiencing difficult times for religious life in some parts of the world, the Order has a great vitality and I believe that our contribution to the Church is very valuable in general terms. I do not want to err with excessive optimism if I point out that there are many values and riches in our Order and that my final assessment is highly positive. Perhaps a proof of this (humble, but also - at least for me - significant) is that I do not end burnt out or discouraged, but quite the opposite. But I think that for honesty and for a sense of responsibility, I cannot fail to mention some aspects that concern me and on which I think we will have to meditate in the future.

- St. Vincent de Paul said that "*noise makes no good and good makes no noise*". I want to show my deepest gratitude to those brothers and sisters who do good as they do their work faithfully, continuously, serenely, humbly and cheerfully. In this context, I do not want to hide my concern about the excessive level of conflict that exists in some provinces or entities of the Order in which so many energies are lost in Cainine struggles, in unnecessary conflicts, in sterile controversies, energies that they would be precious if they were used in evangelization, in the service of the people of God, in culture, etc ... There are those who say that this conflict in religious life is a symptom of its weakness in our day. I would go even further: without denying that conflicts accompany all human reality and that they can be even positive, I have the impression that some of them start from very mundane criteria, which revolve around money, power, prestige and which, therefore, are far from the evangelical criteria that should govern our lives. It may seem simplistic, but I think the answer and the antidote to avoid all these is none other than the real conversion.

- Another thing that worries me, as I have pointed out in various fora, is the intransigence of some brothers in their interpretation of the charism. The phrase "*Timeo hominem unius libri*" is attributed to Saint Thomas. The same thing



happens to me in the Order when it comes to interpreting our charism: I fear the one who has only one sensitivity (which he usually tries to impose) and who ends up neglecting or denying other legitimate or possible readings of the charism. Our charism is symphonic; it cannot be reduced to a job or a specific mission. Without denying that there may be erroneous readings or activities that go beyond our mission, I believe that the richness of Carmelite spirituality allows (and requires!) various sensibilities and missions, in the great tradition of mendicant flexibility.

We must respect and learn from the various sensitivities, not by diplomacy, or to live together, or to avoid conflicts, but because it shows the richness of our charism that is not identified with any specific job. If we fall into these exclusivisms, we impoverish the charism and, consequently, our service to the Church and to humanity.

- I am also concerned about the situation we have experienced in some chapters: the “block” vote (the same votes for the provincial and for the councillors). It is grave not only because it goes against our mendicant culture (and its corresponding spirituality), but because it converts our voting Chapter into something "partisan" and mundane. Much talk about “power”, "campaigns" , "win", etc ... does not form part of our style or of our deep evangelical spirituality.

- One of today’s worries in many areas of religious life is the lack of respect for a healthy "principle of subsidiarity". Perhaps because of the immediacy of modern means of communication, it is very easy to go directly to the higher authorities, ignoring intermediate authorities. This is a mistake and sometimes leads to very negative consequences. For anything they go to the General Council (or to the corresponding Vatican congregation!), skipping the corresponding instances. We have to respect this principle, not only to take care of the General Council, but because this principle has canonical value because it preserves the possibility of going to a higher court if the corresponding instance acted unfairly or insufficiently. Moreover, this principle safeguards the healthy autonomy of our Provinces and Commissariats, and avoids an exaggerated leadership from Rome. I could give you several very striking examples of what I say, but I think it is enough to remember this basic principle of law.

- Finally, I would like once again to recall the seriousness of the issue of abuse and terrible damage - and, in a few cases, irreparable - that these cases have caused to the Church. Much has been said and written on various levels about this subject in which all the preventions are necessary. Without denying that there may be cases of false accusations; without denying that in some countries the information coverage of this issue has been uneven and even unfair (as if it were an exclusively ecclesial problem); without denying that in many cases the protocols and preventive measures are giving very good results and that in some countries the Church is at the forefront of prevention; without denying all of this ... we must remember that the first criterion,



the first value, the first objective of any action must be in favour of the real or possible victims. Therefore, I invite you to remain vigilant, not to focus only on protocols and canonical penalties (certainly very necessary and convenient) and to take a step further: the radical conversion to put victims at the center our reflections and that leads us to realize that the fight against abuse is not something we do reluctantly and against our will, but is part of our mission, of the struggle for good versus evil.

Higher ecclesial authorities invite us to reject the idea (which is heard frequently) that "this problem does not exist in my country or in my geographical area." Unfortunately, the news tell us that it is not so.

With serenity, with firmness, with a sense of responsibility and, above all, with true charity that is at the base of our faith... I invite you to put the maximum interest so that the issue of abuse will one day be only a sad memory of times gone by.

Before concluding this report I would like to express my gratitude to all who have collaborated in the preparation of this chapter, especially Fr Giampiero Molinari, General Secretary, who has been working hard while living personal and complex family circumstances and Fr Kurt Mizzi who very generously agreed to be co-secretary when the chapter was already close. Thanks also to all the staff of the Curia who has done a great job of coordination, to the translators and various collaborators, such as Fr Augustin Barbut and the staff at Sassone who always makes us feel at home.

Though the list of thanks would be very long, I cannot not mention Fr Christian Körner, Vice General of the Order, whose generosity and dedication has been a true lesson of life for many of us, and the members of the General Council and the Curia House with whom we have shared many moments of work, of projects and of fraternity. To all ... Thank you!

With this chapter Carmel starts a new phase of its centuries long history. Let us flee from sterile defeatisms and face reality with courage and hope. We have really exciting missions in our hands; we open ourselves to new geographical areas and new cultures; we continue to deepen the treasures that our charism, our spirituality and our history contain; we contribute a grain of sand to the construction of a better world so that - from the faith and the Carmelite charism - this may be the "common home" of which Pope Francis speaks in *Laudato Si'*. Is it not an exciting future to commit to with all your heart?

To meet many of you, to know your realities and missions, your apostolates and social works, to enter into contact with so many Carmelite brothers and sisters ... it has been for me a true honor and an immense grace for which I feel very grateful. I hope to continue serving the Order from other fields and ministries, but with generosity and joy. From now on I am available to our new Prior General and his council. For



them I ask for your most generous collaboration and the same affection that you have shown to me in these years.

May Mary, Our Mother and Sister, accompany and guide us in this new phase of our history.

Fernando Millán Romeral, O.Carm.

Prior General