



DISCALCED CARMELITES GENERAL HOUSE

Corso d'Italia, 38 – 00198 ROMA

**“A Lamp for My Feet”
Rereading the Constitutions for Renewal of Life
Discalced Carmelites 2015-2021**

Letter of Father General

Avila, 15 October 2015

Dear Brothers,

Receive my fraternal greetings on these joyful days concluding the V Centenary of the birth of St. Teresa. During the last months we have had numerous opportunities to celebrate with the great family of the Teresian Carmel and the whole Church, the memory of a person whom we consider mother, teacher and foundress. Let us again be grateful to God for this great gift He has given us in the person and writings of Teresa, and for the opportunity to rediscover to whom we dedicated this year.

The Centenary has allowed us to deepen our knowledge of her writings, and through them: her experience, her spirit and her teaching. It was a long and fruitful journey the Order began in 2009, heeding the invitation of the General Chapter held in Fatima. During those years we reread the Teresian texts, as individuals and as communities, with the purpose of discovering its relevance and value for our lives.

It is now time to look within and to put into practice all that we have learned and shared during this period. The General Chapter held last May in Avila, birth place of St. Teresa, offered us a catchphrase laden with strong Teresian implications: “*It is Time to Walk,*” and as a continuation of rereading the works of St. Teresa, it invites us to respond “to the question about who we are as she wanted us to be.” (ITW, 8). It asks us “to evaluate the truth of our life” (ITW, 8), “to continue our path of renewal” (ITW, 14), and “to question the quality of our service to God and to others in fidelity to the Teresian charism” (ITW, 17), and “to review our life in light of the signs of the times” (ITW, 18).

According to this Chapter proposal, the concrete way to achieve this necessary goal, demanding as it seems, is through a rereading of our current Constitutions. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, and in the spirit of the instructions inspired by that Council, they were

formulated not only or primarily as a legislative document but as “a guiding text that gives orientations and criteria for our options of personal and communal life.” (ITW, 10) Undoubtedly, these constitute for us “a text of ongoing formation, in the light of which we should constantly revise our way of life” (ITW, 11). This is our task for the sexennium that commences.

Acceding to the request of the Chapter of Avila, the General Definitory appointed an international commission that will provide texts and necessary documents as guidelines for rereading the Constitutions. This commission met in Rome in mid-September and has prepared the introductory materials to assist our religious and their communities in this process. The first phase (until the end of this year) will be a reading of the document “*It is Time to Walk*” on a personal and communal level. Starting in January 2016, we will begin a systematic rereading of the Constitutions, following the guidelines contained in the booklets the Commission will prepare and send in the coming weeks.

The proposed readings are inspired by *lectio divina*, a well known Christian spiritual tradition employed in the reading of Sacred Scripture and other important texts. This option stresses that we want to approach our fundamental legislation with the desire to discover through the text the Presence of God in our life, to enter into dialogue with Him, and to be fully available to His will. The task involving the Constitutions wishes to stir up within us a desire for authentic renewal of life. We need to discern if we are living the Teresian ideal in an authentic, committed and concrete way in harmony with the real needs of the Church and humanity. The review should lead us to a commitment to renew all that is necessary, in the Teresian spirit of sustained fidelity and continuous renewal, of “always going from good to better” (F 29, 32).

Obviously, through attentive reading and reflection on the Constitutions, we can facilitate an honest encounter between the Teresian ideal, on one hand, and with our actual life and the current situation of the Church and the world on the other. It is possible that we will discover the connection between the search for new expressions of the Charism that respond more effectively to these new times and relevant ways to reach out to the new generation. The Constitutions were written in a particular historical context, and its language and forms of expression are not fixed and unchangeable. The Chapter document tells us “we must encounter anew the motives for what is written in the norm and rediscover its meaning, and if necessary, expressing it in a more adequate form for our time” (ITW, 26). Correspondingly, should the communities consider it appropriate, they are to make its proposals so the best decisions can be made as regards the texts of the Constitutions at the Extraordinary Definitory of 2018; and later at the General Chapter of 2021.

In this regard, it is necessary for every Circumscription to appoint a religious, who may be one of the Councilors, to be the person-in-charge of animating and coordinating the process of rereading the Constitutions in their respective areas. This religious will serve as the Circumscription’s contact person with the General Definitory and the International Commission (please submit his name to: constocd@gmail.com). Moreover, it is desirable that each Circumscription convene a plenary council meeting or a general assembly to present and encourage this project which the General Chapter has entrusted to the whole Order.

Thus we have begun an exciting and demanding process of reflection, dialogue, prayer and commitment that should encourage us to strengthen the theoretical understanding and the actual living of our ideal of life. Let us enter into this process with confidence, without being discouraged by our poverty and weakness. If we do “the little that is in us,” the Lord will not cease to help and enlighten us with His Presence. Let us remember the words which Teresa heard one day when she was very anxious about the future of the Order: “I dispose things with what I know is your will and not in conformity with your sensual nature and weakness. Take courage since you see how I help you. I have desired that you win this crown. In your days, you will see the Order of the Blessed Virgin flourish” (R 14).

Fraternally in Carmel,



P. Saverio Cannistrà

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General Superior