



## VISIT TO THE PROVINCE OF VENEZUELA

June, 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear brothers and sisters of the Rosminian Family:

the Institute of Charity, the Rosminian Sisters of Providence, Ascribed and Consecrated Ascribed, Adopted Sons and Daughters, Sisters of Our Lady of Usambara, brothers and sisters of the Fuente Real Family, Principals, Teachers and Staff of our Schools, Staff of our parishes and Centres, and Friends,

I am writing to you about my recent visit to Venezuela, Colombia and Panama.

When we stand back and look at our history of faith we see that, from Abraham and Sarah until today, 'setting forth' (cf. *Genesis* 12:4) is integral to the living of our faith. The Lord calls us not once in our lives but every day, and we respond.

'Setting forth' occasionally is literal – visits to Provinces or taking up new assignments etc. But always present, is a figurative or spiritual 'setting forth'. We Rosminians 'set forth' daily on our fundamental spiritual quest to live the holiness of love.

Key to that journey is letting go of what holds us down - repetition of set ways, closed thinking and fears, sin etc. Instead, we endeavour to embrace the ever-evolving needs for universal charity through which our charism is lived. Rosmini's contemporary, Saint John Henry Newman, put it this way: to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often. Through our spiritual lens, we can read that as a resounding affirmation of Rosmini's insight that indifference (or availability) is the gateway to selfless charity which serves the greater good of the Church and our neighbour's greater benefit (cf. *Constitutions*, 85).

### Hope amidst difficulties

As many of you know, prior to being elected Superior General, I was Provincial in Venezuela for seven years, and had worked there for many years earlier. This visit

was then an opportunity for me to renew old friendships as well as to spend time with the brethren.

The Institute's presence in Venezuela dates back to 1958. It is a mission closely interwoven with our Sisters. Together we have worked to build up two fine Colleges. Both schools cater for primary and secondary education, and attract families who appreciate affordable Catholic Education.

Venezuela in more recent years has sadly been subject to much upheaval which has benefited few and disadvantaged many. The economy has been severely weakened and family life has been sorely tested through economic poverty and uncertainty. Over seven million Venezuelans have reluctantly 'set forth' to seek elsewhere a fairer standard of living, and the hope which comes from justice. A number of Religious Orders also have left Venezuela or significantly reduced their presence there. Little wonder that the title of our Assembly was 'Resilience in a Time of Difficulty'.

We Rosminians are determined to remain in Venezuela. We feel the pain of our people, so many of whom are under-employed and suffering hardship. But also, I and those who accompanied me, experienced the wonderful affection and the determination of so many who are doing their best for the country they love and wish to continue to call home.

Let's pray that our strengthened presence in Venezuela, and our undivided commitment to the young people and families we serve, will be a source of encouragement and hope for them.

### **Resilience through unity**

In a time of social and economic pressure it is easy to see pragmatic changes as the solution to pressing difficulties. Yes, we must be outwardly attentive to fast changing realities and needs, but firstly we must ensure that we are united in mission and service. The unity of Religious is what we uniquely bring to our apostolates. Our unity gives us the strength to be effective bearers of charity, notwithstanding our paucity in number and our natural human limitations.

Father Founder uses an attractive phrase in the Constitutions which encourages us in our fraternity and mutual care: live as 'companions in charity' (cf. *Constitutions* 551). This is not always easy, but surely it is a witness that people expect and cherish in us especially in times of social fragmentation and tension caused through negative economic circumstances.

## **Our Colleges**

The time spent at our Colleges, Colegio Rosmini in Maracaibo, and Colegio Juan XXIII in Cabimas, was a time of great blessing. My heart was lifted by the friendliness of the students and the dedication of our teachers and other staff members. Those accompanying me were greatly impressed with what they described as the Venezuelan ability to combine great affection with discipline. They also noticed the loving family atmosphere of the Colleges.

The challenges facing our Colleges are considerable: economic pressures, migration of families from the catchment area, the need to balance just salaries for staff and affordable fees for families, maintenance and facility costs etc. These factors all call for dynamic leadership and a well-articulated plan for the future. They also require the involvement and support of parents, students, teachers, and administration and grounds staff, as well as good relations with the local parishes, and diocesan and civic authorities.

In short these circumstances call for a spirit of collaboration, clarity of purpose, and uplifting communications. I am heartened therefore by the growing bonds of collaboration between our two Colleges.

The combined professional development day at which I was able to participate was indeed a highlight of my visit. Commencing with the joyful celebration of Holy Mass, it was a wonderful day of great insight into what a Rosminian Education means. The enthusiasm with which everyone participated can surely be a sign of great hope as we pro-actively seek to strengthen and grow our Venezuelan Colleges in a strategic manner.

We have a new management team structure in place for our Colleges, some of whom are Ascribed, and I am very grateful for the considerable work they are enthusiastically undertaking under the guidance of Fr Jorge, Rector of Colegio Juan XXIII.

## **La Familia Fuente Real**

La Familia Fuente Real is a part of our Rosminian Family that is perhaps less known to many of you. This community is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and an example of a more recent form of Consecrated Life emerging in the Church.

La Familia Fuente Real was founded in Venezuela by Fr Stephen Harney, an Irish Rosminian. It includes many aspects of Rosminian spirituality while maintaining its own distinct charism of 'building the civilization of love' through community living, retreats, formation of young people and adults, and loving hospitality. It has now been recognized as a Religious Congregation of diocesan right, comprising mainly of families, including men and women who take perpetual vows and some men who go on to ordination.

I wish to thank their Servant General, Permanent Deacon Alexander Jaimes, his wife Franceni and their family, and all the community members for the wonderful hospitality they extended to me and those accompanying me during our visit. The vitality of the Fuente Real communities left a vivid impression on us all of the Lord's love and the Holy Spirit's warm embrace.

### **El Alto Escuque**

El Alto Escuque is in the Trujillo state of Venezuela and is where our Novitiate has been and where various initiatives of formation and faith development have been offered to families in the area. Our presence has been much appreciated by these families, and their kindness and care for the brethren is greatly valued.

A decision has been made to evolve the way this Centre is run. La Familia Fuente Real will assume responsibility for the El Alto house and mission. I am very grateful to them for accepting my request to do so. This will ensure a continuity of the spiritual works of the Centre and of vocational guidance for young people. The presence of La Familia Fuente Real will also ensure an on-going spirit of collaboration with the Rosminian Sisters who have a magnificent and greatly frequented Retreat Centre in El Alto, the "Retreat House John Paul II".

Naturally there is sadness and pain, both for our two brethren who have been serving in the area and for the families of El Alto, that we will no longer be resident. 'Letting go' and 'setting forth' are not easy. But this sacrifice will enable our other communities to be strengthened in ways that are fitting for community life and the charism of Rosminian priesthood. Our lived witness to the nature of Religious Life is an essential part of our efforts to foster the vocations we long for, in order to continue to serve the people we are called to love.



### **The Breadth of our Mission: Colleges and other Works.**

The strengthening of our College communities does not mean that our apostolate in Venezuela is limited only to teaching and school leadership. Our exercise of universal charity is diverse. In fact, there are many and varied faith groups we serve from our College communities, especially in Maracaibo: the San Francisco of Assisi church community, the Zapara community of Saint Antony of Padua, the Villa Serena community for the elderly, the Casa d'Italia community, the Carmelite Sisters' Monastery in our Maracaibo College grounds, and chaplaincy and collaboration with the Rosminian Sisters.

All of these aspects of our mission are much appreciated, and they can indeed grow. I think too of the Sisters' initiative of the "Plato Rosminian" in the barrio area close to our Maracaibo College. This is a fine example of temporal charity, with its nutrition and medicines programme for the poor.

A pastoral dimension is of course present in all our works. As Father Founder writes in the Constitutions, "pre-eminent among the works of charity is pastoral care ... embracing universal charity" (n. 4). It is precisely in "priests undertaking pastoral care" that the Institute reaches its "full existence" (n.5). This directive of our Founder gives us broad scope to ensure that our Colleges are strong in spiritual charity. A Rosminian College serves not just the students but their families too, and the staff and their families. Through academic results, a Rosminian College nurtures the faith development of all its members through comprehensive pastoral care including: prayer, sacramental preparation, retreats, service programmes, vocations promotion and guidance, and family visits. A Rosminian College is a home, a school of faith, a school of learning, and a good neighbour. Already our Colleges in Venezuela are vibrant communities. I am confident that through our renewed commitment to pastoral care within them, they will further develop as beacons of faith and mission.

### **Colombia and Panama**

Brief stays in Colombia and Panama were also a part of this visit. Our Sisters have a mission in Tomarrazon in La Guajira area of Colombia. This is an isolated area, so our visit was welcomed not only by the Rosminian presence but also by the local parish, and the kind and helpful local Bishop. While we have no brethren in Colombia, we do have a scholastic from the parish of Tomarrazon. By the grace of God who knows if in the future we might be able to have a community of priests in this country too; the Bishop has already extended to us a warm invitation, to accompany our sisters in the apostolate of La Guajira region.

Similarly in Panama there are no brethren present, but there are a number of people interested in becoming Ascribed. Just recently they have had their first online gathering and introduction to our spirituality. Surely this is a welcome sign that the Holy Spirit often works in ways well beyond our own imaginations. In fact, there too we have been invited by the Archbishop to have a community and lead a parish: we are listening to the call of the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

I wish to thank Fr Jorge Rincon, the Provincial of Venezuela, and all the brethren, Sisters, Ascribed, Teachers and Staff, Collaborators and Friends for the welcome we received during this visit. The Venezuelan spirit is generous and resilient. While the challenges are many, so too are the opportunities to serve and grow.

My founded hope is that the adjustments which have been made in the Province, around personnel and works, will usher in a reinvigorated base with which we can strengthen community life and in so doing bring renewed energy to our mission including the duty and the desire to foster vocations in a systematic way.

May Nuestra Senora di Chiquinquirà accompany us and with her intercession strengthen our Rosminian Family as we “aim to set no limit or boundary to the exercise of charity” (*Constitutions*, 12) .

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marco Tanghetti', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Tanghetti IC

Superior General.



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