



FRATELLI DELLA CARITÀ . BROTHERS OF CHARITY . BROEDERS VAN LIEFDE . FRÈRES DE LA CHARITÉ

*Bringing these people
the **joy of the resurrection**
is still our priority,
also in 2019.*

**The Brothers of Charity wish you
a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year**

Bro. René Stockman
Superiore generale
Fratelli della Carità

Christmas, by Caravaggio, Divines Creatures,
reproduction by handicapped people, Florence



Rome, 25 December 2018

Beloved Confreres,

Dear Associate Members, Staff, and Volunteers in the apostolate,

During these days of Christmas and New Year, I wish you all a merry Christmas and a blessed 2019. This is an excellent time to look back on the year that is ending with gratitude and to look forward to the future ahead of us with hope and faith. Indeed, may gratitude, hope, and faith be the keynotes that sound in our heart.

Around Christmastime, I am always moved by the singing of angels who had a message of good news for the shepherds: "Glory to the Lord God in the highest and peace on earth to those of good will." There is no wish more beautiful or better-sounding, even in our time. At the same time, it is striking how often a message is delivered by angels in Scripture. I know that many will find it hard to believe in the existence of angels,

but this Christmas could perhaps be a moment to think about what angels can be: messengers of God, protectors of people, warriors against evil. With these three qualities, tradition mentioned three archangels for that matter: Gabriel, who brings good news; Raphael, who protects us on our life's path; and Michael, who fights evil.

However, we also often hear that people are called angels these days. Every time, these are people who live, experience, and give shape to good in a special way. And then we say: "You're an angel to me."

I recently met angels in the sisters who sat by my dying mother's bedside, day and night, and who made sure that she was not alone in her final hour. Older sisters, who said to me that this was their apostolate now because they had the time and enjoyed sharing with others what they still had: their time. They spent quality time with my mother: they spoke gently to her, held her hand, offered her some water, prayed with her. And so, thanks to those angels, she could go to heaven in great peace. I am so grateful for these angels, who delivered my mother into the hands of the true angels.

I believe that we meet many of such angels in our Congregation: brothers, staff members, and co-workers who give their very best, self-evidently, and an even greater availability, to be close and remain close to people in need.

I remember a boy in Nioki. He used to walk on his hands and feet, but after a successful operation, he was able to walk upright for the first time ever. "I used to be an animal in the jungle, now I'm a real person. I've come across angels in my life and they brought me a new life."

And the person with mental illness who the brothers found on the street in Yamoussoukro, utterly neglected and chased away by everyone. They washed him, shaved him, tended to his wounds. One year later, he stood at the door, ready to leave the centre a new man. He had encountered angels who had offered him new perspectives in life.

I was recently at 'Les Sauverdias' in Belgium, where the brothers see poor people every day. I saw brothers, sisters, and volunteer workers who were busy serving meals. Some of the guests spoke to me and said how happy they were that they could come here every day: "We experience friendship here." It nostalgically reminded me of the early years of Triest House in Ghent, where Bro. Godfried and Bro. Clariet, and their volunteer staff, all angels, received the poor from the neighbourhood with so much love, out of the Holy Angels community – how meaningful.

An older brother told me that he goes to see the elderly and the sick every day, and administers Holy Communion. Some of them look forward to his visit because he is the only one who drops by. Is he not an angel to these people?

And André, a retired headmaster, who went to India 9 times to help the brothers build a school for the poor. Every time he goes there, he brings good news and after several years of involvement he is able to see the fruits of his labour. "The children coming from the quarries, where they had to work hard, were timid at first and had dirty clothes. Now, they are clean, young people, looking smart in their school uniforms, proud that they can go to school, and looking forward to a new future with hope."

Every one of us will be able to offer more examples of angels they have encountered. And, hopefully, every one of us is called an angel every now and then when they were the bringers of good news, helped people in danger, offered good in word and in deed.

Brothers and full-time staff will have to keep watch that they fulfil their work with the patience of a saint, and always allow charity to be the keynote of their service. For the danger is in letting our professionalism degenerate into a objectivization and a routine. We might be good or even outstanding technical experts but if the heart is missing from our activities, we will not be able to say that this is charity. It becomes a businesslike provision of care, according to set rules, by the book, yet cold and calculated. This is fatal for a lot of organisations, including in the health care sector.

Those who can slow down after their professional careers are invited to be resourceful and see how they can continue to be angels to those who have no one. Do not settle into an armchair in front of your television or behind your newspaper but head out, with the opportunities and limitations that you have, and do what we are called to do: shine God's love through very concrete acts of love for the neighbour. Then, the words of the angels at Christmas will sound every day. "Glory to the Lord God in the highest and peace on earth to those of good will." It does not need to show in grand gestures or activities, but it is time to put all of our energy into a tender closeness, into listening to people, into small acts of neighbourly love for which there was not enough time before or which was overlooked.

Beloved Confreres and everyone connected to us in charity, it is my fervent wish that we can be like angels in 2019 for those many people who await our love. And that we only seek inspiration where it is to be found: in prayer most of all, with our Lord Jesus,

who is the Way and the Truth and the Life for us, and with neighbours who exude something through their simple example and quietly remind us what life is really about.

Gratitude for your commitment and an encouragement to go on, for God's glory and peace will then fill your heart and grow and bear fruit abundantly.

Fraternally yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'René Stockman', written in a cursive style.

Bro. René Stockman
Superior General
Brothers of Charity