

# Familia Comboniana

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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774

May 2019

## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

### Holy Redeemer Guild

May	01 – 15 ET	16 – 31 I	
June	01 – 07 ER	08 – 15 LP	16 – 30 P

### Prayer intentions

**May** – That women may be ever more aware of their specific role and talents and participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church. Lord hear us.

**June** – That the small steps towards opening between the Vatican and the People’s Republic of China may help to increase the understanding and respect of the government towards all Christians living in China. Lord hear us.

### Publications

**Comboni Missionaries**, *Vocation Stories*, Comboni House, Juba, South Sudan. Various Combonis working in South Sudan present, in a few pages, the story of their vocations: real stories by real people coming from different contexts and countries who were fascinated by a single call, that of Jesus saying to them: “Come, follow me”, as Fr. Louis Okot Tony, provincial superior, writes in the introduction.

**Comboni Missionaries**, *A sign for the times. Who they are and what they do*, Comboni Missionary Publications, United Kingdom

and Ireland. This booklet begins with the return of Bishop Daniel Comboni to Khartoum, in 1881, and brings us face to face with men and women who followed his footsteps in Africa, Asia and the Americas: from the mission in the midst of the civil war in South Sudan to ministry among the indigenous peoples in the heart of Peru and to advocacy at the United Nations in New York. Different apostolates but with a single purpose: to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## CURIA

### **Third conference**

The Association Casa-Famiglia Ludovico Pavoni, in the Torpignattara quarter in Rome, was the fruit of the experience of the Pavonian priest Fr. Claudio Santoro, at the oratorio of the church of St. Barnabas situated in that same quarter of the city. Fr. Claudio, urged on by the growing presence of minors in danger of going astray, by the growing influx of migrants and by increasingly pressing requests on the part of the families, decided to initiate this association that has as its aim to assist children and adolescents to go to school, to assist poor families and to help migrant families and children to find their place in the socio-cultural environment.

Fr. Claudio presented his experience during the third conference held at our Generalate on 11 April 2019 and entitled: "The challenge for people of different cultures of living together in a parish environment". Most impressive in Fr. Claudio was his simplicity and also his ability to make radical choices based upon the Gospel message of love. The conference was not a systematic exposition of the theme. On the contrary, Fr. Claudio, speaking off the cuff, communicated in a captivating way that which, for him, is the motivation which makes possible an encounter between people of different cultures: to love and to make God loved. The result is acceptance and respect beyond religious differences. His accounts of life among the children and youth belonging to various religions and cultures who accept and respect one another, in a place where migrants (mostly from Bangladesh) are '80% of the population, were deeply moving.

He is certainly a priest who does not fit into the usual categories. Provocatively, he emphasised the need to change the way parishes are administered: "We must go out of the Church because it is the road that makes the Church" he said; "The time has come to break with self-referential pastoral and parish groups that are closed in themselves". Speaking of the possibility of people of different faiths meeting each other, he stressed the need to "being one in charity". Fr. Claudio remarked upon the necessity that the priest be a mediator who awakens the question of God in young people by means of his enthusiastic witness to the Gospel: it is this enthusiasm that moves young people and even older people as well and is, in fact an instrument of unity and communion.

### **Feast of the benefactors**

On Sunday 5 May, the friends and benefactors of the Combonis of the Curia met at the general House to share and celebrate a festive gathering with the community on the theme of the mission. Among the outstanding moments of the feast was the testimony of Fr. Celestino Prevedello, the new superior of the community, who spoke of his missionary work of almost thirty years in Sudan and the Eucharistic celebration at which he presided.

Fr. Celestino recalled some events in the social, political and ecclesial history of Sudan, describing the life of the people and the work of the Comboni Missionaries, especially in the field of education and interreligious dialogue. At the end of the meeting, Fr. Torquato Paolucci introduced Fr. Michele Tondi, newly appointed to the Curia community with responsibility for missionary animation.

In his homily during the Mass concelebrated with other Comboni priests, Fr. Celestino, commenting on the Sunday readings, emphasised especially the personality of the apostle Peter whom Jesus asked three times, "Do you love me?" and three times told him to "Feed my sheep". These very words, Fr. Celestino said, "Are today spoken by Jesus to each one of us". All of us are called to be missionaries, to proclaim and be witnesses of the Gospel to all creatures, following in the footsteps of Jesus, of the apostle Peter and our Founder St. Daniel Comboni.

The celebration concluded with a fraternal meal shared in the rectory.

## ITALIA

### **Convention for Brothers in Pesaro**

The Brothers of the Italian Province gathered in Pesaro from 29 April to 2 May for their annual meeting. This year, besides the Brothers from the Curia, the Brothers from Portugal and the DSP also attended. They thank the Lord for the gift of this experience of fraternity which renews every year their passion for the charism of St. Daniel Comboni and for the vocation granted to them. In communion with the journey of the entire Institute, this year they dialogued on the theme of interculturality, the title of the Convention being "In mission as Brothers in a multicultural world". One theme which was of special interest to the participants was that concerning the Comboni Work of Human Promotion which the 2015 General Chapter asked to be promoted in each continent and which the European provincials decided to carry out at Camarate, in the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal.

The Brothers wish to express their heartfelt thanks to Father provincial, Fr. Giovanni Munari, and the Brother Assistant General, Bro. Alberto Lamana, for their discreet and fraternal presence and for their contribution to understanding the theme of the meeting; they likewise thank those confreres who contributed to the development of the proposed theme: Fr. Giorgio Padovan, Bro. Alberto Parise, Bro. José Manuel Salvador Duarte and Fr. Horácio Ribeiro Rossas. They also wish to send their cordial greetings, through the good offices of Bro. Alberto Lamana, to all the General Council, assuring them of their constant prayers and support in their ministry at the service of the Institute.

## NAP

### **Visit by Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse**

Father General, Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse G., is visiting the North American Province (NAP) from 5 to 19 May when he will preach the Spiritual Exercises for the confreres who will attend in two groups. The first is that of California which includes Covina, the Sacred Heart and Holy Cross (Los Angeles), from 6 to 11 May.

The second group is that of the communities of Kitchener in Canada, Chicago, Newark and Cincinnati, from 13 to 18 May. Fr. Tesfaye will also lead the discernment reflection of the NAP on the missionary objectives of the Province and on its commitments regarding the personnel situation in view of the election of the new provincial and his council.

## TCHAD

### **Studio Comboni**

The Studio Comboni of the Combonis in N'Djamena is a powerful instrument of missionary animation. A number of initiatives are under way.

Fr. Luigi Moser, having restructured the diocesan radio *Arc en ciel* and the *Mass Media* Centre of the Archdiocese over a period of five years, now works there full time, in collaboration with the diocesan committee and the national POM.

The Studio is the seat of the new website of the Combonis in Chad: [combonitchad.org](http://combonitchad.org)

Among other things, before October 2019, the studio will make available to parishes and other centres a missionary display: "*Evangelisés pour évangéliser*" (Evangelised in order to evangelise): the history, illustrated by geographical maps, photos and documents, of the evangelisation of Africa and of Chad, consisting of 24 panels 100cm x 70cm, on coloured plastic-coated card, with an easily transported metal frame (50 Kg). Four panels are dedicated to Comboni.

Starting last year, comments on the Sunday readings from a missionary point of view are being regularly sent to more than sixty confreres and priests.

During the summer holidays, after a period of formation for the "composers", a competition for the composition of missionary songs in French and the local language will be launched. The winning compositions will be awarded prizes and will be published.

Sessions, following a syllabus, are also being prepared at the Studio on music, liturgy and the media, all with a missionary outlook.

Other achievements are in the pipeline: missionary broadcasts on national radio and TV; not forgetting development and health, work is going ahead on preparing an educational film called “Le compost”, the local production of biological fertilisers which restore to the soil all its productive ability while giving harvests that are four or five times more abundant than previously. A film on the theme of health is also being produced.

Long may Studio Comboni live!

## TOGO-GHANA-BENIN

### **Experience of mission**

It is in order to give thanks that I wish to share my experience of mission in a context of Moslem majority.

“The Lord is my light and my help, whom shall I fear...”.

In March 2015, after five years of priesthood, I was sent to northern Benin, to the parish of St. Tamaro of Toko-Toko, a mission run by the Comboni Missionaries.

The diocese of Djougou – whose former bishop and great pastor Mons. Paul Vieira is well remembered – is in Moslem majority and includes all the factions that make up that denomination. Despite this growing presence, the Catholic Church continues its journey and is present all over the area.

As I began my ministry, this completely Islamised context caused me some concern. As a pilgrim of the Good News, I soon started to work organising meetings for the youth.

The youth are the most vulnerable social group and are exposed to the teachings of their friends and, by following this strategy, my insertion was facilitated both pastorally and as regards relations with our Moslem brothers and sisters.

The diocese is continuing with its process of interreligious dialogue with the encouragement of all the pastors which fosters mutual support and the exchange of ideas.

Situated 40 km from Djougou, our mission is completely surrounded by mosques and there is also an important Koranic school. The construction of numerous Koranic structures is meant to rival and influence the Christian faith, to the best of our knowledge. On the other hand, mutual respect and collaboration

between religions have fostered an atmosphere of peace. Very often, especially towards the end of the year, we visit them as a community so as to consolidate our ties. In fact, my position as diocesan Almoner of the Legion of Mary has brought me into direct contact with the difficulties that generally stand in the way of good relations between religions. Many young people in search of a better life migrate towards neighbouring Nigeria and, on their return, demonstrate disturbing changes including a degree of radicalisation of their ideas. Due to poverty and deprivation, our young people are easily persuaded and are often led to reject their Christian faith.

“Give thanks to the Lord for he has worked wonders...”. We live in hope since our God does the work. (*Fr. Adanle Léopold, mcccj*)

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Fr. Gino Centis (01.02.1927 – 21.03.2019)**

Gino was born in San Vito al Tagliamento (PN) on 1 February 1927. He completed classical school in the diocesan seminary of Pordenone where he had also done the gymnasium course. With the consent of the bishop, on 15 August 1946 he applied to join the Sons of the Sacred Heart, pointing out that he already had a brother, Felice, who was a Comboni Missionary in the London Province.

Gino did both the Novitiate and Scholasticate in Venegono where he took first vows on 9 September 1948 and perpetual vows on 22 September 1950. On 19 May 1951 he was ordained priest.

Immediately afterwards he was sent to Viseu, in Portugal, to prepare for the mission. In 1953, now appointed to Mozambique, he worked as assistant priest at Nacaroa (1953-1954), parish priest at Cabaceira (1954-1955) and curate at Carapira. In 1956 he was assigned to Portugal and went to Faleiro as local superior. He stayed in Portugal until 1971 when, after completing the renewal Course, he was again appointed to Mozambique where he worked for many years at the Anchilo Catechetical Centre and, for the last eight years, at Nampula. He returned for good to Italy in 2015.

At Anchilo Catechetical centre – we read in Fr. Arnaldo Baritusio's book "Mozambico, 50 anni di presenza dei Missionari Comboniani" – "alongside his work in direct formation, a complete series of editorial initiatives developed of which the real leader and animator was Fr. Gino Centis. Unlike in distant years of 1953-54, when he was constrained by ill health, he was now gifted with unlimited energy. He produced lectionaries, catechisms, hymn books and prayer books, missals and Bibles, eighteen titles altogether. By 1982, printings and reprints amounted to 149.000 copies of which 20,000 were complete Bibles, editions of the new testament and a selection of passages from the Old testament in the local language. The Bible was, in fact, presented to the communities as the book to be preferred. If we want to continue counting publications up to 1994, we will see that editions of the Bible reach the figure of 175,000 copies. Besides the lectionaries for Sunday celebrations, also worthy of note is the *Malompelo* (a manual or prayers and various community celebrations) with 227,000 copies".

As also emphasised by Fr. Gianluca Contini, who shared the mission with him, Fr. Gino "was the missionary who knew the local language: how fortunate to have the complete text of the Bible in the Macua tongue as well as the lectionary for Sundays and feast days for years A, B and C, the Malompelo book of daily prayers (people always kept it, and still do, as a sign of religious and human identity). The Word given to the people of God, written and understood in their mother tongue. A wonderful instrument through which the Holy Spirit brings to completion both Proclamation and Evangelisation. The text of the Bible is the first official complete document written in the Macua language".

"Fr. Gino spent his life for the Word, in order to make it accessible to the people of Mozambique, so that, 'not one jot, not one flourish' of the Law would be lost" said Fr. Renzo Piazza during his homily at the funeral Mass. "I had the impression that Fr. Gino had the gift of knowing that, the crucial moment of his life had come when 'the veil would be torn' and he could meet the Lord. He spoke about it to both collaborators and confreres with serenity, in a moment when words seemed to fail him ... He thanked all who looked after him and, a few moments before passing away,

he asked to be taken home so as not to be late for the 6 pm Mass”.

“I would like to say a big ‘thank you’ to Fr. Gino – Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins, Vicar General, wrote – for the way he lived the mission in Mozambique for so many years: years of great suffering during the period when the Comboni Missionaries were expelled from Mozambique and also during the difficult and violent years of war. Fr. Gino was always present in the joys and sorrows, the rough and the smooth times in the life of the people. He persevered in accompanying the journey of the people, especially during the long years of civil war (16 years).

His translation work was his great service to evangelisation. Like a true perfectionist, he happily and efficiently dedicated himself to the study of the, spoken by more than seven million people and to teaching it to new missionaries on their arrival in Mozambique.

I thank God for the gift of his life, for all he did and, above all, for what he was for the people and for me: a partner in mission, an example of dedication, a person with a passion for the Word of God, which he made accessible even to the most simple people. Great was the joy of the people when they heard the Word of God in Macua: ‘Now God speaks our language too’”.

### **Fr. Bernhard Mai (29.04.1933 – 05.04.2019)**

Bernhard was born on 29 April 1933 in the industrial city of Mannheim (with over 300,000 inhabitants today). He was six years old when the Second World War broke out. In the early forties many cities were bombed. It was the turn of the city of Mannheim on 3 July 1944. His parents’ home was one of those destroyed. Bernhard was then eleven. His family then moved to Mengen where the company his father worked for had another branch. They would be safer there.

After primary school, he began training to be a baker but, since he was allergic to flour and, most of all, because he found painting and sculpture more attractive, he enrolled in a school for painting and restoration. At sixteen, he spent his free time as a very active member of the Catholic youth group and organised excursions and summer camps.

In his adopted city of Mengen he met two Comboni Missionaries who were ordained to the priesthood: Fr. Karl Wetzel (1950) and Fr. Franz Xaver Kieferle (1951). They had returned from being prisoners of war a few years previously. Impressed by their example and enthused by an active and lively parish, at the age of eighteen he became a Brother candidate of the Sons of the Sacred Heart in Josefstal. He completed the novitiate and took first vows on 19 March 1954.

In the post war years there was much work to be done: the rebuilding of the Josefinum seminary in Ellwangen, the construction of the seminary of Neumarkt and the restructuring of other houses. However, Bro. Bernhard did not want simply to carry out orders; he also wanted to make plans and, being aware of his abilities and talents, had some concrete and well-founded ideas. Later on, when in the sixties the work of building and restructuring was almost finished, Fr. Josef Pfanner, then a missionary in the Prelature of Tarma (Peru), opened up for the Brother an entirely new prospect. He believed, in fact, that Bro. Bernhard was the right person to restore the altars of the cathedral of Tarma. Bro. Bernhard therefore left for Peru in 1966. After he had restored the altars, a work which turned out very well to the satisfaction of all concerned, other confreres too entrusted him with the task of restoring their colonial churches, many of which were very precious: Ulcumayo, Cerro de Pasco, Huánuco and others. With his artistic talents, he felt at ease in that field. However, this Brother was not only artistically gifted. He also knew how to approach people, especially the youth. This was why, in 1969, after three years of intense work in Peru, he was recalled to the DSP and assigned to the missionary seminary in Neumarkt, in Baviera. There he could dedicate himself to the formation of the youth and exercise his qualities of leadership and craftsmanship. Besides his activities in his free time and theatrical presentations, he was also busy with manual work, teaching the students various techniques for inlaying and working with copper and clocks etc.

In the seventies and eighties, the minor seminaries were in crisis and, one after another, were closed, including that of Neumarkt where, in the meantime, Bro. Bernhard had become director.

His deepest desire had always been to dedicate himself to pastoral work as a priest. In the past, it had not been possible to real-

ise this desire because of the circumstances of the time. Now, however, it resurfaced. There was no doubt about his ability but his superiors opposed his request. There followed five years of discernment. He worked for a year in a hospice for AIDS patients. He then contacted the "Lumen Christi" evangelisation centre in Maihingen, which was then starting a social project in Kaliningrad (the ancient German city of Königsberg), where he had the possibility of pastoral work among people who were both economically and spiritually very poor, and to contribute with his craftsmanship to the completion of the project.

While still in the seminary in Neumarkt, unknown to his superiors, Bernhard had begun to follow correspondence courses in theology, and succeeded in gaining all the necessary qualifications for ordination to the priesthood. Archbishop Kondrusievich of Moscow, to whose diocese Kaliningrad belonged, agreed to ordain him priest. On 20 April 1997 he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Kondrusievich in Kaliningrad in a prefabricated wooden church which Bernhard himself had built. The DSP province had given its consent in condition that the confrere would then work in the sector of the Holy redeemer Guild. This meant he had to leave Kaliningrad. Fr. Bernhard swallowed the bitter pill and, from that moment on, was fully committed to missionary animation, opening up new and lasting pathways.

In accompanying the Holy Redeemer collaborators, he came into contact with many people who sought advice from him in their difficulties. Fr. Bernhard wrote many letters, often very long, giving countless people comfort and advice. He acted as a spiritual guide for many pilgrimages, especially to Medjugorje.

In all circumstances he showed himself to be completely authentic. Fr. Bernhard never doubted his religious, missionary and priestly vocation. He never showed any bitterness and he never lost, even in his illness and times of physical weakness, his lifelong witty but inoffensive sense of humour that marked him out from others. He died on 5 April 2019 at Ellwangen. (*Fr. Reinhold Baumann*)

## **LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD**

**THE FATHER:** Danilo, of Bro. Damiano Mascalzoni (I).

**THE MOTHERS:** Lettehawariat, of Fr. Tesfamariam Ghebrecristos Woldeghebriel (I), Agnese, of Fr. Antonio Campanini (P).

**THE BROTHERS:** Flavio, of Fr. Norberto Stonfer (EGSD), Leone, of Fr. Pietro Bracelli (I), Jill, of Fr. Romulo Panis (PCA).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTER:** Sr. Marialba Cianca.

**THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY:** Nunziatina Lepore.

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**MISSIONARI COMBONIANI VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 - ROMA**

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