

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

815

February 2023



WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The Church has been celebrating the World Day of Consecrated Life on 2 February 2023, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, for 27 years. The Day will be an occasion to thank the Lord for the gift of consecrated life and to pray for the Holy Father Pope Francis who, around that time, will be visiting the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan where many consecrated men and women carry out their mission in contexts of poverty and social marginalisation.

Holy Redeemer Guild

February	01 – 15 C	16 – 28 EGSD	
March	01 – 07 CO	08 – 15 E	16 – 31 DSP

Prayer Intentions

February – That the celebration of the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation (on 6th February) may help all of us, women and men missionaries, to increase our attention and care for the dignity of women, especially those most vulnerable, and that, through the intercession of Saint Bakhita, we may know how to find new ways of “making common cause” with all victims of oppression and inequality. *Let us pray.*

March – That, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, the guardian of the Holy Family of Nazareth, our Institutes may always have what they need to live and continue with dignity the mission they share, and that they may be helped to administer well all that has been entrusted to them. *Let us pray.*
February

Comboni liturgical calendar

FEBRUARY

8 Santa Giuseppina Bakhita, Virgin Memoria

Meaningful anniversaries

FEBRUARY

1	B. Benedetto Daswa	Africa, South Africa
2	Presentation of Jesus in the temple	Day of Consecrated Life
4	St John de Britto, martyr	Portugal
6	The Japanese Martyrs	Asia
23	Kidane Mehret, Co-redemptrix	Eritrea

Meaningful anniversaries

MARCH

15	Birth of St Daniel Comboni	
17	St Patrick, bishop	LP (London Province)
19	St Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary	Central African Republic
24	St Oscar Arnulfo Romero	El Salvador, Latin America Day of prayer and fasting in memory of the missionary martyrs
27	Bl. Joseph Ambrosoli	(day of death)

Publications

On the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute of the Missionary Sisters Pie Madri della Nigrizia (now the Comboni Missionary Sisters), *Combonifem Magazine* [which from 1st January 2008 to 31 December 2022 was the digital channel of the magazine of the same name; from January 2023 the site has become the communication channel of the Comboni Missionary Sisters of the Italian Circumscription] has decided to publish the book, *Fortunata Bakhita Quascè – A free woman against slavery*, by Maria Tatsos, to pay homage to her and to all women who, as laywomen and religious, have embraced the message of Daniele Comboni and continue to spread it.

The book, which tells the story of the first Comboni missionary nun of African origin (originally from the Nuba Mountains – South Sudan) was presented to the public in Rome on 25 January, in the Sala Marconi, Palazzo Pio (Piazza Pia, 3), in collaboration with the monthly *Donne Chiesa Mondo* of *L'Osservatore Romano* (which in February 2023 dedicates the entire issue to the women's mission). The text is a historical novel that tries to reconstruct the life of sister Fortunata (c. 1845-1899), of which no writings have survived. The narration is based on real events, mentioned and told by some of her sisters, in letters sent to families or their superiors, and in the testimonies on the Mahdia period written by them at the invitation of the institute, after Fortunata's death.

Kidnapped as a child by slave traffickers and freed by an Italian priest, in 1953 Fortunata was taken to Verona to the Mazza Institute where she studied and met Daniel Comboni. In 1873, she chose to join Comboni's project of "Save Africa with Africa" and returned to her continent of origin, with an expedition led by Comboni himself, of 30 people, including 14 African governesses.

Fortunata was a teacher and knew Arabic and Italian perfectly. Throughout her missionary life, first as a laywoman and then as a religious, she devoted herself to the education of young girls redeemed from slavery. On August 7, 1879, in El-Obeid, she asked to enter the Institute of the Pie Madri della Nigrizia. She made her first vows in 1882 (one year after Comboni's death).

From 1883 to 1885 she lived as a captive of the Mahdists together with six nuns, three priests and four lay brothers of Daniele Comboni. Her tormentors were particularly furious against her, unable to understand why an African like them could embrace a religion perceived as foreign. But Fortunata resisted all torture, demonstrating her human and spiritual strength. After having managed to escape together with Sister Maria Caprini, in 1888 she was a member of the first community of nuns of the Leo XIII anti-slavery colony at Gesira (Egypt), founded by Mons. Francesco Sogaro, apostolic pro-vicar of the vicariate of Central Africa, to welcome refugees from Sudan, rescued from slavery.

Sr. Fortunata died in Cairo on October 12, 1899, just 50 years old.

MISSION SECRETARIAT

Meeting of JPIC coordinators of the European provinces

The online meeting of JPIC European coordinators took place on January 18th. The participants shared their experiences from Italy, Spain and Portugal, with the participation of Fr. P. Grabmann Hubert Josef, Provincial Superior of the German-Speaking Comboni Province (DSP)

and the continental coordinator of the mission sector, Bro. Antonio Soffientini, the continental reference Brother and of Bro. Parise Alberto, JPIC coordinator at the Institute level.

It was an opportunity to reflect together on the Chapter mandate regarding JPIC and Integral Ecology. Ideas emerged from the dialogue for planning and for contributions towards the next six-year plans. This is the beginning of a participatory process that will take place throughout 2023.

VIVAT International among observers at COP27

Bro. Alberto Parise, JPIC coordinator, was part of the group of three accredited observers of VIVAT International who attended the 27th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (known as COP27), which was held in Sharm-el-Sheikh (Egypt) from 6 to 20 November last. As a point of contact with VIVAT – our Institute is one of the 11 missionary congregations that are members of it – Bro. Parise is involved in various activities of this non-governmental organisation dedicated to advocacy for human rights and sustainable development.

This edition of the COP was very interesting as, for the first time, the Holy See participated as part of the Paris Climate Agreement, which it adhered to on 4 October last. A choice that testifies to its commitment to contribute to the solution of the climate crisis, by participating in the negotiations. Furthermore, the SECAM Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar also decided to be present, represented by the archbishop of Kinshasa, Card. Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, OFM Cap., Director of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Episcopal Conference of the DR Congo (Cenco) and animator of the JPIC sector of the entire continent, and by Msgr. Claudio Lurati, mccj, Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria in Egypt. Their presence brought together in dialogue the many Catholic actors present in Sharm-el-Sheik.

The VIVAT delegation also participated in the journey of the interreligious group which has been pursuing a commitment to the climate and sustainability for years. The gravity of the triple environmental crisis – climate, biodiversity, pollution – has brought together leaders and religious communities from all over the world, and has facilitated a very fruitful dialogue and common commitment.

The faiths contribute to the creation of a more peaceful and just world that is also more respectful of ecology, with a vision of humanity and creation as an interdependent and harmonious whole, with vital relationships. Furthermore, they share the ideals, hearts and lives of the people, appealing to the conscience of the negotiators, to promote the protection of the most vulnerable. The interfaith movement also offers a prayer and

meditation network to spiritually support all those who are committed to caring for the world and fighting climate change. What unites people of different faiths is a shared and profound sense of moral duty to care for suffering people and ecosystems. 84% of the world's population professes a faith, so dialogue between faiths is very important. In fact, it offers the opportunity to speak with one voice to affirm the values and principles that guide climate action. Overall, COP27 showed the current crisis of multilateralism. Despite the efforts and commitment in the negotiations, we have not come anywhere close to the radical changes that are needed, as demonstrated by the scientific reports presented in recent months. The COP is based on the principle of consensus, which is essential because a sustainable solution requires unity of purpose, participation and responsible commitment from all. However, progress is still too little and slow to adequately respond to the climate crisis. In the face of epochal crises, as that of COVID19 has shown, radical interventions are needed: we need to think and act in a completely new way.

There is therefore a need for strong external pressure on the negotiating system. Civil society, indigenous peoples, youth and sectarian groups within the COP are promoting pressure campaigns to overcome the impasse, such as – among others – those for a Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Fossil Fuels and for the introduction of the Crime of Ecocide in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We need binding and sanctioning tools to pick up the pace and make a quantum leap in climate action.

ONGOING FORMATION CENTRE

Renewal Course 2023

On January 9, 2023, the Renewal Course began in Rome, as a sign of the care that our institute takes for its members.

We are 11 participants, some already elderly, others a little younger. We come from 9 different countries, and four continents. Here are our names, our country of origin and the countries where we work:

Name	Prov. Of origin	Juridical membership
Fr. Ngumba-Lelo Joseph	R. D. Congo	Kenya
Fr. José Manuel Guerra Brites	Portugal	Portugal
Fr. Mario Andrighetto	Italy	Brasil
Fr. Rodriguez Martin Juan Manuel	Spain	Brasil
Fr. Denima Darama Emmanuel	R. D. Congo	South Sudan
Fr. Pierino Landonio	Italy	Egypt/Sudan

Bro. Afanvi Jean Kossi	Togo	Togo
Bro. Rodríguez Fayad Jorge Arturo	Mexico	South Sudan
Fr. Tesfaghiorghis Hailè Berhane	Eritrea	Eritrea
Fr. Rojas Zevallos Ibercio	Perù	Perù
Fr. Leandro Araya Leonardo	Costarica	Mozambique

We were well received by the two communities present in the Generalate, and we were ‘masterfully’ accompanied by Father Fermo Bernasconi and Father Alberto Silva who are in charge of the Renewal Course.

After three weeks, we find the topics covered and offered for personal reflection and prayer very interesting. We mention those treated up to now: the stages of life; the experience of God in the various stages of one’s life; the sapiential rereading of life; the physical dimensions of various ages; the experience of the General Chapter. If, as they say in Italy, “Good Morning really does begin in the morning”, we have no doubts that the course will be an enriching experience for each of us.

The road is still long, but guided by an “*inner voice*”, we are determined to move forward, certain to become “wiser” than yesterday, determined to do the right thing and transform everyday experience into wisdom.

Among the comments made in the first few days, one of the most frequent was the observation of the surprisingly small number of participants, followed by a joke: «We should believe more in the goodness of these renewal courses». Hence, our warm invitation to take advantage of it.

We ask for your remembrance in prayer.

The Renewal Course participants.

CHAD

Second Comboni Social Forum at “Abraham’s Tent” in N’Djamena

The second edition of the Comboni Social Forum was held from 26 to 30 December 2022 at the “Abraham’s Tent” Dialogue Center in N’Djamena, entitled: “Unity is strength – Advice and solutions for cohabitation, peace and the protection of our common home, planet earth”. This second Forum saw the participation of the delegations of Abéché, Dono-Manga and Moïssala, and of some parishes of N’Djaména. The awareness raised throughout the year meant that the organisation of the event was excellent and well received and that the daily program was carried out without too many hitches.

The themes addressed in the three-day event were inspired by three themes that are particularly important in the socio-religious situation of Chad: a) interreligious dialogue (dealt with in the second and third

conferences); b) the importance of an integral ecology according to the indications of *Laudato Si'*; c) the proposal of non-violence as a need to live human fraternity, even in a context of conflict such as that of Chad. The lecturers excellently fulfilled the task of illustrating the issues entrusted to them, taken up and then shared in the group work following each report.

There was no shortage of setbacks and difficulties, due to the non-arrival of two of the invited speakers. However, Father Patrice M, – pastor of the parish “San Carlo Borromeo”, on the outskirts of the city – brilliantly replaced the former, with an attractive reflection on the theme of “peaceful cohabitation” in Chad, which aroused a lively and exciting debate among the participants. The Comboni Father Kasereka Amini Wasingya, on the other hand, did not make us regret the second absentee, Dr. Abakar Walat, presenting a lively development of the planned theme – “The Islamic nation” – in a clear and attractive way. The intervention of the latter speaker on issues related to the social doctrine of the Church was very engaging, clearly highlighting the importance of education in non-violence practised in the context of living together. The various topics presented and discussed literally “warmed up” the audience, arousing extremely interesting debates, both in the classroom and in the working groups.

What happily surprised the organisers was the fact that the audience was made up mostly of young Chadians (Muslims and Christians) who, for three days, lived, reflected, worked and prayed together, offering a surprising example of a “peaceful cohabitation” lived in the most real and concrete way possible.

This was the most beautiful fruit of the initiative, and it is hoped that it will last. Although the socio-political and economic situation of the country is extremely tense, arduous, painful and even cruel, in their final resolutions the Forum participants highlighted the importance of “coming together” from the different parts of Chad for a participatory reflection on the future of the country. They did not fail to underline the need to continue carrying out initiatives of this kind: “Only in this way will we be able to foster the spirit that we positively experienced during the Forum, and present it as a concrete proposal to all young Chadians, in particular to those who, for one reason or another, were unable to participate”.

The Forum acquires a strong value as a ‘place’ and ‘moment’ for reflection and participation. Obviously, this challenges us Comboni Missionaries and spurs us on, in the context of educational proposals for interreligious dialogue, to launch similar initiatives in all the human communities in which we live, also broadening our commitment towards non-

Christians, so that “peaceful cohabitation” in Chad is assumed, lived and proposed for the well-being of all.

Finally, a word of thanks must be addressed to the Comboni confreres of the communities participating in the Forum, to the speakers who urged the young people to become protagonists of cohabitation. Despite the difficulties, we managed to create the Forum and crown it with success. Now it's up to all of us to make the ideas that emerged from this meeting bear fruit. No one should refuse their input. With hope, joy and patience, we make an appointment for the third Comboni Forum, which will be celebrated in Abéché. *Enrico Gonzales, mcccj*

CONGO

Postulant brother and wounded by a bullet

On 22 January 2023, at 7.00 am, the Mai Mai rebels attacked the vehicle of the postulant Comboni brothers of the Postulancy of Butembo, a city in North Kivu, in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, located west of the Virunga National Park. At the wheel of the pick-up was the formator of the postulancy, Brother Jacques Eluma Nsele Jacques, a Congolese from the diocese of Kenge. With him were four postulants. They were returning from the fields. Suddenly, the five found themselves facing a group of Mai-Mai rebels who fired wildly at the vehicle. Bullets punctured the four wheels; one, however, hit the leg of the postulant Héritier Mambaya, 22 years old, from Bumba. Héritier is in his third year of postulancy training.

Father Léonard Ndjadi Ndjate, the provincial superior, promptly dispatched a short message giving the distressing news, specifying that “at the moment, the postulant is hospitalised in Malanda hospital in Butembo where the doctors are trying to remove the bullet from his leg. We are awaiting news on the state of his health. We entrust the success of the surgical operation to the intercession of St. Daniel Comboni.”

At the end of the message, his deepest indignation: «We denounce with the utmost firmness this barbaric and criminal attack against innocent people. We deplore the inability of the police to guarantee the safety of the population of the East. We ask you to pray for peace in this region and in all of Africa. May God grant our young man a speedy recovery.”

Thankfully – or providentially – the bullet didn't hit any bones. The operation was successful, and Héritier is recovering well.

Terrorist acts and the silence of the international community

In a report dated January 20, sent to the Catholic charitable organisation “Aid to the Church in Need”, Father Marcelo Oliveira,

provincial treasurer of the Comboni Province of Congo, denounces the silence of the international community in the face of terrorist attacks in the eastern part of the country.

The brutal terrorist attack on Sunday 15 January against a Protestant church in Kasindi, in the province of North Kivu, very close to the border with Uganda, continues to arouse many protests, because it was a premeditated and intentional act against a Christian community.

But similar attacks are frequent in this eastern part of the country, says Father Marcelo. «The *modus operandi* of the armed rebels is always the same: to attack the villages and sow terror among the population, forcing them to flee their villages, take refuge in the forest and remain hidden there waiting for the rebels to leave the villages. The aim is to take possession of a part of the territory where there are immense riches - such as gold, diamonds, cobalt and coltan - which are hidden in the subsoil of this huge African country». The attack on the Protestant church on Sunday 15 January is part of this strategy of terror. On that occasion, the perpetrators of the attack, in which a homemade bomb was used, were the so-called Allied Democratic Forces [ADF], which targeted a Protestant church on a day when the church was particularly crowded, because “baptisms were being celebrated and the bomb was placed in the middle of the assembly, causing at least 15 deaths and dozens of injuries”.

Terror has now spread to this part of the country. “Today it’s the turn of this village, tomorrow of another, and the day after tomorrow of another ... What makes us angry is that all these massacres, with numerous human victims, are taking place while the international community remains silent”.

Father Marcelo assures us that the ADF are a group affiliated to Daesh, the jihadists of the Islamic State, who promptly claimed responsibility for the attack on the Protestant church. It is a Ugandan group particularly active in the eastern part of the DR Congo, accused of having killed hundreds of civilians. It is estimated that there are more than 120 armed groups and militias in the east of the African country. According to UN data, some 6 million people are internally displaced and hundreds of thousands face extreme food insecurity as a result of the attacks and instability caused by these armed groups.

ETHIOPIA

One year after the decision taken by the Provincial Council (25 December 2021) to suspend the community of Gublak and to incorporate its members into that of Gilgel Beles, starting from 1 January 2022, on 19

January the presence of the Mccj Community in Gublak has been re-established, since the situation, in terms of security, in the Metekel area of Benishangul has improved somewhat.

The parish priest of Gublak, Father Isaiah Nyakundi, and his assistant, Father Christ Roi, have been patient and audacious in maintaining contact with the faithful of Gublak, wherever they are, and in periodically visiting the mission buildings, at first empty, then full of occupiers or refugees, and finally damaged or devastated. In recent months, the fathers had been able to spend a few nights there to prepare the faithful for the announced visit of the Apostolic Nuncio to Ethiopia, Archbishop Antoine Camilleri.

The date chosen for the reopening of the community seemed to everyone to be very significant: in Ethiopia, January 19 is the day of Timket (a word deriving from the Ge'ez language, which means "to reveal"), the feast of the Epiphany, one of the holiest celebrations on the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian calendar, commemorating the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The intention was to underline the will of Jesus Christ to *manifest* himself in the region and still lead many people to true faith and baptism.

At present, the Gublak community is composed of Fathers Abba Isaiah Nyakundi Sangwera, as superior and parish priest, and Christ Roi Tomety, as deputy superior.

KENYA

Two new Kenyan Comboni lay missionaries

On 18 December 2022, two of our candidates, Maria and Belinda, after completing their formation period, officially became Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM). The celebration took place in the church of San Daniele Comboni in Huruma, in the parish of Kariobangi.

At Christmas, some of us joined the international community of Kitelakapel (Linda and Pius) to celebrate with them. They shared beautiful moments and even enjoyed a film together. We were also invited to collaborate in the organisation of the youth retreat with the Comboni missionaries in Chelopoy, in the parish of Amakuriat. The retreat was held from 26 to 29 December. It was a great achievement for us, as we are now extending our collaboration with MCCJs beyond our parish as well. At the beginning of January 2023, we celebrated our annual meeting, where we planned and budgeted our activities for this year. We have confirmed the managers of the previous year in their roles since their

mandate is for 2 years. We also decided to add more roles and therefore appointed new managers, so they can help the existing ones keep things running smoothly. For this purpose, we have added coordinators for communications and projects.

We have also included in our plan some 'input' from the African Assembly in Benin, in which two of our representatives participated, from 3 to 11 December 2022, at the Comboni novitiate house of Sèdégbé, in Cotonou. This has led us to review some points of our "constitution" (or statute). We have also added a new aspect to our training by deciding to add to our monthly meetings moments of service offered to other organisations. For example, on the last day of our meeting, we spent some time at the Sisters of Charity centre, helping them look after a group of disabled children. We thank the Lord for all these fruitful events, for the work done so far, for the small and large goals achieved, for the enthusiasm and commitment he has instilled in us, and we trust that he will accompany us again in the new year. *LCM Kenya*

ITALY

Centenary of the birth of Fr. Giovanni Vantini

On the afternoon of 1 January 2023, the Municipality of Villafranca (Verona) offered the citizens a musical concert, masterfully performed by the Verona Philharmonic Orchestra in the packed Cathedral of Villafranca. At the end of the show, the mayor illustrated some municipal initiatives to be implemented in the new year. Among these was also the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Fr. Vantini Giovanni, a Comboni missionary in Sudan for almost 60 years. Fr. Carmine Calvisi, present at the ceremony, offered those present a brief profile of their illustrious fellow citizen.

Fr. Vantini was born on 1st January 1923 in Villafranca (Verona). He entered the apostolic school of Brescia in 1939, coming from the episcopal seminary of Verona. After his first vows (1941), he continued his studies in Verona where, on May 31, 1947, he was ordained a priest. He was immediately assigned to the district of Khartoum, in North Sudan, but he went first to Lebanon to study Arabic, which he learned very well. On July 9, 1949, he arrived in Khartoum and was assigned to the cathedral parish, as a ministry assistant. He also became a teacher at the Technical School.

In the province of Khartoum, Fr. John spent 58 years studying, reading books, instructing pupils and students, teaching catechumens and university students, and digging in the sand of the desert, looking for vestiges of ancient Christian kingdoms. But he wanted to clarify: «I'm not

an archaeologist. I've always been just a missionary." However, he had a great passion - which he always cultivated - for the study of ancient Christian Nubia, so much so that he became a world authority on the subject, thanks to his numerous publications on the subject.

His latest effort was *The Mission of the Heart – The Comboni Missionaries in Sudan in the twentieth century*, (Emi, Bologna, 2005). In 992 pages, Fr. Giovanni retraces the entire Comboni story in Sudan, the fruit of his direct knowledge of the ecclesial and civil situation.

In 2007, Fr. Vantini had to return to Italy due to illness and went to the Center for the Sick in Verona, where he spent his last years, always engaged in historical research. He died in Verona on May 3, 2010. Upon hearing the news of his death, Mons. Camillo Ballin, who had lived with him for some years in Omdurman, commented: «With Father Giovanni there disappears an inexhaustible well of knowledge of Sudan, of the Church and of the country ».

MEXICO

Two important and meaningful anniversaries

In 2023, the Comboni province of Mexico will celebrate two important anniversaries. "We hope that 2023, the year of the 75th anniversary of the presence of the Comboni Missionaries in Mexico, will become a moment of celebration and an occasion to renew our missionary commitment in this Mexican Church which needs the missionary witness that we are called to give". This was the wish addressed to the province by Father Enrique Sánchez González, in his most recent Christmas message, as provincial superior, before handing over the leadership of the province to Fr. Güitrón Torres Rafael.

Next 15th March, the birthday of St. Daniel Comboni, the year of celebrations will open in the Comboni communities of the province with various activities:

- ▶ a re-reading of the history of the province based on the writings left by Father Demenico Zugliani (+ 2010) and Mario Menghini (+ 2013);
- ▶ the celebrations of the 25th and 50th anniversary of consecrated and priestly life of some members of the province;
- ▶ a presentation-reflection on the themes of Comboni spirituality and the missionary promotion of the Comboni Missionaries in Baja California Sur;
- ▶ a report on the first Comboni Missionaries in Baja California Sur;

► a supplement on the themes of Comboni spirituality and the promotion of the online *Missionary Holy Hour*.

Father Enrique's Christmas message continued: «We will also celebrate the **70th anniversary of the *Esquila Misional* magazine**, which has been an extraordinary tool for our task of missionary animation and vocation promotion. Surely the necessary time will be carved out to stop and remember what a blessing the magazine has been for our province». Without a doubt, each of its directors has contributed to promoting and improving the presentation of *Esquila Misional*'s mission and content. But Father Antonio Piacentini (+ 2002) and Father Enrico Farè (+ 1989) should also be remembered, who, although never officially directors of the magazine, were its soul and indefatigable promoters in the first years of publication and diffusion.

PERÙ

The JPIC Commission of Peru calls for peace

Tensions remain high in Peru, where anti-government protests and clashes between demonstrators and the police continue in various parts of the central and southern regions. After an apparent Christmas calm, protests resumed unabated in early 2023. The tangled institutional crisis has already led to the arrest of former president Pedro Castillo and investigations against the current president, Dina Boluarte, for the massacres of the past weeks. The dead are counted in their dozens, while the capital Lima is invaded by protesters.

On January 24, the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the Comboni Family in Peru (Comboni missionaries, Comboni Missionary Sisters, and Comboni Lay Missionaries) published the following statement, calling for an end to the violence.

We want Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Mt 5:9)

1. The Comboni family present in Peru joins the appeal for “peace with social justice” of other instances and institutions of our civil society and of the Church, echoing the words of Pope Francis and our pastors: “Violence extinguishes hope of a just solution to problems, which drives us to take the path of dialogue”. **No more violence, wherever it comes from!**

2. Faced with the serious social crisis that our country is going through with increasingly worrying levels of violence, we ask our authorities to convene the representatives of all possible sectors to a

fraternal dialogue in order to listen to each other and seek solutions to the crisis in the immediate, medium and long term. **We are not listening!** Many of us use terms that divide, stigmatise, offend and discriminate. We look for terms and strategies that unite us; let us be bridges of union and reconciliation. **May each of us become an instrument of peace!**

3. The pandemic has crudely shown, as in an x-ray, the weaknesses from which our country suffers: poverty and inequality, insecurity and inequality accumulated for decades in our health and education system; regions and villages, forgotten by the state, which lack basic services, such as water, sewage, health centres, etc. **How many of these requests are met?**

4. We are a country rich not only in our minerals but also in the diversity and cultural richness of our people. Let's stop belittling ourselves for the colour of our skin or where we come from. **We are all Peruvians**, with the same rights and the same duty to make our country progress. Our differences must become a channel of grace and blessing for our people.

5. We ask the political class and our authorities to interpret the generalised discontent of our country and to use all legal and democratic instruments to find a solution as soon as possible to this crisis which is claiming victims and paralyzing the nation. For decades now we have observed how our politics has deteriorated more and more, reaching levels that are difficult to understand. There is repressed anger that begins to express itself in ever greater forms of violence. However, we all have the right to demonstrate in a peaceful, just and democratic way, but never in a violent and destructive way! In no way can the current Congress be overly concerned with passing laws that further its own interests, while the people it represents suffer the loss of life. It is incomprehensible that, in 6 years, we have already had 6 presidents and that, of the last 10 presidents of Peru, 7 are in trouble with the judiciary for crimes of corruption. How is it possible that, of the 26 regional governments, most are under investigation for corruption, as are many offices of provincial and district mayors? **Corruption means fewer schools, fewer hospitals, fewer roads and fewer opportunities for everyone!**

6. We ask the **members of the Comboni Family** (in its various sectors: mission, formation, animation) and all those who are close to us and are committed to our work, to continue supporting life because it is the greatest gift that God has given us and to continue working for peace and for the good of our families, to be the cradle and first school of the values that make a dignified life possible. Let us continue to work so that

these difficult times we are going through make us more human and more fraternal. May Our Lady of Peace intercede for us!

UGANDA

Ordination of Msgr. Dominic Eibu, the new bishop of the diocese of Kotido, Uganda

January 14, 2023, was a great day for the Catholic Diocese of Kotido. A large crowd flocked to the episcopal ordination ceremony of Msgr. Dominic Eibu, mccc, and his installation as the third bishop of the diocese, after Msgr. Denis Kiwanuka Lote (1991-2007) and Msgr. Giuseppe Filippi (2009-2022).

Presiding over the lively celebration, as the main consecrator, was Msgr. Emmanuel Obbo, Metropolitan Archbishop of Tororo who encouraged his brother bishop to live close to the “flock” entrusted to him. Quoting Pope Francis, he urged him to be “a shepherd with the smell of sheep about him”.

Referring to the first reading, taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Msgr. Obbo underlined the surprising link between the episcopal motto chosen by Msgr. Eibu – “Comfort my people” – and the description that Isaiah 61: 1-3 makes of the mission of the servant of Yahweh: «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the humble; he has sent me to bind up those who are broken-hearted [...] to console all who are afflicted”. By proclaiming and living the Gospel, the new bishop was invited to bring consolation and good news to his people.

All four ecclesiastical provinces of Uganda were represented by their bishops. The Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria in Egypt, Mgr. Claudio Lurati, mccc, and the Bishop of Wau, mgr. Matthew Remigio, mccc, were among the bishops who laid their hands on Bishop Dominic's head. The Comboni Family was represented by Fr. Elias Sindjalim, Provincial Superior of Uganda, and by many Comboni priests, sisters and brothers. The diocesan priests of Kotido have sworn allegiance and obedience to their new pastor.

The celebration was truly the beginning of the “consolation” that the new bishop will bring to Kotido. Appreciation was also expressed by the representative of the Government of Uganda, H.E. Jessica Alupo, Vice President of Uganda, and many other political leaders present at the ceremony.

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father John James Fraser (7.1.1934 – 20.12.2022)

Father John James Fraser was born in Dennistoun, Glasgow, on 7th January 1934, one of six children (two girls and four boys) of Jean (née Hendry) and Matthew Fraser. In his family, there were various religious creeds: his grandparents were partly Jewish and partly Christian; his mother was an Irish Catholic, his father a Scottish Presbyterian; in the paternal family there were prominent members of the local Masonic lodge. Fr. John himself used to repeat that, growing up, he had learned to respect the beliefs, points of view and opinions of others, but that it was his travels that taught him the art of living in harmony with people. For him, life meant love, appreciation, and service to everyone he met.

Fr John attended St. Mungo's Academy in Glasgow before entering the minor seminary of the Comboni Missionaries in Sunningdale (Berkshire) and then in Stillington (North Yorkshire). He completed his novitiate and philosophy studies at Sunningdale (1951-1956), where he made his first religious profession on 9th September 1953.

In 1956, he moved to Rome for theological studies at the Urbaniana University. On 9th September 1959, he made his final vows and on 2nd April 1960, he was ordained a priest in the Basilica of S. Giovanni in Laterano, in Rome. He then spent a few months at the same university, studying a local Ugandan language, Luo, in view of the mission. He had in fact been assigned to Uganda, where to start his missionary work which would last many years. Denis Olaka Oper, chief editor of *Radio Wa*, in Lira (Uganda), recalls his commitment and dedication as a missionary priest: «When he arrived in Uganda, Fr. John was immediately sent to Kalongo Mission to perfect his knowledge of Luo. In 1962 he began teaching at Lacor Seminary and Layibi College in Gulu. He often told students of the deep emotion he felt when he attended Uganda's Independence Day celebrations in October 1962, especially as the Queen's cousin was Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, who represented the Queen on that occasion. His Majesty. And he explained that, when he had been a philosophy student at Sunningdale, he had helped to save the Prince's life, by pulling him out of his own sports car which had overturned right in front of the Seminary.'

In 1966, Fr. John was assigned to the parish of Aduku, among the Lango, as pastor. Although he was already 32 years old, he still had a boyish face. The superior of the Comboni nuns greeted him cordially, but then, turning to the sisters, she whispered: «Is this the boy that the Bishop sent us as parish priest?». Overhearing, Fr. John commented: «Evidently for you I'm still too young to be a parish priest».

In 1967, he returned to England as Rector of Mirfield minor seminary. It was in Mirfield that he contributed to the collection of funds for the construction of the Cathedral of Lira, earning the eternal gratitude of the then-bishop, Msgr. Caesar Asili. But the call of Uganda was strong, and in 1969, Fr. John returned there. His adventurous spirit led him to accept a teaching position at Moroto High School in central Karamoja. He was often designated as the football referee for matches between the police and the army. It seems that the two sides often ended up shooting each other in the street after a match unless there was a strict referee!

Later, he was sent as pastor to the mission of Alenga, on the banks of the River Nile, in the district of Apac, where he spent fifteen years. Soon, he opened the first corn mill and started the first fishing cooperative society in the area.

In 1983, Fr. John was asked to work first in Canada and then in the United States in the field of mission animation.

In 1988, he was assigned to Malawi, where he spent six years in Lisungwe Mission. In 1994 he returned to Canada as National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies. But after reading of the atrocities committed during the interminable civil war in northern Uganda, he asked to return there to help end the unspeakable suffering inflicted on the Lango and Acholi ethnic groups. In 2000, he opened Lira *Radio Wa* ("Our Radio" in Luo) to promote dialogue in an attempt to end the eighteen-year conflict. This community radio even today preaches peace and reconciliation between all ethnic groups in Uganda. According to the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), the radio station, through its Karibu program, run by the famous DJ Kakaba, helped in the return to their families of over 1,000 kidnapped ex-child soldiers and in the surrender of several rebel commanders. Later, Fr. John also started the first local television station in northern Uganda dedicated to preaching forgiveness and reconciliation.

Denis Olaka Oper adds: «At *Radio Wa* – as in the entire Catholic community of the diocese of Lira – we remember Fr. John for his humility, patience and commitment. For him, life meant love, appreciation, and service. May God grant him eternal rest.»

Father John Fraser died unexpectedly at Cumbrae House care home in Bankside Terrace, Glasgow city centre on 20 December 2022. In the previous days, he had contracted a chest infection and was being followed up by his GP, but his condition suddenly worsened and he died peacefully in his sleep. The Requiem Mass on 12th January 2023, in the parish church of St. Philomena in Provanmill (Glasgow), where Fr. John grew up, was attended by relatives from Glasgow, Manchester and Toronto (Canada), friends, Ugandans living in the United Kingdom and many of his relatives. Fr. Javier Alvarado, superior of the Comboni community in Glasgow, spoke movingly about the witness of Fr. Fraser's life: «We give thanks to God for the

extraordinary work done by Fr. John in his sixty-two years of priestly ministry as a missionary in Africa, North America and here in the UK. Through his life and ministry, God touched the hearts of so many people, through his talent and ability, but perhaps most of all through his cheerfulness, kindness, and very helpful nature. His younger brother, Ronald, recalls that when John left home for the minor seminary in Sunningdale, his parents and brothers were in tears, but he was smiling and very happy to follow his vocation. And he never looked back. He spoke often, with great enthusiasm, of his mission experiences in Uganda, Malawi and Canada, and he kept smiling until the end. In the nursing home where he has spent the last three years, he brought great joy to the other residents and all the staff members, who unfailingly started their shifts by going to greet him in his room. In the dining room, despite the difficulty of speaking, his cheerful smile and mannerisms were always taken for granted and much appreciated by the staff and other residents. (Fr. John Downey)

FR. GIUSEPPE DETOMASO (31.01.1942 – 13 01 2023)

If you just take the latest Annuario Comboniano, open it towards the middle, where the “List and contact details of missionaries” section begins, look for Fr. Detomaso Giuseppe, and take a look at the dates and you will find yourself viewing what could be a “record “.

Giuseppe Detomaso was born on 31st January 1942, the eldest son of the Detomaso family, in Pieve di Livinallongo, on the northern slopes of the Marmolada, the queen of the Dolomites, mountains that, since he was a boy, he loved and climbed. He will also do so as a young seminarian, during family holidays. It is from his family and the mountain environment that he receives - and will always cultivate - a great love and respect for nature. Even in Ethiopia, he will continue to take long walks in the mountains of that wonderful country. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Giuseppe's father was called to military service in Russia, leaving his mother Caterina alone to take care of the little family, forced to live for years in the most extreme poverty. Only in 1948, three years after the end of the conflict, would the father return home, in very poor health. The family got together again and grew in number, but the father would always remain poorly for the few years he still had to live.

After elementary school, Giuseppe entered the Comboni seminary in Trento and then attended middle school in Padua and high school in Carraia (Lucca). In 1962, he entered the novitiate in Gozzano, where he made his first vows in 1964. He then moved on to the scholasticate in Verona, where he made his perpetual religious profession in September 1967. On 26 June 1968, he was ordained a priest.

He would have liked to fly to Africa immediately, but the superiors kept him in Italy and assigned him to the community of Pordenone, for missionary

animation. There he furthered his preparation for a future African assignment by taking a basic nursing course. In 1970 he was in the minor seminary of Asti as a formator.

In 1971, he was given the green light to Ethiopia and went to England to learn English. In October 1972 he was in Addis Ababa attending an Amharic language course. At the beginning of 1973, he was assigned to the mission of Dilla, where his main work was the management of the Catholic school.

In 1986, Father Giuseppe began a period of more intense pastoral activity in various missions, often as superior of the Comboni community and/or parish priest, sometimes in charge of the Catholic schools. At a certain point, it almost seems that the superiors decided to assign him the tacit task - renewed several times - of opening, preparing and handing over missions to other confreres or local priests. The list is quite long: Hawassa, Dongora, Tullo, Arosa, Teticcha, Daye... In 2020, now suffering from prostate cancer, Father Giuseppe returned to Hawassa.

His records show many names of missions and as many dates. That might sound like a long, dry string of place names and dates. But far from it, inside him is all the passion of Father Giuseppe and his immense desire to proclaim Christ to the Ethiopian brothers and sisters, showing them what happens when Christ becomes the centre of someone's life.

He founded missions, built schools, opened halls and parish centres, houses for missionaries and sisters, chapels, churches, dispensaries, small hospitals... He brought food to areas affected by drought and famine and cared for the sick. He dug wells and brought electricity where there was none. He directed schools, created Christian communities, animated and baptised thousands of catechumens, forged bonds of friendship with everyone, even the various non-Catholic leaders... and he made himself loved by the people. He even managed to continue teaching religion and catechism in a school of 2,000 pupils and students, even under the Marxist-communist regime of the Derg, with the tacit approval of local authorities.

At the end of 2022, on the occasion of Father Giuseppe's "golden wedding" with the Comboni mission in Ethiopia, Father José da Silva Vieira, a Portuguese Comboni Missionary, also in Ethiopia, asks him to tell him the story of his life. Giuseppe gave free rein to memories and told all. Fr. Joe takes notes, all of which he then types on a computer keyboard and sends to Rome by e-mail. [You will be able to read the "deeds" of Father Giuseppe in the next issue of the *MCCJ Bulletin*].

Father Giuseppe's health deteriorated and prostate cancer was diagnosed. He carried on as usual with periodical medical check-ups and takes the prescribed medicines. At the beginning of January 2023, speaking frankly with the nurse who is taking care of him, he learned that his life was coming to its end: the cancer had spread with numerous metastases. He felt very weak. Father Sisto Agostini, the provincial superior, went to Hawassa and

convinced him to go to the capital for further checks. The two took a flight that same day, but Father Giuseppe did not want to go to the hospital immediately: he remained in the provincial community until the night of January 11, when, in an attempt to get out of bed, he fell to the floor. He said it was nothing serious, and that he also happened to fall in the chapel of Morocho, while he was going down the steps of the presbytery to go and offer Communion to the faithful. However, he was taken to the Landmark Hospital in Addis Ababa. Two days later, on 13th January, his heart stopped beating. In the afternoon of 15th January, a large congregation attended the funeral of Father Giuseppe, in the cathedral of Hawassa. Almost all the priests and religious of the vicariate were present.

On 29th January, in the parish of Pieve di Livinallongo, the birthplace of Father Giuseppe, a funeral Mass was celebrated for him, presided over by the Dean Rev. Andrea Costantini, a great friend of Father Giuseppe. The missionary office of the diocese of Brixen-Bolzano, on the other hand, has planned a great celebration in memory of Father Giuseppe on 12th February, in Oies, the birthplace of San Josef Freinademetz (1852–1908), missionary of the Society of the Divine Word, missionary in China.

At the news of the death of Father Giuseppe, Father Giacomo Bellini, another great pioneer of the Comboni missions in Eritrea and Ethiopia (he worked there from 1961 to 2017), today “retired” in the reception house for elderly confreres in Rebbio (CO), typed the following words on his old Olivetti 22: «The death of Father Giuseppe Detomaso saddens me greatly. We were together for several years in the Sidamo missions. I remember him as a generous, understanding and helpful confrere in difficult situations, always attentive to the needs of those who were with him, whether they were Ethiopian confreres or of other nationalities, regardless of the role they covered in the mission. He was really good-natured and very practical. I like to depict him as a climber who tackles steep rock faces first, planting pitons – one after the other – to make the climb easier for those who will come after him. In his role as a trailblazer, he was always guided by a great sense of equilibrium, so much so that he became an “experienced tightrope walker” in the most impervious situations. The Lord, who called him, will certainly reward him for the good he did to spread the Gospel”.

And the “record” of Father Giuseppe? In the latest Comboni Annuario, an “ET” appears, followed by the date (1972), and this is supported by a dash (-), which remained for a long time awaiting a second date to indicate a transition to a new province that never happened. Father Giuseppe’s “record” lies in that very short dash, which however has taken on the length of 50 years without interruption. He arrived in Ethiopia in 1972 and, for over half a century, he never left Ethiopia. He arrived there one day, immediately fell in love with “her”, made her his own and never left her except to fly to his new “province” of Paradise.

Fr. GIACOMO MOLINARI (31.10.10 - 20.01.2023)

Giacomo was born in Corna Darfo, in the diocese of Brescia, Italy, on 10th October 1931, exactly fifty years after the death of St. Daniel Comboni. He was baptised the same day. He attended school in his own village. He entered the Comboni seminary of Brescia for secondary and high school. He then moved on to the Novitiate in Gozzano, where, on 9th September 1950, the feast of St. Peter Claver, he made his first vows. Immediately afterwards, he went to Rebbio (Como) to begin his theological studies, which he continued from 1953 in Venegono (Varese), where on 9th September 1956 he made his perpetual religious profession. The following year, on 15th June, he was ordained a priest.

He was immediately appointed to the missions of North-East Brazil. On 1st July 1957, he arrived at the parish of Loreto (BNE), where he was appointed deputy parish priest, then parish priest. This was only first of a long series of missions, parishes and communities in which he would work for 56 years: Alto Parnaíba, Sambaíba, Tasso Fragoso, São Domingos do Azeitão, Pastos Bons... He would remain in the North-East of Brazil until November 2013.

At the beginning of 2013, Father Giacomo felt a bit tired. In fact, he was ill. Having asked for some time to rest, he spent two months in the community of Teresina. In March, he moved to São Luis where he stayed until November. In the meantime, there has been the unification of the North-East Province with the South Province. New perspectives are presented to him, but his health had not improved. Reluctantly, at the age of 84, he decided to return to his homeland. On 1 January 2014, he was present in Verona, in the department dedicated to elderly and sick missionaries. In June 2016 he was in the new centre for the elderly and sick dedicated to Bro. Alfredo Fiorini, in Castel d'Azzano (Verona). Never one to stand idly by, he offered to help with any service that was still possible for him to perform. On 1 September 2021, he was appointed deputy superior of the community. He died there on 21st January 2023, after a brief period in hospital due to cardiac arrest. He was 91 years old.

We had to prepare his obituary, consulting his personal records in the archives. E-mails were sent requesting news about him and we were immediately inundated with messages of sympathy and gratitude, praise and admiration. People wanted the fact but, in the end, the only real "fact" was himself because of his life spent totally for others, his joyful character and his availability to serve. Here are some of the messages received.

Testimonies

The first is a dated testimony from Father Luigi Zadra: «I met Father Giacomo when I arrived in Maranhão in 1978. He was busy in the parish of Loreto, very far from mine, but we always met on the occasion of diocesan meetings.

He was a wonderful person, gracious, friendly and sober. He didn't like to show off, but he was always attentive to everything that was discussed in the groups. He followed the pastoral plan that was planned together. His love for the mission was always very creative, both in expounding the Gospel and in living it. He had a special love for the poor. Wherever he has been, he has sown love."

Gregório R. dos Santos, from Viseu (Portugal): «The best memories I have of him are his kindness and the delicacy in the way he treated and assisted people, the elderly and the bedridden sick, with frequent home visits, bringing them the Eucharist, comforting them and often giving them financial help».

Fr. José Manuel Guerra Brites confirms: «Father James was always smiling... He was liked by all. He was very generous with the people who asked him for help, to pay the bills for medicines, gas and energy... he was incapable of saying no».

Raimundo Nonato Rocha dos Santos, provincial superior of Brazil: «Father James was a simple person, discreet and loved by all... His contribution was great to the formation and growth of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and to the strengthening of the Church in Maranhão. I express my gratitude to God for the beautiful testimony that Fr. Giacomo gave us during his life spent in evangelisation».

Father Claudio Bombieri. «Father Giacomo was known and loved above all by the poor. He was the personification of the "open-handed missionary". In his case, charitable giving was proverbial. His generosity was not manifested only in material terms but extended to the personal relationships he had with people. He always focused on the essentiality of life and exercised mercy in a way that only he knew. His availability had no time limits. At all times he was willing to collaborate or lend a hand. Dedicating yourself to others was his way of life. In debates, discussions or formal meetings he rarely intervened, and he never fell into the trap of idle arguments. However, he always showed an inner, emotional openness that led him to accept and support choices, priorities and options decided by the group, even when he didn't entirely agree with them. He had a crystalline soul that only the pure in heart possess».

Celebration

Even during the funeral mass, celebrated on the morning of 24th January in the chapel of the community of Castel d'Azzano, Fr. Antonio Guglielmi, of the community of Palermo, who worked with Fr. Giacomo in Brazil, did nothing but underline the great humanity and kindness, availability in missionary service and the welcoming spirit of his former mission companion.

Father Renzo Piazza, superior of the community, in his homily, went so far as to say: «Father Giacomo's life was full of light, which today we want to deliver to the hands of the Father. His passage among us was marked by his

humble and industrious deeds, by his simple and evangelical works which appear to us today as a light that should not be placed under a bushel, but on the lampstand, so that it sheds light on those in the house. It is a duty for our community to express our gratitude to God, first of all, and to Fr. Giacomo for what he was among us, first in the community of the Mother House and then in that of Castel d'Azzano».

Father Renzo continues: «Sick among sick brothers, he knew how to read reality and accept the limits imposed by health and by years and, wisely, he made the choice of being of service here, an elderly man among other elderly people. He continued to be a priest to the end: he proclaimed the Word and animated the liturgy, with a regular, prepared, measured service, without frills, without trying to show off. He was always available for the service of the Word both at home and in the parishes or in the Neocatechumenal communities. He animated the Listening to the Word group every Thursday. He was sought after by confreres and priests for the ministry of reconciliation. He was always praying. And he prayed a lot».

In addition to proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed, he continued to distinguish himself as a man of service. «He was the vice-superior of the community, reliable and attentive to one and all. As long as he had an iota of strength, he was the companion of Fr. Fabio Gilli, who was blind, pushing his wheelchair, praying the office of readings and vespers with him, reading him information from *Famiglia Comboniana*, taking an interest in correspondence with the family, friends and benefactors of the confrere. This he did every day, every morning, every afternoon... for 5 years! Truly, he transformed the retirement home into the place of his commitment: at a time when so many rest their oars; he did his utmost in service».

The conclusion of Father Renzo's homily was pleasantly to the point. «You will be missed, Father Giacomo. We have seen your good works and today we give glory to the Father who is in heaven. Certainly, your light will no longer shine in this house. But let's not shed any tears. Your example has left its mark. As the song goes: You are blazing a path, another will follow you.

Dear James, they gave you the name of two apostles and we don't quite know which of the two was your patron saint, James the Greater or the Less. We like to think that it is not the eldest, the "son of thunder", that the mother wanted to be seated in the place of honour, on Jesus' right ... Today we would like to entrust you to James the Less, because he is called "the brother of the Lord" and - as we read in today's Gospel - brother of the Lord is whoever does the will of God. Just like you! And you, St. James the Less, brother of the Lord, do not be offended if you have to make some space next to you for a "twin". Take him by the hand and present him to your illustrious Relative, so that he may be recognised by him as a faithful disciple, friend and brother because, like him, he loved and served. Ask him to stay close to Him and to us forever».

After the funeral Mass, Father Giacomo's body was then transported to his village, where the final rites were celebrated, followed by the burial.

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHER: Abram Mayik Nyok Kon, di P. Mayik Nyok Jervas Mawut (EGSD).

THE MOTHER: Cynthia, of P. Alan Dominic McGinty (LP).

THE BROTHER: José, of Fr. Martinho Lopes Moura (P).

THE SISTER: Antonietta, of Fr. Franco Mastromauro (LP); Bertilla, of Fr. Lino Morosinotto (U).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS: Sr. Elisabetta M. Zanca; Sr. Francesca La Iacona; Sr. Emilia Rosa Felini; Sr. M. Genoveffa Giannasi.

THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY: Anna Incampo (I)