

# Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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April 2023



# Happy Easter 2023

## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

### **Meeting in Rome of the Comboni Missionary Superiors with the Comboni Survivors' Group**

On 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023, the Superior General, Father Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, together with the members of the General Council and the Provincial Superiors, past and present, of the London Province met in Rome with the members of the Comboni Survivors' Group . The meeting included a forty-minute private audience with the Holy Father, organized by Father Andrew Small, OMI, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

For the members of the General Council and for the superiors of the London Province, the meeting was a very valuable opportunity to personally meet the members of the Group and hear their testimony. Cardinal Nichols presided over the opening and closing sessions of the meeting, which was also attended by Father Andrew Small, and, at the express request of the Group, by Archbishop Marcus Stock, the current Bishop of Leeds. A communique was released on Wednesday evening, at the end of the meeting. Here is the text.

*“Joint Statement following the Meeting in Rome of the Comboni Survivors' Group and the Comboni Missionaries, March 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.*

#### ***From the Comboni Survivors' Group:***

Recently, Pope Francis urged Church leaders to respond with concrete actions to the experience of survivors of child sexual abuse by clergy. As the Comboni Survivors' Group, we have asked for concrete actions for many years from the Comboni Missionaries and we have been met mostly with either silence or doubts about the veracity of our claims. Many other victims have experienced similar reactions from Church leaders. This atmosphere of fear and recrimination has started to change for us over the past several months as we have met with and been welcomed by the leadership of the Comboni Missionaries, past and present. In our latest Meeting, we were joined by the leadership from the London Province of the Comboni Missionaries, who were responsible for dealing with our requests for help and engagement over the past twenty-five years. We shared our painful histories of abuse and the devastation brought on by the dreadful response we received from the London Province when we looked for help. During our Meeting in these past few

days, which included a meeting with Pope Francis, we feel that we were not only heard, but believed by the Comboni Leadership, something that has brought us a sense of calm. This has been a transformative experience for us, vindicating our search for justice and dialogue as the only path of healing for those impacted by the wrong that was done to us. We look back at all the mistakes and misunderstandings we experienced over the years from the Comboni Missionaries and feel a sense of despair at how so much suffering could have been avoided. With goodwill and a common commitment to dialogue and action, the frustration and hurt we have carried for so many years can be channelled into making things different not only for ourselves but all those who face similar experiences to us. Pope Francis encouraged us to stay the course of dialogue and encounter, even during the darkest days. We are deeply grateful to the Comboni Missionaries for their kind invitation to come to Rome and we see in them allies on the path to healing and renewal. We are more hopeful than ever that this common journey is heading in a different and healthier direction for all of us and we are committed to walking this road together.

***From the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries:***

We thank the Members of the Comboni Survivors' Group for accepting our invitation to come to Rome and to address Members of our General Council and the leadership of the London Province, past and present. While we too have been impacted by the wrongdoing of some of the past actions of our Confrères and lay co-operators, only recently have we come to fully understand the impact of lasting harm this abuse has caused to the lives of those entrusted to our care all those years ago. We deplore and condemn what happened. We also regret the misunderstandings and missed opportunities when responding to the Comboni Survivors' Group that unfortunately led to more harm and hurt to those who have suffered so much. We are truly sorry for the times we have not responded adequately, and we ask once again for forgiveness. We hope our time together can bring some peace and healing and we commit to further concrete actions to ease what has been a difficult road for them. As Members of the leadership of the Comboni Missionaries, we have heard their experiences and we believe their stories of pain and disappointment and we want to make things better as much as we can. We commit to learning from these experiences and to incorporate them into our Institute's Child Protection Programmes to ensure we can learn from the past and prevent any such abuse in the future. In dialogue, we

will seek to find ways to provide needed pastoral care and support to each one of them, as much as we are able. And lastly, we thank Pope Francis who met with us, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Bishop Marcus Stock and Fr. Andrew Small, OMI and all those who have helped bring us to this moment of grace. We call on the Lord's help who alone can make all things new."

**Ordination to the priesthood**

Byron José Valverde Arce      San José (PCR)      25 March 2023

**Holy Redeemer Guild**

April                      01 – 15 CN                      16 – 30 EC  
 May                        01 – 15 ET                      16 – 31 I

**Prayer Intentions**

**April**

For those who live in the great overcrowded cities: that they may find there a place of welcome, work opportunities and respect for their welfare so that humanity may be restored to the cities. *Lord, hear us.*

**May**

That the celebration of the Day of Prayer for Vocations may stir up in the hearts of young men and women the awareness that the mission needs them to respond freely to the call of Jesus to go out to all the world and bear witness to him. *Lord, hear us.*

APRIL

**Meaningful anniversaries**

25	San Pedro de San José de Betancur, religious	DCA (Central America, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua)
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MAY

**Comboni liturgical calendar**

Last Saturday of the month "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart"	memorial
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**Meaningful anniversaries**

MAY

2	Saint Athanasius, bishop and doctor of the Church	Egypt
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**Comboni Renewal Course – Rome 2023**

The Comboni Renewal Course (CRC) is a sabbatical period that the Comboni Institute offers to confreres between the ages of 45 and 65. This year, there are eleven missionaries attending the Course at the Generalate in Rome, from January to May, interrupting their activities to make a wise re-reading of their lives and then return to the mission.

This year's participants come from nine countries and from different ministries in the various sectors of missionary ministry. Their ages range from 55 to 74 years. The CRC is coordinated by Father Fermo Bernasconi and Father Alberto de Oliveira Silva.

During the CRC, much importance and time is given to community life, to reflection, and to personal and group prayer, which allows each one to share more freely and easily experiences of personal life and mission, and to get to know one another better.

Usually, a formation theme is presented every morning, with the aim of helping the confreres to review the various stages of personal, community, religious and missionary life. For this reason, week after week, different themes follow one another, which include the different dimensions of life and help each missionary to re-read his own individual and community life, to be renewed from a spiritual and vocational point of view, to remember the life and writings of Comboni, and to review his lifestyle in the face of the various challenges of the mission today, also taking into account the Acts of the XIX General Chapter.

The CRC includes several outings together for study purposes and to create a community spirit. The group has already been to Greccio and Fonte Colombo – the land of St. Francis, the great inspirer of the simple life and mission – and Subiaco, the land of St. Benedict, and has already visited and participated in various celebrations at the nearby Monastery of “Tre Fontane”. A final visit was made to the community of Castel Volturno, an authentic “pilgrimage” to the challenges of the Comboni mission in Europe, at the service of the many immigrants and the local population, for mutual enrichment.

There are still two very special visits scheduled, which arouse great expectations in all: to Verona and Limone sul Garda, the land of our Father and Founder St. Daniel Comboni, and, during the last few weeks, to the Holy Land, to get to know the biblical places and the roads where Jesus walked as he accomplished his mission.

Father Pierino Landonio tells us how the course is progressing, despite the small number of participants, and how the group is experiencing it

personally: «We were well received by the two communities present in the Generalate, and we are accompanied “masterfully”. We find the topics covered very interesting. We have no doubt that the course is evolving into an enriching experience for each of us. After decades of life engaged in various countries on missionary service, sometimes exhausting or apparently not very fruitful, retracing one's steps and reserving more time to be with Him in a contemplative dimension, will in the end only be for the good of the Mission itself ».

## BRAZIL

### **The Catholic diocese of Roraima welcomes its new pastor**

The seat of the Catholic diocese of Roraima remained vacant since Bishop Dom Mario Antonio da Silver was transferred to the archdiocese of Mato Grosso in May 2022. During this period of about ten months, the diocese was entrusted to Fr Lucio Nicoletto, a Fidei Donum priest from the diocese of Padua (Italy), as diocesan administrator.

Last 25<sup>th</sup> January, on the occasion of the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, Pope Francis appointed Dom Evaristo Pascoal Spengler, O.F.M., 62 years old, former bishop of the diocese of Marajó, the tenth bishop of the diocese of Roraima.

The beautiful Eucharistic celebration of installation took place on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023, in the central square of the city, in front of the Cathedral “Cristo Redentore”, in the presence of the Cardinal of Amazon, Dom Leonardo, of various bishops, priests, men and women religious, and government officials. Numerous lay faithful from the diocese and elsewhere also attended.

The episcopal motto of Dom Evaristo, which appears on his coat of arms, is “Put out into the deep”, the words of Jesus to Peter, inviting him to cast his nets in deep water (Luke 5:4).

The new bishop is well aware of the challenges he has to face in the diocese where he has been placed at the helm. Among these, the situation of migrants and Indian groups stands out. The city of Boa Vista, the capital of the state of Roraima, is the destination of many migrants, mainly from Venezuela. The diocese welcomes them and offers them the necessary support.

The state of Roraima has the highest population of Indians in Brazil. They are subdivided into various groups: Macuxi, Wapichana, Ingariko, Yanomami, etc. The Yanomami have often attracted the attention of local and international media because, in their ancestral homeland, they are plagued by the growing number of illegal mines and illegal occupation of

Indian lands, as well as by hunger, pollution, high infant mortality and diseases such as malaria. Since 2003, the Comboni missionaries have been working among the Macuxi and Wapichana Indians.

In his homily, the new bishop reiterated the preferential option for Indians and migrants. He said: «I know that the Amazon is in the heart of Pope Francis. Called to be faithful to the Gospel, I see my coming to Roraima as part of God's plan for me and for this local church. Therefore, I intend to act in communion with the whole Church, in a spirit of synodality”. He then concluded by thanking his predecessors and the diocesan administrator for the service they rendered to the local Church. (*Father Teddy Keyari Njaya, mccj*)

## ESPAÑA

### **Meeting of the Comboni Family**

The Comboni Family of Spain met on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March 2023 in Madrid. The central theme of the meeting was the sharing of the journey that we are pursuing at the world level, also taking advantage of the occasion of the General Chapters of the Comboni Missionaries and of the Continental Assemblies of the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) in America and Africa, all recently celebrated.

The meeting was opened by Father Pedro Andrés, who recounted how the General Chapter took place, while Saturday afternoon was used to get to know better the Chapter of the Comboni Sisters.

On Sunday, there was a presentation by the CLM. At first, Isabel, the coordinator of the Spanish coordination group, spoke about the last assembly and the challenges we face as a Spanish group: in particular, the need to understand how many we are and where we are present, and the initiatives that we conduct. Immediately afterwards there was sharing on the meetings celebrated this year at a continental level in America (Lima-Peru) and in Africa (Cotonou-Benin). The most important aspect was above all the possibility of deepening our understanding of the richness and weaknesses of our CLM in these continents.

Finally, the leaders of the three “branches” who participated in the meeting, as they said their goodbyes, invited the meeting to continue this family commitment.

The meeting concluded with a Eucharistic celebration during which a special moment was dedicated to Father Pedro Andrés who, after spending years as provincial of Spain, is leaving for Peru. (*Alberto de la Portilla, Coordinator of the Central Committee of the CLM and member of the CLM of Spain*)

## ETHIOPIA

### **Drought among the Borana – Visit to the stricken areas of the Vicariate of Hawassa**

From 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> March, the archbishop of Addis Ababa, Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, and the representatives of the Vicariate of Hawassa, Mgr Juan González Núñez, Apostolic Administrator, Father Nicola Di Iorio, delegate vicar, and Don Tsegaye Getahun, director of the Catholic Secretariat of Hawassa, went to visit the region of Borana, located in the south of the Vicariate, inhabited largely by the ethnic group of the same name, one of the areas most affected by the drought, to bring aid and, above all, hope to the many victims.

In Ethiopia, it is said that if you ask a Borana for water, he will offer you milk. Today, however, these generous people can offer you neither milk nor water: the people and their livestock are literally dying of thirst.

The Borana occupy the southernmost part of Ethiopia, bordering Kenya. Their land is a perpetually dry steppe, but, if the rains are regular, it can support two or three million cattle, as well as large herds of goats.

Unfortunately, the normal pattern of rainfall in the district has drastically altered. It has not rained for five years, and the region's capacity to cope with such a catastrophe is now completely exhausted. One by one, all the water wells dried up and almost all the livestock died. There is talk of at least two million head of cattle that died of hunger and thirst.

We have to go back to 1984 to find such a tragedy. I witnessed it firsthand. In that terrible year, the victims among the Borana exceeded one million. Today, the government promises it will not let a single person die in the drought. They might even succeed if they lumped all the Borana into camps for displaced people. However, it will not be possible to know with certainty how many victims will have been caused by malnutrition and hunger. Gradually, most of the people have already moved to camps for displaced persons set up by the government.

The delegation of the Catholic Church, led by the Cardinal of Addis Ababa, visited the Dubluk camp, which, with 80,000 residents, is one of the largest in the area. The displaced live mostly in tents, some are housed in real huts, others still in pole shacks covered with plastic sheeting. The people appear clean, decently dressed and well-fed: clothing and food are provided by the government and charities. But there is a sense of despondency among those who were once wealthy and have lost everything. As mentioned above, the drought has now lasted for five years: the longest people remember. From the very beginning, the Vicariate of Hawassa has been there, helping the displaced in every



possible way. Among the Borana, there are three Catholic missions run by the Spiritan Missionaries, who have distinguished themselves for their social work through schools, student residences and digging water wells. The Vicariate as such has always assisted the affected population. But we don't know how long the emergency will last. To date, we have managed to assist around one and a half million Boranas, distributing to them the large quantities of aid received from organizations such as Caritas America, Caritas Austria, and others.

The day after our visit to the displaced people, it started to rain. Now, of course, people will say that it was the Catholics who brought the rain! It would be a curious misunderstanding. We know well that only God is the Lord of all that his providence places at our disposal. (*Mons. Juan González Núñez, mccj*)

## ITALIA

### **Feast of the relatives of the Italian Comboni Missionaries in Padua**

"It was nice to be together, meet again and enjoy a day with the family". These are the comments that were heard on the lips of the relatives of the Combonis, gathered last Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> March, at the house in Padua, for their annual meeting. Together with the confreres of the community, there were about ninety people, happy and grateful for the beautiful day spent together. Someone commented: "The style of our meeting today was different than usual: the atmosphere was really like that of a family". After all, the protagonists of the day were their relatives, who spoke about their missionary sons or brothers.

Father Gaetano Montresor set the tone for the celebration, reaffirming, once again, that «each Combonian makes his whole family a "Combonian", so that one's family becomes everyone's family, and every Combonian feels at home when he visits the family of a confrere".

The meeting began with a succession of stories of Comboni life. Then, there was the intervention of Father Eliseo Tacchella, who took up some points of Pope Francis' recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. To summarize the strong messages pronounced by Pope Francis during his trip, he quoted the following sentence: "Hands off Africa!". Father Eliseo also presented the situation of the real looting of minerals in the DR Congo, and the truly terrible ways in which the exploitation of the mines is perpetuated. Finally, he listed the unspeakable suffering of the population and described the state of absolute poverty in which they are forced to live.

Responding to the question raised several times as to the reason for the presence of Comboni missionaries in Latin America, an institute founded mainly for the evangelization of Africa, Father Alessio Geraci explained, with documents in hand, how the Institute has, in truth, responded to very specific and insistent requests coming from the Churches of Latin America and warmly supported by the Holy See itself. «If the Church calls, the Comboni Missionary answers». Today, Father Alessio continued, the Comboni Missionaries are seriously engaged in proclaiming the Gospel in those lands, with particular attention to the gigantic challenges caused by the ever more savage destruction of ecosystems, the tragic situations in which some ethnic minorities are relegated, the increasingly frequent outbreaks of violence, and the weakness of some democracies.

This intense session of stories and information was followed by the celebration of the Eucharist, which made a strong contribution to making the spirit of the Comboni family grow in all those present. The names of the recently deceased relatives were remembered, in particular the mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers of Comboni missionaries, and also of numerous Comboni fathers and brothers, both originally from our area and confreres who served in this community. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj*)

### **Workshop on integral ecology**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023, the Casavatore scholasticate promoted a workshop on integral ecology, animated by Father Fernando Zolli and Brother Antonio Soffientini, members of the Commission for Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Italian Province, and by Mrs Monica Fioretti and Mr Vittorio Moccia, promoters and supporters of the resistance of the grassroots movements of the Campania Region, against toxic waste dumps and soil and air pollution.

In the light of the “Gospel of Creation”, of the theological orientations expressed in the encyclical *Laudato si'* and in the apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* of Pope Francis, and of the experiences lived in the territory – called *Campania Felix* by the ancient Romans and today referred to as the *Land of Fire* – the scholastics understood:

- the meaning of the interconnection that exists between creation and humanity;
- the importance of growing in awareness of the havoc that the technical-scientific system inflicts both on Mother Earth and on the poor and excluded;

- the urgency of gradually eliminating excessive emissions into the atmosphere of carbon dioxide (also called carbon dioxide and known by the chemical formula CO<sub>2</sub>), to stop the process of climate change;
- the need to denounce the savage and systematic looting of common goods, with dramatic consequences for the populations of the southern hemisphere;
- the importance of growing in the commitment to assume the defence of the common home, as an integral part of evangelization.

As concrete commitments, the scholastics have adopted the *Vademecum Laudato si'* of the Italian province, to educate themselves to live new lifestyles and ecological relationships; they have decided to join the *Laudato Si'* Platform (LSPA), promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, of the Vatican, and indicated as a priority by the XIX General Chapter of the Institute; they expressed their willingness to grow in “ecological spirituality”, making their commitment to create a new Heaven and a new earth, as guardians of creation and of the weak, according to God's primordial plan and revealed by Christ, «The plan, that is, to recapitulate all things in Christ, those in heaven and those on earth” (*Eph* 1:9b-10).

## PROVINCIA DE CENTRO AMÉRICA

### **Priestly ordination of Byron José Valverde Arce**

The parish of San Giuseppe Patriarca, in the province of Heredia, Costa Rica, celebrated the priestly ordination of one of its sons, the deacon Byron José Valverde Arce, on 25<sup>th</sup> March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

Having entered, in 2011, the Comboni postulancy located in the Barrio Sagrada Familia, in San José, Byron José moved on to the Novitiate in Xochimilco in 2015, concluding with first vows on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017. He then went to the Scholasticate of Casavatore (Naples, Italy), where he remained until 2021.

After completing his theological studies, he carried out his missionary service in the parish of San Luis, Petén, Guatemala, where he made his perpetual vows on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022, and received the diaconate shortly thereafter.

Byron was ordained a priest by Msgr. Vittorino Girardi, mccj, bishop emeritus of the diocese of Tilarán-Liberia. The confreres wished to show

him their spiritual and physical closeness by attending his ordination in large numbers, alongside his family, friends and benefactors.

The parish was deeply moved by this unique event, prepared for by a week of animation and prayer and solemnized by a very lively celebration of the feast of its Patron Saint Joseph.

During the joyful ordination Mass, Mons. Vittorino exhorted Byron to continue to say his “yes” to the mission, to missionary passion and to service, following the example of Mary, the Lord's servant. The whole congregation echoed the bishop's exhortation with thunderous applause.

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Brother Angelo Drago (16.02.1939 – 17.03.2023)**

Angelo was born in Arre, in the province of Padua, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1939. In October 1951 he entered the Professional Training School that the Comboni Missionaries run in Thiene (Vicenza) as an Apostolic School for “candidate brothers”, choosing carpentry as his branch of study and specialization. On 30<sup>th</sup> June 1955, he had the joy of receiving a certificate from the Ministry of Public Education which qualified him as a “skilled carpenter”.

Still not content, he asked to do an intensive course to obtain the “Certificate of Higher Technical Specialization”. He explained to the superior of the Institute: «I don't want to deal only with woodworking, but I also want to know how to shape and transform it according to the projects to be carried out». At the end of the course, the judgment is really flattering: «A very good carpenter. He loves the job. He is a man of few words: he speaks with facts. He is pious, observant and exemplary in everything. He loves the vocation so much and has a very strong will ». There is only one critical note: «He is a little deaf. He is subject to otitis disorders. But in the opinion of the doctors, however, the disorder should not degenerate; it will just require a little attention.” The diagnosis would prove completely mistaken: the deafness kept getting worse, and for Angelo, it was a constant cause of suffering until the end of his life.

In June 1956, he wrote to Father General: «After years of preparation in the Comboni House of Thiene, I wish to be part of the Congregation of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a Missionary Coadjutor Brother. Therefore, I ask your permission to enter one of the novitiates of this congregation as soon as possible”.

Father General's response was positive. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1957, Angelo began his novitiate in Gozzano under the guidance of Father Pietro Rossi. He spent the second year of the Novitiate in Florence, where he made his first religious profession on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1958. The following day he was in Thiene, working in the house.

In July 1959, he went to Mirfield to learn English. He was appointed to the missions of Uganda and was therefore obliged to obtain the Technical Teacher's Certificate, a diploma necessary to teach in the schools and technical institutes of the English colony.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1963, he was at last able to reach Uganda, and was immediately sent to Ombaci, in the West Nile region, as a professional instructor at the local technical school. On September 15, 1964, he made his perpetual profession. He remained in Ombaci for seven years, making himself appreciated and loved both by students and confreres.

In 1970, his superiors asked him to go to Masindi, where there was a need for a builder and a treasurer. The "carpenter with golden hands" set off and, in a short time, proved to be a skilled builder and coordinator of the various teams of workers involved in the various constructions, and also a capable steward.

The rumour about his abilities spread throughout the various Comboni missions of the country: in 1975 he was in Makiro, in 1977 in Namalu, and then Kalongo, where he would remain for seven years, "under the orders" of Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli. In 1986, after a short vacation in Italy, he returned to Uganda, assigned to the parish of Naoi as a "construction worker", he received the message containing his official appointment. He would receive many other similar leaflets, always indicating a new destination: Moroto (1988-1989), Kapedo (1989-1992) and Matany (1992-1994). In October 1994, they wanted him back from Naoi, no longer as a builder, but as an instructor at the Professional School.

In 1996 he was at the Comboni House in Laybi. Here one has the grace of being able to dedicate oneself to "ministry". He liked to visit the chapels, the communities and talk about the love of Jesus and the Gospel... In 1997, the mission of Namalu forcefully claimed him; having put the house in order, he asked to go back to Laybi, but they told him he could continue his service in Namalu. He stayed there for eight years.

Brother Angelo began to feel tired. In March 2005, he was assigned to the parish of Matany, now as a "house worker". But he can't sit still: there's always someone calling him for an urgent job or repairs. During one of these trips, he finds himself in the middle of a firefight between Karimojong warriors and regular soldiers. His car was riddled with bullets, but he was unharmed. In November 2011, he had the opportunity to attend the Renewal Course in Rome, at the Generalate.

At the beginning of 2016, his health presented serious problems. In July he went for treatment to the Mother House in Verona. He was always available to anyone who asked him for a favour. As long as he had the strength, he also undertook some demanding renovation and repair work.

In August 2018, however, he was forced to retire to the “Brother Fiorini Centre” for the sick in Castel d’Azzano. It was to be his last stop. The cross of deafness has become very heavy for him.

Father Renzo Piazza, head of the Centre, recalls: «Every time someone sang the song “Blessed are those who listen”, my eyes sought Brother Angelo, and I wondered what he might be feeling at that moment... for so many years he had been deaf... what profound suffering! The terrible pain of not being able to listen must have been renewed in him countless times, while he felt the bitter taste of growing marginalization!».

On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Brother Angelo passed away and his funeral was celebrated on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The whole community gathered in the chapel. There were also some family members of his and a deacon from his home parish. In the afternoon, the coffin is taken to Arre for burial. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

### **Father Giancarlo Ramanzini (30.11.1939 – 18.03.2023)**

Giancarlo was born in Trevenzuolo, in the province of Verona (Italy), on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1939. He entered the minor seminary of the Comboni Missionaries of Padua while still young. In 1955 he began high school in Carraia (Lucca) and obtained the certificate of maturity in 1958.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1959 he was in the novitiate of Monroe (Michigan, USA), where on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1961 he made his first religious vows. For theological studies he moved to the scholasticate in San Diego, California. He made his perpetual religious profession on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1964. On 27<sup>th</sup> May of the following year he was ordained a priest in San Diego. In his hand, he already had the letter from Father Gaetano Briani, the Superior General, with his destination: Khartoum. After the two-year Arabic language course, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1967, he was sent to El-Obeid, and was immediately appointed parish priest of the Cathedral and director of the schools, in particular of the Comboni School, where he was also a professor. He was more at ease in pastoral work, which he never omitted. A few months later, having noticed his pedagogical competence, Msgr. Paolino Lukudu, a Combonian and the Apostolic Administrator of El-Obeid, put him in charge of the diocesan pastoral centre, which however did yet not exist except in the desire of the prelate. Father Giancarlo rolled up his sleeves, “allied” with Sister Margaret Hazzan, and the two gave life to the PALICA (Pastoral Liturgical Catechetical Centre) in El-Obeid. “He was so tireless that, at times, it was impossible for me to keep up with him”, the nun later recalled.

In 1976, in agreement with Msgr. Lukudu and with the approval of the regional council of the Comboni Missionaries, he went to Brussels for a diploma course in Catechesis and Pastoral Care at the “Lumen Vitae” International Institute. At the end of October 1977, certificate in hand, he

returned to El-Obeid, and resumed the direction of the Pastoral Center. He would remain there until July 1982, when he was sent to Khartoum where he taught at Comboni College and at the diocesan major seminary. He too became responsible for the various youth associations of the city and, soon after, he agreed to be the chaplain of the Catholic University

In 1993, he was deeply involved in the preparation for the visit of Pope Saint John Paul II to Sudan. "I want this event to mark a" historical moment "that can clearly" define "the Church in this country," he often told his confreres. This is how it turned out: on 10<sup>th</sup> February, at the Eucharistic celebration in honour of Blessed Josephine Bakhita, in Khartoum's "Green Square", the Pope found himself in front of a million Catholic faithful. "Who are they? Where do they come from?», the Pope asked in amazement, at the sight of that tide of Christians in the capital of an Islamic state. "They are Catholics from South Sudan, refugees here because of the war going on in those regions", Archbishop Gabriel Zubeir Wako explains, adding: «They are all "sons" of Daniele Comboni». There are those who swear that, since that day, the cause of beatification of the Founder of the Comboni Missionaries has received a very strong impulse. Three years later, in fact, on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1996, Pope John Paul II would beatify Comboni.

Father Giancarlo remained in Khartoum for 19 years, also engaged in ministry at the cathedral and the many Christian communities, made up mostly of South Sudanese refugees, located in the distant suburbs of the capital. In 1997, Archbishop Zubeir appointed him as his Vicar General, until February 2001. Father Giancarlo enthusiastically threw himself into strengthening the Diocesan Secretariat for Religious Education: he wanted to train teachers who were prepared and capable of bearing witness to their Christian faith in that Muslim land.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2001, after a "fraternal but energetic dialogue" with the superiors, in which Mons. Zubeir also intervened (who would have liked his Vicar to stay with many more years), Father Giancarlo returned to Italy, assigned to the Mother House of Verona, in charge of missionary animation. In 2004, he was vice-superior of the community. In the Verona area, he was very well known. After all, despite being away from home for almost 40 years, he had always kept in close contact not only with his own parish but also with the entire diocese. Parish missionary groups would call him for conferences and he proved to be a skilled animator of missionary activities in each parish, especially those of Isola della Scala and Nogara.

In October 2005, he managed to convince his superiors to let him return to Khartoum where he accepted the position of professor at Comboni College. Unfortunately, eleven months later, a serious illness – a tumour of the liver – forced him to return urgently to Italy. He was admitted to Center for the Sick in the Mother House of Verona. He gradually recovered and returns to being his usual self.

In 20011, his confreres wanted him to be vice superior of the community again. He would have preferred to be let go, but he accepted. As soon as he could, however, he would engage in the apostolate in the many parish communities of the diocese.

In 2019, he became ill again. He was advised to undergo serious treatment but opted for a milder form. He still had a little energy left and wanted to spend it as he thought best. He also worked hard raising funds to sponsor new schools in the Kosti region, and also in his beloved Khartoum, where the Salesian Sisters of Shajara have asked him for help.

Early in March 2023, he complained of severe pain in his stomach. He resisted in silence for a few days but then had to admit he couldn't take it any more. He was taken to the hospital where the doctors found a bowel obstruction. The operation seemed to have gone well. But he remained very weak and passed away on 18<sup>th</sup> March 18. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, in the presence of Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, provincial superior of Egypt-Sudan, the funeral mass was celebrated in the chapel of the Mother House. That afternoon, the funeral was held in the parish church of Trevenzuolo. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

### **Father Davide Ferraboschi (19.07.1941 – 24.03.2023)**

Davide was born in a small town called Rubiera, in the province of Reggio Emilia, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1941.

Even as a child, he loved "saying mass", trying to imitate the old parish priest to perfection. His friends formed his "assembly of the faithful". When the fifth elementary class was about to begin, his brother Romano and his cousin Mario, a year older than him, entered the diocesan minor seminary, together with three other classmates. Davide would have liked to follow them, but he couldn't as he still had to finish fifth grade. He would follow them year after.

While attending eighth grade, a Comboni missionary, Father Luigi Crotti, visited the seminary and talked about the missions in Sudan. The boy is quite struck by his words and decided that he too will be a Comboni missionary. The following year, he entered the Comboni seminary in Brescia for secondary school and high school. In October 1949, he entered the Novitiate of Gozzano where, on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1961, he took his first vows. For theology studies, he went first to the Verona Mother House and then to Venegono. He also spend a year in a Comboni house in Spain.

On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1965, he made his perpetual profession and, on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1966, he was ordained a priest. He then moved to Rome for various specializations: a license in Pedagogy, a license in Theology, Diplomas in Psycho-Pedagogical Sciences, Islamology and Spirituality, excelling in every subject.



On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1970, he went to London to study the English language. In July of the following year, he went to Khartoum, destined for the missions in Sudan. He stayed in the capital for a year to study Arabic. In May 1972, he was sent to Kadugli, in the Nuba Mountains, as an assistant parish priest and worked there for four years.

In 1975, he was transferred to El Obeid, as parish priest (1975-1977), then teacher at Comboni School, (1977-1980) and finally as principal (1980-1987). He would always say that El-Obeid was his first and unforgettable love. The Nuba people live in the Vicariate of El-Obeid and Father David was devoted to so much that he became “a true Nuba at heart”, through the liturgy and their songs.

In the decade 1980-1990, the Archbishop of Khartoum, Gabriel Zubeir Wako, promoted a great liturgical movement throughout Sudan. Father David began to collect religious songs from Lebanon, Egypt, some Protestant churches, from Juba or the Roman liturgy. The collection also included a number of songs in the local Sudanese languages, such as Dinka and Nuba Moro. His immense effort of collecting, translating and even creating new songs and hymns was crowned by the publication of a voluminous songbook. “Songs are wonderful tools for the ministry of the catechumenate... I teach them to the catechumens, and they spread them in their homes and in their villages. And people sing them on the street, in the fields, at the market and – of course – also in church».

Towards the end of 1987, Father Davide asked for a holiday period in his homeland. After three months, he returned, this time parish of Kadugli as parish priest.

In 1990 the foreign missionaries received the order to leave Kadugli, Dilling, Abiei, Nahud and Babanusa, and Father Davide was assigned to the Combonian postulate in Cairo (Egypt). He only stayed there for a year, as formator of postulants. In July 1991, he returned to Italy and obtained from his superiors the right to complete his studies in Arabic and Islamic studies at the Pontifical Institute of Islamic Studies (PISAI). In 1993, he returned to Cairo as a teacher in the Institute that the Comboni Missionaries had set up to prepare ecclesiastical personnel from all over the world and belonging to every Christian denomination, to work in Arabic-speaking countries.

In 1994, Father Davide was able to return to Sudan, as pastor of the mission of Nyala, in Darfur. He stayed there for four years. In 1998 he was a member of the Comboni House of El-Obeid, in charge of the ministry; in 2003, he became its superior.

In September 2005, he was assigned to Omdurman parish. It was his last appointment. He worked there until November 2022 when he was transferred to Comboni College, Khartoum.

On the morning of Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023, he told his confreres he was not feeling well. He is promptly taken to the hospital for a medical checkup.

After a few hours, he came back saying: “I feel better now” and retired to his room. In the evening, he seemed to have fallen asleep peacefully but the following morning he didn’t come as usual to the chapel for mass with the confreres. After Mass, they went to his room only to find he was “already resting in peace”. (Edited by Fr. Jorge Naranjo, mcccj)

### **Father Nazzareno (“Neno”) Gaetano Contran (26.08.1933 – 23.03.2023)**

Nazzareno (“Neno”) Gaetano was born in Piove di Sacco, in the province of Padua, on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1933 and was baptized the following day. On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1941, he was confirmed. While still a boy, he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his elder brother Sergio (born in 1926) and entered the Combian apostolic school of Brescia for the upper secondary school, passing the secondary school leaving exams in June 1949.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October 1949, Neno began his novitiate in Gozzano and on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1951, he took his temporary vows. He went to Verona for his high school studies and obtained his diploma of classical maturity at the “Barbarigo” high school in Padua in July 1954. A few weeks later, he went to Burgos, Spain, to undertake his theological studies. In July 1955 he was in the scholasticate of Venegono, where he finished the five-year period of theology with his perpetual profession on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1957. On 31<sup>st</sup> May 1958 he was ordained a priest. In July of the same year, his superiors called him to Rome for specialization studies, and in 1960 he obtained a licentiate both in Theology and in Missiology and Sociology.

He returned to Spain and was a vocations promoter in Madrid. He knew Spanish so well that he was able to write numerous articles for *Mundo Negro*. After only one year, he was called back to Verona, first to the editorial staff of *Piccolo Missionario* and then to that of *Nigrizia*, of which he became director in 1965. Under his direction, the circulation of the magazine increased and the name *Nigrizia* became synonymous with seriousness and competence in African affairs.

In 1970, he was elected superior of the Comboni delegation in French-speaking Togo. He immediately went to Paris and, at the École Internationale de Langue et de Civilization Françaises, of the Alliance Française, he obtained a diploma in French. By July, he was already back in Togo and chose to live in the community of the parish of Afanya: “You can be the superior of a quite small delegation and also help a parish priest in a mission”, was his comment.

In July 1975, he was again editor-in-chief of *Nigrizia*, no longer in Verona, but in Rome, at the house in San Pancrazio, on the Gianicolo. He signed many of his articles and dossiers with the name of Gaetano Durell, removing the “o” from his mother's surname, Durello. The confreres particularly appreciated the articles of this non-Italian “expert”. Joking with the three sub-

editors, he said: "To make the confreres happy, sometimes even these innocent little jokes are needed. If a name, not entirely false, increases the "truth" of an article, why not use it?!"

The Comboni Missionaries in Togo again chose him as their provincial superior. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1978, he left, leaving the magazine editorship vacant. A little over a year later, he was again in Rome for the 1979 General Chapter. His personality struck all the capitulars. In the first poll, he got the vast majority of votes. He smiled, stood up and said: «If today were April 1st, I would say that it was a successful "April fool". But since that is not today's date, I must tell you not to count on me. With the responsibility I have for the small Comboni province of Togo, I can't sleep anymore. What would happen to me if I were elected Father General?».

In July 1984, Father Neno was in Rome as Secretary General of Missionary Animation, a position he would hold until June 1993. Towards the end of this commitment which he skilfully exercised, his health begins to play tricks on him. He had a couple of small heart attacks but recovered well from them. In Nairobi, the Comboni magazine for English-speaking Africa, *New People*, needed an editor, and the superiors are thinking of Father Neno. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1993, he arrived in Sunningdale (England), where he threw himself into the study of the new language. Five months later, he was back in Nairobi.

In the meantime, the Institute decided to start publishing a magazine for Francophone Africa. Who would be the one in charge? Fr Neno, of course. And he accepts. He knows French perfectly. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1998 he went to Kinshasa. A few months later, *Afriquespoir* was born, a magazine that immediately sold out. Numerous books also came from his pen. Some were real bestsellers, such as the three on Christian priests, nuns and laymen killed in revolutions, wars, ethnic clashes and genocides. Given the success of the three booklets on the "recent martyrs", he decided to also publish *The Saints of Africa: 500 witnesses of the church on the continent*. This, too, sold well. People were amazed: they never thought that Africa had such a significant "weight" in the Catholic Church.

For relaxation, Father Neno published booklets of "African Jokes", "African Humorous Stories" and "African Proverbs". But perhaps the book that he loved most was *This Path Could be Yours*, in which he introduced St. Daniel Comboni to many young people; some of them are now Comboni Missionaries, thanks to what they read. At the insistence of his confreres, he opened and directed the Center Missionnaire *Afriquespoir* from which clips, films, pamphlets, posters and brochures were issued. Finally, he also opened a website, which immediately becomes very popular. He was also available for spiritual retreats, celebrations, confessions, missionary and vocational animation meetings. Wherever he went, he spread love.

In April 2020, he wrote to Father General: «I am tired. I think the time has come for me to return home.' In April, he visited the Bro. Fiorini Center in

Castel d'Azzano for treatment. Regaining some strength, he moved to the Mother House in Verona. He still had his intellectual and communicative abilities: and he could still tell his famous jokes.

In mid-2022, he returned to Castel d'Azzano and, in March 2023, he was hospitalized with severe pneumonia. After a couple of weeks, he returned to the Sick Center of Castel d'Azzano. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, he was seen in the garden praying the Rosary. Once he finished his Rosary, he went straight to his room. Shortly afterwards, he passed away.

On 27<sup>th</sup> March, the funeral mass at Castel d'Azzano was presided over by Father Fabio Baldan, superior of the Italian province. In his homily, Father Eliseo Tacchella, who lived many years with Fr. Neno, described the personality of the confrere in sincere and heartfelt words. At one point, as if he were saying the most obvious thing in the world, he added: "Fr. Neno was a peacemaker, a true and holy missionary". The gaze of all those present expressed total agreement. In the afternoon, his funeral was celebrated in Piove di Sacco.

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

**THE FATHERS:** Calixto, of Fr Victor Hugo Castillo Matarrita (RCA); Roger Arnaud, of the Sc. Tabasse Taramboui Ebed Melek Ruben Dario (RCA); Maurice, of Fr Longba Guéndé Godefroy-Médard (RCA).

**THE MOTHER:** Lindóia Carolina Matzembacher Reghelin, of Fr Valnei Pedro Reghelin (BR).

**THE BROTHERS:** Giacomo, of Fr Bettoli (A); Giovanni, of Fr Carmine Calvisi (I);

**LA SISTERS:** Norina, of Fr Gino Melato (I); Paula, of Fr Alois Eder (DSP); Evelina, of Fr Erminio Pegorari (+1999); Giuseppina, of Fr Antonio Di Lella (I); Maria, of Bro Johannes Valentini (DSP).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Sr Giovanna Blanchetti; Sr Stefania Bassan; Sr Luisa De Berti.