

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

818

May 2023

PENTECOST



«My life is inflamed»
(St. Catherine of Siena)

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL NOTES OF THE MARCH-APRIL 2023 CONSULTA

Appointments

Appointments within the General Curia

The General Council has appointed:

- Fr. Tomas Herreros Baroja: Superior of the Community of the Curia in Rome as from 1.5.2023;
- Fr. Franco Moretti: Assistant to the Secretary General and member of the editing staff of the *MCCJ Bulletin* as from 1.4.2023.

Appointments within the Formation sector

The General Council has appointed:

- Fr. Villaseñor Galvez José de Jesús: Secretary General of Formation as from 1.4.2023;
- Fr. Katsan Fodagni Kokouvi (Fidèle): Formator and superior of the scholasticate of Kinshasa-Kintambo as from 1.3.2023;
- Fr. Corrado Tosi: Bursar of the scholasticate of Kinshasa-Kintambo as from 1.3.2023;
- Fr. Andrés Miguel Pedro: Formator of the scholasticate of Lima as from 1.5.2023;
- Fr. Martin Vargas Francisco José: Formator of the Formation Community of Granada as from 1.5.2023;
- Fr. Habtu Teklay Tiluk: Father Master *ad interim* of the novitiate of Asmara as from 1.1.2023.

Appointments within the economy sector

On 3.4.2023, the General Council has appointed for the period from 1.1.2023 to 31.12.2025:

- Fr. Marcelo Fonseca Oliveira: Member of the Financial Council (ASCAF reference person);
- Bro. Mora Mora José Alberto: Member of the Financial Council (AA reference person);
- Fr. Zema Philip: Technical Adviser to the Financial Council.

Assignment of novices

This year, the number of novices admitted to first vows and assigned to the scholasticates and CIF has far exceeded the accommodation

capacity of the existing scholasticates. In line with the discernment already made (in the Chapter and at the meeting with the newly elected superiors) in anticipation of this event - and which had already partially materialised with the opening of the formative community of Granada -, the General Council has decided to open two new formation communities respectively in Graz and Chicago. During the consultation, 50 young novices asked for and were admitted to first vows. 36 of them were assigned to all traditional scholasticates that had sufficient room, while 14 were assigned to Granada (5) and to Graz (4) and Chicago (5). The General Council is grateful to all the circumscriptions which have shown their willingness to place structures at their disposal for this purpose.

Meeting with the “Comboni Survivors” group

On 21st and 22nd March 2023, the Superior General, Father Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, together with the members of the General Council and the past and present Provincial Superiors of the London Province met in Rome with members of the Comboni Survivors’ Group. The meeting included a forty-minute private audience with the Holy Father, organised 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 precious opportunity to meet personally the members of the Group, listen to their testimony and continue the journey of healing. Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, 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, Msgr. Marcus Stock, current Bishop of Leeds. A statement was released on Wednesday evening, at the end of the meeting, and published in April’s *Familia Comboniana*. The lived experience, despite its delicacy and objective difficulty, was an opportunity to learn about the suffering of those who have suffered from various forms of abuse and to learn some points of method that will have to be taken up again in an exercise of extension of the fields covered by the Code of Conduct, which will start as soon as possible.

The Comboni Year 2023 – and other courses of ongoing formation

The General Council, considering the small number of candidates for the CYOF – which would not allow the implementation of an adequate formative dynamic - has decided, in dialogue with the confreres in charge of the courses of FP, to postpone it to next year, 2024-2025. Before reaching this difficult decision, during the consultation, steps had been taken to contact the circumscriptions, asking for new enrolments of the confreres

for the course, but the response was not satisfactory because, unfortunately, not all the circumscriptions responded to the appeal and, furthermore, because some confreres were unable to interrupt their service for want of adequate replacements. For the consultation in June, the GC, in collaboration with those in charge of the OGF courses, will send the provincials the list of possible candidates for the CYOF for 2024. The superiors are asked to carefully plan their personnel so as to free up all the confreres who are on the list or others who ask to follow the course. It should be remembered that the CYOF is an important stage in the ongoing formation process that the Institute organises for the members after the first period of the mission. The decision not to participate should not be taken without very serious reasons.

Response to requests for contributions

The General Council thanks all the circumscriptions for the ordinary and extraordinary contributions that have been made for the various purposes of the Institute. At the same time, they also thank the circumscriptions that have joined the fundraising to finance solidarity initiatives in favour of the populations affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. As already mentioned in the meeting of the provincials, the sum collected was sent to the Vatican Department of Eastern Churches (ROACO).

In communion with the people of Sudan

As we well know, some days ago, a situation of conflict has developed in Sudan which in a few days has made Khartoum a place of confrontation between opposing factions, causing the deaths of many brothers and sisters, mourning and suffering for the defenceless people who once again see their hopes for peace denied.

The General Council wishes to express what is in the heart of every Combonian who once again sees the martyrdom of this land so dear to St. Daniel Comboni.

We are all close to the Sudanese people and to our brothers and sisters who work tirelessly in Sudan to bring the Good News of Christ's Resurrection. We remain, and invite everyone to be diligent in prayer for peace. We ask for the intercession of St. Daniel Comboni, who lived and died in Sudan, so that peace and harmony may come. We also do so in unity with the request of the Holy Father. The General Council also asks everyone to remember that the dissemination of news on the subject is done with sobriety, bearing in mind that in a confused situation, it is easy for unconfirmed news to create more problems than they solve.

Calendar of the events of the Institute

General Events

- Assembly of Ongoing Formation – Rome, from 17th to 30th June.
- Financial Council – Rome, from 22nd to 26th May.
- Meeting of the General Councils of the Comboni Family – Rome, CMS, from 2nd to 4th June.

Continental Events

- Continental meeting of Brothers (Europe) – Maia (Portugal), from 24th to 26th April.
- GERT – Sunningdale, from 3rd to 5th May.
- Continental Assembly of the Mission – Rome, from 5th to 12th June.
- APDESAM Continental Assembly for Formation – Mukono (Uganda), from 9th to 17th July.
- ASCAF Continental Assembly for Formation – Cotonou (Benin), from 23rd to 30th July.
- America-Asia Continental Assembly for Provincial Bursars – San Paolo (Brazil), from 10th to 17th July.

Communications between the General Administration and Circumscription Superiors

The General Council wishes to point out to the Circumscription Superiors that the communication channels between them and the General Management must always remain open, and for this reason, it is essential that, in the event of absence from office or periods of unavailability by telephone or e-mail, information on how to establish urgent communication is made available to the assistant in charge of the circumscription. The General Council also wishes to note that it is good practice - indeed necessary - to signal the receipt of an official communication by e-mail within a short time; this report must be addressed exclusively to the person who sent the communication. For this reason, the practice “reply to all” must be used only when it is truly required by the type of message transmitted. Otherwise, it becomes a source of confusion, errors, and sometimes problems.

Journeys by members of the General Council

Bro. Alberto Lamana	21-27 April, Maia, Brothers' meeting.
	15-31 May, South Africa.
Fr. David Costa Domingues	20-22 April, DSP (with Fr. Codianni).

	2-5 May, Paris.
	5-27 May, PCA.
Fr. Luigi Codianni	20-22 April, DSP (with Fr. Costa Domingues).
	26 April–17 May, RCA (with Fr. Sindjalim).
Fr. Elias Sindjalim Essognimam	26 April–17 May, RCA (with Fr. Codianni).

Next Consulta

The June consulta is planned for the period from 29.5 to 16.6.

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Perpetual professions

Sc. Nelson da Costa Mariosse (MO)	Namapa (MO)	14 April 2023
Sc. Dapilos Raposa Benjosef Carlos (A)	Quezon City (RP)	15 April 2023

Ordinations to the priesthood

Biro Jexis Berlin (RCA)	Grimari (RCA)	2 October 2022
Valverde Arce Byron José (PCA)	San José (PCA)	25 March 2023

Holy Redeemer Guild

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

Prayer Intentions

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 into all the world and bear witness to him. *Lord hear us.*

June

That, in our pastoral activity, we may know how to integrate care for our common home and the protection of the environment as an expression of our recognition of ourselves as God's creatures, recognising the provident hand of God in creation. *Lord hear us.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

MAY

27	Blessed Virgin Mary, “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”	memoria
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Meaningful anniversaries

MAY

2	Saint Athanasius, bishop and doctor of the Church	Egypt
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Comboni liturgical calendar

JUNE

16	Most Sacred Heart of Jesus <i>Principal patron of the Institute</i>	Solemnity (Togo-Ghana-Benin)
17	Immaculate Heart of Mary	

Meaningful anniversaries

JUNE

1	Anniversary of the foundation of the Institute	
3	Saint Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs	Uganda
5	Saint Boniface, bishop and martyr	Memoria – DSP (South Tyrol, Austria, Germany)

Publications

Father Alessio Geraci, mccj, *Buone notizie in tempi difficili*, ed. San Lorenzo, April 2023, pp. 345.

This book is the translation and adaptation to the Italian linguistic and cultural reality – edited by the author himself – of his previous book in Spanish, *Buenas noticias en tiempo de pandemic*. The text contains his daily comments (from December 2020 to November 2022) on the Gospel that the liturgy proposed in these tough times, divided into ten sections, following the life of Jesus, and some reflections he shared during the pandemic with the young people whom he still accompanies in his pastoral service in Italy. The intention is to make people understand that Jesus is the Good News in these tough times, emphasising the importance of the “good news” that Jesus came to give us which represents the path of hope for all of us today.

Presentation of the book *Africa, culla della trasformazione sociale*

On Saturday 1st April, the volume *Africa, culla della trasformazione sociale* (“Africa, Cradle of Social Transformation”) [Leggimi editions, 2023, pp. 223, € 15.00], by Domenico Agasso, which reconstructs the path and missionary vision of Father Francesco Pierli.

The volume traces the stages of Father Pierli’s life, highlighting the experiences and historical processes from which his research and practice of social transformation developed. What emerges is a profoundly Comboni path, which reflects the ideas, values and style of the Plan for the *regeneration of Africa with Africa* of St. Daniel Comboni. We encounter here a thought that critically confronts the great social and cultural transformations of our time and that operates discernment to respond to the epochal challenges that arise according to the dream of God. It is understandable, then, how from his origins in post-war Umbria, marked by strong tensions and demands for social justice, Father Pierli developed a particular sensitivity and deep interest in the Social Doctrine of the Church and the vocation to social responsibility and “the politics” of Christians.

Father Pierli lives the season of the Second Vatican Council and puts it to effective use, inspired by the vision of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. He gets involved with the magisterium and with the social practice of the Church and, when at the end of his mandate as Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries he arrives in Kenya, he founds the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission (today the Institute for Social Transformation) in Tangaza College (in the Catholic University of East Africa). It was 1994, a year full of events: the First Synod of Bishops for Africa (April-May), in which he participates as an expert; the first democratic elections in South Africa (on 27th Apr), which sanction the democratic transition after apartheid; but also the genocide (April-July 1994) in Rwanda, a predominantly Catholic country. The African Synod invited the Church to embrace the social mission of the Church, in response to the great challenges present on the continent. The Institute founded by Father Pierli was the first response to this invitation: to train social ministers capable of these great challenges.

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A vivid testimony of the impact of the Institute’s work came from Dr. Judith Pete, a former pupil of Father Pierli, who now teaches at the same university and is the regional coordinator for sub-Saharan Africa of UNESCO research on open educational resources for development – “Differentiation in the Southern Hemisphere” – conducted in 36

universities in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia, aimed at promoting the synergy between learning and service in the area. In addition to the story of how the meeting with Father Pierli profoundly marked her life, Dr. Pete underlined the importance of the pedagogy used in the Institute, «which harmonises theory and practice, professional training and an attitude of service and integrity». But above all, she underlined how the programs of the Institute for Social Transformation contribute “to forming leaders dedicated to social transformation in Africa”.

Professor. Mario Molteni, of the Catholic University of Milan (also the author of the Preface of the book), spoke about the fruitful collaboration with Father Pierli and the Institute he founded. This collaboration has launched a Master’s program for the training of social entrepreneurs, with a direct path to the launch of start-ups with a social impact: «a program that was only possible thanks to the courage and vision of Father Pierli, which made it possible to have an effective, open and creative counterpart in Africa». Today that program has spread to 20 African countries and in the next few years it will arrive in another 5. It is not just an academic program in partnership with African universities, but a network of entrepreneurs and local business services for a significant social impact, called *E4Impact*. Recently, this initiative was visited by President Mattarella during his official visit to Kenya, selected for its innovation and significance.

At the end of the event, Father Pierli was asked what was the most difficult challenge of all these years. Without any hesitation, he underlined the difficulty of changing mentalities and attitudes, and power relations, which lead to dependence, rather than to the autonomy and interdependence of Africa. «We have not yet overcome the heavy colonial legacy. The path to social transformation continues».

CENTRE FOR ONGOING FORMATION

In view of the Solemnity of the Heart of Jesus, which will fall on 16 June next, Father Fermo Bernasconi and Father Alberto de Oliveira Silva, heads of the Centre for Ongoing Formation, are finalising the preparation of a booklet as an aid to help us to live the Solemnity more intensely. They are doing this in compliance with the invitation addressed to us by the XIX General Chapter, that is, to deepen and assume our spirituality, which is marked precisely by some specific elements that create our identity as Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus.

The supplement is expected to be ready around the middle of May when it will be sent to all the superiors of the circumscription and those responsible for ongoing formation. They will be the ones to send each community and/or each confrere a digital copy so that each community can study it and find the best way to prepare for the Solemnity.

We hope that we can all make a journey of personal and community growth rooted in Jesus Christ, according to the legacy of St. Daniel Comboni. “With our eyes always fixed on Jesus Christ”, we want to actualise our charism among the poor to whom we are sent.

ASIA

Perpetual vows and diaconate of Benjosef Raposa

15th and 16th April were two important days for the Comboni Delegation of Asia, characterised by true Easter joy and profound gratitude to the Risen Lord, expressed in an exciting way in two splendid ceremonies, full of songs and prayers.

Saturday 15th, in the chapel of the Postulancy-Novitiate “Saint Daniel Comboni”, in Quezon City, surrounded by his mother, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends and benefactors, confreres, postulants and novices, a young adult of 34 years, Benjosef Carlos Dapilos Raposa, originally from Naga City, one of the main cities of the Bicol region, is making a decision that will change his life: he intends, in fact, to promise to become a Comboni missionary, forever committed to the adventure of announcing the Gospel of Christ, with an existence marked by the three religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Benjosef arrived at this decision after prolonged and careful reflection. He entered the Comboni postulancy of Quezon City in 2013, he is attending the three-year course of philosophical studies at the “Christ the King” Seminary of the city. In 2016 he was sent to Xochimilco (Mexico) for the novitiate, which he concluded with temporary vows on 25th May 1918. He then went to the scholasticate of Pietermaritzburg (South Africa) for theological studies. In 2022, he returned to his homeland for the experience of missionary service, spent in the community of Quezon City.

Now he is there, in front of the altar, in the presence of Father Aguilar Sánchez Víctor Manuel, Delegate Superior for Asia, holding in his hand the text on which he wrote the formula for his perpetual profession. He began with a brief and surprising biblical introduction: «“Let it be done to me as you said” (*Lk* 1:38). These words, spoken by the Blessed Virgin Mary, were the original inspiration in my vocational journey. Mary, despite her initial fears, said her “yes” with all her heart, and this changed the

course of our history of salvation. I thank the Lord for the many graces that he has granted me throughout my life. In the face of so much goodness, I can only say: “Thank you, Lord... Here I am”».

After the ritual formula of consecration, Benjosef prayerfully abandons himself to the loving guidance of Jesus, whom he calls Manoy Jess (“brother Mayre”), and implores the help of Inâ, “our beloved Mother, by whose “yes” I was inspired throughout my journey of faith».

Benjosef’s double reference to the Virgin Mary in his formula of religious profession was not surprising: in Naga City, his hometown, there is the Shrine of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, one of the most important centres of Marian devotion in the Philippines.

The next day, Sunday 16th, again in the chapel of the Comboni house in Quezon City, Benjosef became a deacon through the hands of Msgr. Honesto Flores Ongtioco, Bishop of the Diocese of Cubao, which includes part of the large Quezon City.

Deacon Benjosef Raposa is the latest of the 18 Asian Comboni missionaries, radical members of the Delegation of Asia, erected on 1st January 1993. In addition to the three communities in the Philippines, the Delegation of Asia has one in China (Macau), one in Taiwan (New Taipei) and one in Vietnam (Hô Chí Minh City).

ITALIA

In memory of Mons. Camillo Ballin

Three years after the death of Msgr. Camillo Ballin, the Comboni community of Padua and the parish of Fontaniva, the birthplace of Msgr. Camillo, wanted to remember the figure of this missionary who dedicated his life to pastoral work in the Islamic world.

On Thursday, 27th April 2023, a meeting was organised in the civic centre of Fontaniva. Mr. Guerrino Citton, a local historian, retraced the journey of the Ballin family and the main stages in Camillo’s life.

Father Giuseppe Caramazza, on the other hand, spoke of the Islamic world, emphasising how easy it is to fall into a negative pre-understanding: instead, it is necessary to know the history of Islam and recognise its values which have also made a contribution to Western culture.

Father Angelo Giorgetti, former provincial superior of Egypt-Sudan, gave his testimony, highlighting the human qualities of Msgr. Ballin: a man dedicated to the encounter with Islam, but also engaged on a pastoral level with Christians living in Sudan and Egypt, where he worked in various parishes and in the field of teaching until 2005, and then exercised, as

Vicar Apostolic, a fruitful ministry of closeness and support to Christians living in Northern Arabia and Kuwait.

His ability to relate to the royal house of Bahrain, where the vicariate of Northern Arabia was based, was commendable. One of the fruits of this relationship was the land donated by the King of Bahrain to the Catholic Church for the construction of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Arabia. The large church, started by Msgr. Camillus, was completed after his death and consecrated on 10th December 2021 by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

The mayor of Fontaniva, Mr. Edoardo Pitton, concluded the evening with a brief speech in which he underlined the importance of the figure of Msgr. Camillo Ballin for the entire local community: «inquiring about the figure of our fellow citizen – he said – I noticed the human greatness, the marked altruism, the refinement of thought of the man. I discovered such willpower, and stubbornness that enabled him to act in a difficult context, both on a religious and socio-political level. The anecdote about his vocation made me smile. When asked to indicate three possible places or situations where he would like to go, he replied: “The Arab world, the Arab world and the Arab world”».

After the civic ceremony, the Fontanive community wanted to celebrate a solemn Mass in the parish church, presided over by Father General Tesfaye Tadesse.

Archbishop Ballin died in Rome on 12th April 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. On that occasion, in Fontaniva there was neither public prayer nor a funeral that brought together the local community. With this celebration, the town was finally able to say goodbye to one of its sons and gather around his family.

KENYA

The first Secular Comboni Missionaries in Africa

On 22nd April 2023, four young Kenyan women – Julia Wangui Ngari, Lucy Mutola Singa, Mary Watetu Ndungu and Ruth Wanjiru Mbugua – made history by becoming the first Secular Comboni Missionaries in Africa.

Maria Pia Dal Zovo, General Director of the Institute, received their vows in the presence of two Central Councillors, Gina Villamar Ultreras and Paola Ghelfi. Father Andrew Wanjohi, Provincial Superior of Kenya, presided over the Eucharist, solemnised by the choir of our students. Also present were Isabella Dalessandro, former General Director of the

Institute, numerous members of the Comboni family in Nairobi with the parents and relatives of the newly professed.

The faces of Julia, Lucy, Mary and Ruth were beaming with joy as they said their vows and their smiles immediately spread to the faces of everyone present. The celebration, full of colour and in a joyful atmosphere, marked the culmination of a lengthy process of discernment that began about 10 years ago, under the guidance of Father Francesco Pierli, who, at a certain point, offered them the possibility of becoming Secular Comboni Sisters. They immediately showed interest in this possibility. Father Francesco, therefore, invited the leaders of the Comboni Secular Missionaries to accompany these young women.

Isabella and her Council accepted the challenge and came to Kenya to continue the process of discernment with the possible candidates. Today it is fair to say that Father Francesco was right: they were real roses... and they bloomed!

In his homily, Father Andrew Wanjohi thanked the four young women for their courage and faith. He encouraged them to remain faithful to their vocation. He also reminded them that living as a consecrated woman outside a religious community will certainly be a challenge. It is, in fact, a new method of consecration in the context of Kenya, where the vocation of consecrated women is considered possible only in a religious institute. Father Wanjohi assured them of the support of the Comboni Family in their commitment to live their consecration and to transform society from within. Finally, he thanked their parents for donating them to the institute. Maria Pia, General Director of the Institute, expressed her gratitude to the Comboni Missionaries in Kenya for having supported the four newly professed in their process of discernment. She also rejoiced that the four have become the seed of the Comboni Secular Missionaries in Africa. She then exhorted them to live their consecration with commitment and joy, in the hope that their example will inspire others to imitate them so that the Institute can expand more and more.

As an immediate preparation for their first vows, the newly professed had a five-day spiritual retreat, led by Father Andrew Bwalya, with meditations on the theme of “consecration and mission”. Maria Pia, Gina, Paola and Isabella also participated in the retreat.

The newly professed women are a small but significant sign that the Comboni dream of “saving Africa with Africa” is coming true. (*Father Andrew Bwalya*)

MOÇAMBIQUE

Padre Leonello Bettini: sixty years of priestly life

On 30th March, Father Leonello Bettini celebrated sixty years of priesthood in the Comboni community of the Matola Postulancy. In addition to the members of the community, religious and postulants, the confreres of the community of Maputo, some representatives of other religious institutes of Matola and various friends and benefactors of the Postulancy were present. It was a moment of praise and thanksgiving for the marvels that God worked in the life of Father Leonello, an authentic “old soldier”, as they say in Mozambique.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Father Leonello who, with characteristic simplicity, shared some salient moments of his missionary and priestly life. He was 30 years old when he arrived in Mozambique and was assigned to the diocese of Tete, where the Comboni Missionaries had just begun their presence. Subsequently, he worked in Beira and Maputo.

Currently, at the age of 85 and after 52 years of missionary work in Mozambique, he is in the postulancy of Matola, where he “forms” the Combonian postulants with his testimony of life and the wisdom accumulated over so many years of missionary life, punctuated by the various moments in the history of Mozambique and marked by great suffering, by profound solidarity with the people, and by true fraternity lived among the confreres.

Father Leonello, in fact, underlined, as a fundamental aspect of his missionary life, having always felt in an “upper room of apostles”, where faith, missionary passion, work and free time are shared.

PORTUGAL

Feast of the families of the Comboni Missionaries

This year, the traditional celebration of the families of the Comboni missionaries was held in the community of Viseu on Sunday 16th April.

Since there are no longer any Covid-19 restrictions, the attendance was remarkable. About 120 people were present, including the relatives of some confreres on mission abroad and, naturally, a good number of missionaries present in the province.

This meeting of friendship and missionary communion began with a moment animated by the provincial superior, Father Fernando Domingues, who shared some news on the life of the Institute, in particular on the

conduct of the XIX General Chapter, which was held in Rome last June, and on the beatification of father Giuseppe Ambrosoli, a missionary doctor, which took place in Kalongo (northern Uganda) on 20th November 2022.

A television documentary was also presented - sponsored by the Comboni Province, by the Ecclesia news agency and by the Pontifical Mission Societies of Portugal - on the work of the Comboni Brother José Eduardo Macedo de Freitas, who continues today the apostolate of Blessed Father Joseph Ambrosoli, as a nurse in the Kalongo hospital, founded by Father Ambrosoli himself.

The elderly Comboni missionaries residing in the Reception Centre of Vi-seu also took part in the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the superior of the community, Father Manuel António da Silva Machado. After lunch, the meeting concluded with a moment of Marian prayer in the seminary chapel, during which each family was offered a rosary, a personalised magnet and a leaflet with a prayer to the newly Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli.

Meeting of the Comboni Brothers of the Provinces of Europe

The Brothers who live and work in the Comboni circumscriptions of Europe met from 23rd to 26th April 2023 in the community of Maia, in Portugal. The 16 participants were from Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Portugal and the Curia.

The meeting – the first at the European level held outside Italy – offered an opportunity to reflect on some points that emerged from the last General Chapter in relation to the Brothers. In particular, the value of the methodology used during the Chapter was highlighted, which favoured the launch of processes based on a common vision. The participants underlined the importance of deepening the ministry of the Brother within the primary purpose of the Institute: the “proclamation of the Gospel”.

Another theme under consideration was interculturality, and the presence of Brothers from Africa and Latin America certainly helped to revive the debate. The theme of interculturality inevitably prompted the participants to recognise the urgent need to courageously address the question of the ever more “international” character of the Comboni mission in Europe.

There was also a rich exchange of ideas on the state of the “vocation of the Brother” within the Institute. All the participants felt the need to be more present “as Brothers” in the dynamics of youth ministry adopted. The clear feeling is that the growing imbalance between Fathers and Brothers is leading the Institute to dramatically reduce its true and original “Comboni dimension”, and this was judged “very worrying”.

The Brothers involved in the Comboni Society for Human Promotion of Camarate, on the outskirts of Lisbon, presented their project in detail. And the assembly recognised that this community is, above all, a “true ministry of presence and accompaniment alongside the poor” which wants to be a sign of the presence of the Kingdom. In recent years, the Society has managed to create an impressive network of collaborators and volunteers who donate their time and expertise.

The opportunity was then given to present both the ministerial experience carried out with immigrants in Granada, and the “*online initiatives*” among the various European districts in this field.

In the meeting, integral ecology had a prominent place, and some of the initiatives that are being implemented in this important dimension were shared.

Father Filipe Miguel Oliveira Resende presented the journey being made with young people on the theme of World Youth Day which will take place from 1st to 6th August in Lisbon.

The meeting “delivered” to those present the commitment to continue working with passion for the mission, as witnesses of God’s action in our lives, in order to make fraternity the characteristic sign of our vocation.

TGB

Provincial Assembly 2023

From 17th to 22nd April 2023, the Comboni Missionaries of the province of Togo-Ghana-Benin held their provincial assembly. The meeting, characterised by a serene atmosphere, saw the participation of almost all the confreres.

The work of the assembly focused on the presentation of the Acts of the 2022 General Chapter and on the programming of the 2023-2028 six-year plan, under the engaging guidance of the confreres delegated to the XIX General Chapter.

Before getting to the heart of the work, an entire day was dedicated to training-information on the delicate issue of abuse of minors and vulnerable people. Towards the end of the assembly, other topics relating to the life of the province were discussed.

It should be noted that this assembly had the peculiarity of being held in our provincial house. For years the provincial meetings had been held in the house of the Canossian Sisters, and this involved huge expense. This year, on the other hand, thanks to the renovation and expansion of the

provincial headquarters, the assembly was able to be held “in our home”. Our thanks go to the friends and benefactors who made all this possible.

PROVINCIA DE CENTRO AMÉRICA

The Italian government decorates Mons. Vittorino Girardi

On 18th April last, the bishop emeritus of the diocese of Tilarán-Liberia, Msgr. Vittorino Girardi, was honoured with a knighthood by the Italian government, in recognition of his educational, theological and pastoral contribution to society.

The Order of Merit of the Italian Republic is the first and most important of the Italian orders of chivalry. It was established by the Italian Parliament to reward the results obtained by citizens in the fields of science, literature, the arts, sport and other sectors, as well as for humanitarian works. Recognition to Mons. Girardi is mainly due to his contributions in the theological field, through his works, his speeches, his conferences and his articles. The prelate is recognised for his pastoral service, especially for his attention to the most needy.

Interviewed by *Eco Católico*, Costa Rica’s first weekly, founded in 1883, Msgr. Girardi expressed his gratitude to Italy, adding, however, that Costa Rica truly “merited” this recognition, as he has spent more than 30 years in the service of the Costa Rican Church. He then hastened to quote the words of Jesus: «When you have done all that has been ordered to you, say: “We are useless servants. We have done what we had to do”» (*Lk 17:10*), that is, we are servants without expecting rewards, knowing that we are not indispensable.

Monsignor Vittorino Girardi was born in Italy on 24th March 1938. He made his final vows as a Comboni missionary on 9th September 1962 and was ordained a priest on 30th March 1963 in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, by the hands of Clemente Micara, Cardinal Vicar of Rome. He is a person with a remarkable academic background. He obtained a doctorate in theology and a diploma in the philosophy of atheism at the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome. He then specialised in Mariology at the Marianum, also in Rome.

After his priestly ordination, he was formator of the Comboni Missionaries first in Spain (1963-75) and then in Nairobi, Kenya (1975-79). After his specialisation studies in Rome, in 1983 he moved to Mexico, where he was a professor at the Pontifical University of Mexico for nine years. In 1992, he moved to Costa Rica, first as a formator of the Comboni Missionaries and then, from 1995 to 2002, as a professor at the Catholic University of Costa Rica.

On 13th July 2002, he was appointed bishop of Tilarán-Liberia by Pope John Paul II. The following 21st September, he received episcopal ordination in the cathedral of Tilarán from Archbishop Antonio Sozzo, apostolic nuncio to Costa Rica. On 6th February 2016, he resigned as he had reached the age limit.

Monsignor Girardi, in addition to having taught in various universities, has also published numerous books on philosophy and theology. He is still a collaborator of *Eco Católico*, where he writes the column “Your Doubts”. Italian Senator Francesca La Marca, visiting the Italian community in Costa Rica, presented the decoration to Monsignor Girardi at the Italian Embassy. The deputy head of the Republic of Costa Rica, Luis Fernando Mendoza, gave a speech in which he highlighted the path of the prelate. Also present was the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Bruno Musarò. (*Catholic ECO and FM*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Antonio Solcia (18.7.1936 – 24.3.2023)

Antonio was born in Trezzano Rosa in the province of Milan, on 18th July 1936, into a peasant family with five children. His parents were fervent Catholics and very committed to the parish. Antonio attended elementary school in the village up to the fourth grade. Early in the morning, he would go to church as an altar boy. He had already repeatedly expressed to both his parents and the parish priest his desire to become a missionary priest. At the invitation of the parish priest, Antonio wrote a letter to the Istituto Missioni Africane in Verona, declaring himself ready to enter one of the apostolic schools that the institute manages in Northern Italy. In October 1946, he entered the then “Piccolo Seminario” of Crema to start the fifth grade. At school he was brilliant. In October 1950, he moved to the Brescia seminary for two years of middle school and three years of high school.

On 7th October 1952, he entered the novitiate in Gozzano. In June 1953, he was sent to Sunningdale, England, for the second year of novitiate, and made his first vows on September 9, 1954. He began his theological studies in the same seminary, where he remained for three years. In July 1957, he moved to Venegono. On 9th September 1960, he made his perpetual religious profession. On 18th March 1961 he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Milan by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Paul VI.

Assigned to Uganda, in June he returned to England to obtain a diploma that allowed him to teach in the then British colony. In February 1962 he

was already in Pakele, diocese of Gulu, as assistant parish priest. He stayed there until November, when he was sent to Koboko in the diocese of Arua, in charge of the secondary school, where he was also a professor. Father Antonio immediately revealed himself to be a good teacher. The boys adored him and he knew how to make himself liked. Sometimes, he would spend the whole day in the school, organising meetings, debates, various activities and sporting events for the students.

In 1965 he was called to teach at the Teacher's Training College of Lodonga. He was to remain there until July 1981. It was there that Father Antonio gave his best performance as a professor and animator.

Father Torquato Paolucci, who knew Father Antonio closely, recalls that «he had a very special love for teachers, whose permanent formation he supervised. He used to write a circular to everyone to encourage them to live their profession as an important vocation for society and the Church. He also wanted them to read *Leadership*, the monthly magazine published by the Combonis in Uganda. Every month he ordered 5,000 copies, which he then distributed in the various schools ».

In July 1981, Father Antonio was assigned to the province of Kenya, as vice-rector of the scholasticate of the Congregation of the Apostles of Jesus, in Langata, a suburb of Nairobi. Two years later, he was able to return to "his" diocese of Arua, appointed to Ombaci as a secondary school teacher and chaplain and diocesan consultant for religious education. For several years, he too was superior of the large local Comboni community. In 1997, he moved to the nearby Comboni House, in Ediofe, where he was able to devote much of his time to ministry while continuing to lecture in the nearby seminary. For a time, he was also the diocesan administrator.

In July 1998, Father Venanzio Milani, Vicar General, and Father Juan Antonio González Núñez, Assistant General, were visiting the province of Uganda. In Ediofe, they met Father Antonio and proposed a change: in Rome there is an urgent need for an aide to the General Secretary, Father Alois Weiss. Father Antonio, in all honesty, says that he doesn't think he's the right person, but adds: "If you ask me, I'll obey." The official request arrived shortly after, and on 1st July 1999 Father Antonio was in Rome, a member of the community of the Curia. He struggled a bit to settle in, but quickly learned the job and performed his duties very well. Among other things, he also helped arranging the general archive.

On 15th April 2001, he was once again assigned to his beloved Uganda and, in October, he was again in Ombaci, in charge of ministry and the schools; a few months later, he was also appointed superior of the community. He remained in Ombaci until December 2008. After a period of

family vacation, he went to Rome for the Ongoing Formation Course, of which he says he is “very enthusiastic and deeply grateful”. But in June of the following year, he was back in Ombaci and spent another two years there. In October 2010, he was called to the provincial house in Kampala as assistant to the provincial treasurer.

Father Antonio then began to feel some age-related ailments (he was now 76 years old). In mid-2012, he returned to Italy for checkups. He stayed for more than six months at the Brescia Center for the Sick but in June 2013 he was ready for Uganda again and returned to Lodonga, where he lends himself to all sorts of ministry, both in parishes and schools. The confreres also chose him as their community bursar. When a priest was needed in Ombaci, he agreed to go there, remaining until June 2017, the year in which he returned to Italy, destined for the rectory community of Lucca.

Father Giovanni Taneburgo, superior of the community, remembers him as having “a true spirit of prayer and service, even at the cost of sacrifice, especially during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic: always ready to procure even small things for the welfare of the community. He was a humble, loving, punctual and discreet person, with a remarkable ability to take second place without feelings of inferiority. He also had a firmness of character which led him to be generous and immovable in his personal beliefs or tastes.’

In March 2022, Father Antonio asked to move to the Center for the Sick in Milan. There too he had a rectory and could continue to do some ministry.

On the morning of 24th March, the confreres, not seeing him at prayers, became worried and one of them went to check on him. He went into his bedroom and found him still in bed: he was still breathing but unable to speak. An ambulance was called to take to the nearest accident and emergency centre. He was found to have suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and passed away before midnight that day. His funeral was held at his parish church of Trezzano Rosa on 27th March. His remains were interred in the part of the town cemetery reserved for religious. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccc*)

Father Franz Weeger (13.4.1939 – 31.3.2023)

On the morning of the day Father Franz Weeger died, last 31st March, in the community we spontaneously sang the invitatory psalm (*Ps 94*) at the beginning of our morning prayer. Franz particularly liked this psalm, especially the second verse: «A mighty God is the Lord... In his hands are the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains are his».

Among the fantastic peaks of the Andes, “Padre Pancho” – as the people called him, using a diminutive of Francisco – lived for more than 50 years... and always “in the heights”, between 2,800 and 4,500 metres. Those mountains, whose peaks reach the sky and speak more than any other creature of the incredible artistic imagination of the Creator, have always been dear to him.

Franz was born on 13th April 1939, in Gern, a tiny fraction of the city of Ornau, in the district of Ansbach (Bavaria). [Ornau was the cradle of many Comboni vocations, including Msgr. Lorenzo Unfried Gimpel (1919-1988), initially Auxiliary Bishop of Arequipa (1969-1979) and then Bishop of Tarma (1980-1988), in Peru, and Father Rudolf Friedl, a long-time missionary in South Africa].

At the age of 11, Franz entered the Comboni Seminary of Ellwangen. On 1st July 1959, he began his novitiate in Mellatz, which he concluded a year later with temporary vows. In July 1960 he began his scholasticate in Bamberg. On 5th February 1965, he made his perpetual profession and on 6th March 1966, he was ordained a priest. Six months later, he was already in Peru, in Tarma, the centre of the homonymous diocese. In March 1967, he was assigned to the parish of Cerro de Pasco, as pastor. The altitude of 4,500 meters did not bother him. Indeed, he immediately felt at home with it. And he remained there until June 1973, when he moved to the city of Junín, again as parish priest, dedicating himself to the pastoral care of both the city and the surrounding villages, for more than 12 years.

In 1985, he returned to his dear mountains of Cerro de Pasco, where he stayed for three years. From 1989 to 1993, he was involved in ministry in Tarma, at the cathedral. In 1994 he was assigned to the parish of Yanahuanca, where he remained until 2003.

Wherever he went, he was appreciated for his dedication to pastoral care and his concern for people. His somewhat brusque character did not prevent him from forming good relationships with everyone.

From the beginning of 1999 to December 2004, Father Pancho was also a provincial councillor. In this role, he offered invaluable contributions to the province, thanks to his profound knowledge of the history of Peru and of the Comboni presence in the country. His reasoning and suggestions were always well received.

In 2004, he was assigned to the parish of Huánuco, where he threw himself into rural pastoral care, especially in the areas of Margos and Chaulan. But slowly, his health forced him to abandon visits to the villages and communities scattered throughout the vast parish and to limit himself to helping out at the parish church of San Pedro.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the obligation of isolation, weighed heavily on him, even becoming unbearable. His health continually deteriorated. In February 2023, he was forced to resign and asked to be taken to the provincial residence in Lima. He told everyone: "That's my last stop." On 3rd March, he died surrounded by the love and prayers of the confreres.

I spent the years of minor seminary, novitiate and scholasticate with him. In Peru, we were assigned to different missions and parishes, but I was lucky enough to share a few years with him as members of the same provincial council. I have to admit that in him I always found a faithful and generous companion... and always able to surprise me. When the era of digital means of communication arrived, for example, he was immediately interested, becoming enthusiastic and in a short time becoming an expert user of these powerful instruments of the apostolate.

I am sure that those who, like me, have had the good fortune to know him, thank God for the gift of his life, for his dedication shown in the many years spent in the Andes, and for the friendship that always showed towards us. shown. (*Father Alois Weiss, mccc*)

Fr. Antonio Di Lella (20.12.1937 – 27.04.2023)

Antonio was born on 20th December 1937 in Caserta (Italy) into a very religious family. He started elementary school at the nearby Salesian Institute and, during the holidays, spent entire days in the oratory adjacent to the college. The same goes for the three middle classes. For the two years of high school, however, he went to the minor seminary of the territorial prelature of Pompeii. In a letter to Father Leonzio Bano, he confided: «Already in high school I had a strong sympathy for the missions, to the point that I subscribed to *Il Piccolo Missionario* [a monthly magazine for children published by the Comboni Missionaries, ed]. I devoured the stories of the missionaries that were told there».

For the three years of high school, Antonio went to the Pontifical Regional Seminary in Salerno. In the same letter to Father Bano, he writes: «It was here that that strong sympathy became a firm decision». In the second year of high school, encouraged by his spiritual father, in letters to his family Antonio begins to mention his desire to become a missionary. However, he met with strong opposition, above all from his Salesian brother, who would like him to be a Salesian like him, and from his mother, who instead wants him to be a priest of the Prelature of the Marian Shrine. Antonio confided in Father Bano, who encouraged him to hold on and always consult his spiritual director.

In June 1955, Antonio passed his high school diploma exams. During the holidays, the family gradually came around to accepting his choice. On 13th November 1955, he entered the novitiate. On September 9, 1957, he made his temporary vows and began his scholasticate at Venegono. He made his final profession on 9 September 1959 and was ordained a priest on 29th June 1960. A week later, he was in Rome, in via San Pancrazio, for a two-year diploma course in spiritual theology.

In August 1962, he was sent to the apostolic school of Pesaro as a spiritual director. The following year he was assigned to the apostolic school of Troia, again as a spiritual director. In July 1967 he was sent to Brazil (the Region of the Holy Spirit), as parish priest of Mucuricí in the diocese of São Mateus. In July 1971 he was back in Rome, in the General Curia, for a refresher course at the Salesian University. In July 1972 he returned to Brazil, assigned to Jerônimo Monteiro, in charge of missionary animation and vocation promotion. He stayed there for five years. In 1977, he was assigned to the Region of North Brazil, as parish priest in Mirador. In July 1980, Father Antonio was at the Missionary Animation Centre in Naples, as a vocation promoter and superior. In 1983, the Comboni community moved to Casavatore (Naples) which became the seat of the Comboni postulate in Southern Italy.

In April 1987, Father General Francesco Pierli sent him a letter of assignment to the province of North Brazil. Father Antonio replied: «I can't wait to go back to the forests of the Brazilian Northeast, to get lost with my poor people who are waiting for me and need a brother who stays with them, a "sign" of the presence of a Father who he loves us in an extraordinary way and desires the salvation of all". In July, he was in Uruçui. He remained there until the end of 1992. From 1st January 1993, he was superior in the parish of Santa Rita / Tibiri for 5 years. In July 1998 he moved to the Center for Missionary Animation and Formation in Teresina, to then move on to the parish of Timon, as bursar of the community.

On 1st January 2002, Father Antonio was once again assigned to the Italian province. He was first assigned to the Pesaro community to coordinate ongoing formation initiatives, but ten months later he was back in Casavatore for missionary animation. In February 2003, he had to undergo surgery for a triple heart bypass. In October 2006, he was again assigned to Brazil and the parish of Ceilândia Norte for a few months, and then definitively to Duque de Caxias, until September 2008. The following month he was in the parish-mission of Porto Velho, where he would remain for five years. In May 2010, to "solemnise" his 50 years of priesthood, he obtained permission for a "4-month halt" to visit some significant places in Europe (Fatima, Santiago de Compostela, Lyon, Lisieux

and Paris), to celebrate on 29th June his Golden Jubilee of priesthood in the cathedral of Caserta, and, in August, to make “a pilgrimage” which leads him to visit the 6 Brazilian parishes in which he lived for 43 years as a missionary.

In July 2013, he was at the Ambrosoli Center in Milan for treatment. After a few weeks in the “Luigi Sacco” hospital for cardiology, in September he went to Casavatore for a period of rest. He hoped to be able to recover fully and return to Brazil, but in October 2014 he “retired” to the rectory of Lucca. He never stood still: between ministry activities and animation meetings, he still managed to fill his days.

In September 2020, he returned to the community of Milan for treatment. At the end of 2021, he retired to the Fratel Fiorini Center in Castel D’Azzano (Verona). He was at the last stage and ready to embark for paradise, an event which took place on 27th April 2023, due to a severe respiratory crisis. On the 29th, his funeral was celebrated in the Comboni community of Castel D’Azzano. His remains were taken to Caserta where on 30th April, a funeral mass was celebrated in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. The mayor of Caserta, Carlo Marino, was also present and asked to speak: «Father Antonio was a great Casertan. He was a tenacious but cheerful man. He knew how to make everyone love him. His love for the last and the poorest, to whom he dedicated his whole life, represents an example for the entire Caserta community ». (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Juan, of Fr. Goicochea Calderón Juan Armando (PE); Enrico, of Fr. Mario Malacrida (I).

THE BROTHERS: António, of Fr. Inácio Babo de Macedo (P); Gianfranco, of Fr. Eugenio Ziliani (TGB); Manuel, of Fr. Agostinho Carvalho Alves (P); Sergio Miguel, of Fr. Villaseñor Gálvez José de Jesús (C).

THE SISTERS: Roser, of Fr. Domingo Aynés Campdepadrós (†); Alesandrina, of Fr. Luigi Sala (I).