

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

823

November 2023

Perpetual professions

Sc. Gabriel Panganito Hilário (MO)	Nampula (MO)	10.10.2023
Sc. Carlos Fernando (MO)	Nampula (MO)	10.10.2023

Ordinations

Fr. Nelson da Costa Mariosse (MO)	Nampula (Mwahivire) (MO)	14.10.2023
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Holy Redeemer Guild

November	01 – 15 SS	16 – 30 T
December	01 – 15 PE	16 – 31 U

Prayer intentions

November

That the memory of our deceased sisters and brothers, ancestors, friends and relatives may make us more aware of the attractiveness of the communion of saints as an anticipation of the joy that awaits us. *Let us pray.*

December

That we may learn to promote and live a more human economy, which places at its centre the most fragile people and those in need of a welcome and assistance, and progressively eliminates the wide and growing inequalities that exist in the world. *Let us pray*

Comboni liturgical calendar

NOVEMBER

Commemoration of deceased confreres, relatives and benefactors	Date to be set
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DECEMBER

Saint Francis Xavier, priest, <i>Patron of the missions</i>	Feast
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Meaningful anniversaries

NOVEMBER

21	Madonna del Quinche	Ecuador
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DECEMBER

1	Blessed Clementina Alfonsina Anuarite Nengapeta, virgin and martyr	Congo
3	Saint Francis Xavier, priest, <i>Patron of the missions, Feast</i>	Mozambique Spain
12	Our Lady of Guadalupe, <i>Patron of the Americas</i>	Mexico

CURIA

The Feast of St Daniel Comboni at the General Curia in Rome

On the evening of 10th October, the communities of the General Curia celebrated together the feast of Saint Daniel Comboni. The Mass was presided over by Father Elias Sindjalim Essognimam, General Assistant. The celebration was attended by some diocesan priests, friends, benefactors, representatives of the Comboni missionaries and the Sisters belonging to the communities where we offer our ministerial service. A very significant presence was that of the Sudanese Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Archbishop Emeritus of Khartoum (Sudan) since 2016.

Father Arnaldo Baritussio introduced the solemn celebration, twenty years after the canonisation of Saint Daniel Comboni, which took place in October 2003, emphasising the fact that Comboni, with his canonisation, has become a point of reference for the entire Catholic Church, not only for the institutes he founded. He then highlighted Comboni's role as 'a prophet of the mission', and addressed a strong invitation to all those present to have 'the eyes of the prophet', like those of Comboni, so as to be able to 'see beyond' and have always a 'broad vision of reality'.

In his detailed homily, Father Elias reflected on the sanctity of Daniele Comboni, underlining three aspects, linked to three 'anniversaries' that the Institute celebrates this year. 1) Passion for God: 20 years after Comboni's canonisation, one cannot fail to remember his profound faith and his ability to always contemplate Christ crucified. 2) Passion for suffering humanity: 150 years after the homily pronounced by Comboni in Khartoum (1873) and reflecting on some passages of that 'programmatic text', one cannot help but be struck by the love that the Founder had for the Africans and by his total dedication in trying to do everything possible to bring them to Christ, "who died for them also". 3) Great love for the Institute and sense of belonging: in the Centenary of the painful division of

the Institute (decreed on 27th July 1923 and finally resolved on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of 1979) one cannot fail to remember the passion that Comboni cultivated for unity among his missionaries. After the Eucharist, there was a fraternal agape, characterised by joy and communion.

DEUTSCHSPRACHIGE PROVINZ – DSP

Spiritual Exercises

The Province's annual retreat took place from 6th to 12th October in the Milland-Bressanone house. 15 confreres participated. Also present was Father Josef Pfanner, 96 years old, the 'senior member' of the Province. The theme of the retreat was 'The sanctity of Daniel Comboni'. The retreat was conducted by Father Donato Benedetti, from the community of Limone. With two meditations each day and a short homily during the Eucharistic celebration, Father Donato was able to arouse our interest in the theme, based on various episodes of Comboni's missionary life. The Founder wanted his missionaries to be fervent, cheerful, and committed: "Holy and capable... first of all 'holy', that is, completely alien to sin or any offence against God, and also humble. But this is not enough: it requires charity to make the subjects capable" (*Writings* 6655). The hour of Eucharistic adoration every day and the silence maintained during the spiritual exercises contributed to creating an atmosphere of reflection and prayer. On 13th October, we all went on a trip to Limone, the birthplace of our Founder, where we were welcomed with exceptional warmth by the community. Our heartfelt thanks go to Father Donato and the community of Milland. (*Father Alois Eder, mccj*)

Visitors from Rome

General Assistant Father Luigi Codianni and General Secretary of Formation Father José de Jesús Villaseñor ('Chuche') visited the DSP from 17th to 19th October, in particular, the community of Graz/Messendorf, which since the beginning of October has been a 'formation community', with the assignment of four scholastics. Father Karl Peinhopf, previously a formator at the scholasticate of Casavatore (Naples), has been appointed community formator.

Of the four scholastics assigned, so far only Daniel Osuna has arrived from Mexico. We hope that the other three – from Kenya, Mozambique, and DR Congo – will arrive soon. Unfortunately, it is very difficult and complicated to obtain a visa for students from Africa.

With the four scholastics and the other six confreres of the community, the old house in Graz (opened in 1908 and renovated a few years ago)

will be completely full. This means that this formation community will be able to welcome a new group of scholastics only when those now present have finished their courses and leave their places to new arrivals.

One thing we would like to underline: the local community of Graz greatly appreciates this new community aspect.

All the confreres of the community had the opportunity to speak individually with the two Fathers who came from Rome. Together with the Provincial Superior, Father Hubert Grabmann, and other members of the community, Father Gigi and Father Chucho visited the city's Faculty of Theology and met the Dean, the Dean of Studies, and the professor responsible for students coming from abroad. The meeting was very cordial and enriching. The faculty is happy that the Comboni Missionaries will be sending a group of their students to the University of Graz. The excellent personal relationship between students and professors and the high quality of the studies – with the possibility of numerous specialisations – were all highly appreciated by the two visitors. (*Father Hubert Josef Grabmann, mccj*)

EGYPT-SUDAN

Sudan – Solemnity of Daniel Comboni in a minor key

In Sudan, this year, the feast of San Daniele Comboni was held on a smaller scale, given the continuation of the war. In El Obeid, the celebration was not held in the cathedral – in the city centre, in fact, shootings were taking place during those days – but at the 'Saint Daniel Comboni' Centre, in the Rukab area, where some young people received confirmation. Other parishes outside the state of Khartoum, however, celebrated the solemnity as usual, imploring the intercession of Saint Daniele Comboni for the gift of peace in the country he loved so much.

Egypt & Lebanon – Apprehension due to events in the Holy Land

In the aftermath of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Sinai, the situation in the Holy Land has been drastically transformed, with a rapid increase in tension and armed clashes. This created – and still creates – great concern in the region, with very polarised opinions on both sides of the conflict. Both Egypt and Lebanon, which border the two warring countries, are viewing the situation with apprehension. We need to pray and have others pray as well for much-needed peace.

The new academic year at Dar Comboni

The 'Dar Comboni' Institute, a centre specialising in Arab Studies, has fully entered the new academic year 2023-2024. There are 9 first-year students and 17 second-year students. Another 15 students are doing individual

courses privately. Worth noting is the presence of 15 diocesan and religious priests from various African countries, sponsored by a project of the Catholic Foundation 'Aid to the Church in Need' (4 from the first year and 11 from the second). Among the students, there are also two Comboni students and a Comboni Sister (all three in their second year).

ERITREA

Perpetual vows and diaconate of Biyanu Habtat Nuguse

On 29th July 2023, the Comboni Family in Eritrea had the joy of attending the perpetual profession of the scholastic Biyanu Habtat, in the chapel of the delegation headquarters in Asmara. Present were the Comboni missionaries, family members, relatives and friends of Biyanu, and some members of other religious institutes.

The Eucharist was concelebrated by almost all the Comboni fathers present in Eritrea and presided over by Father Gaim Haileselassie, superior of the delegation, who centred his homily on the chosen Gospel reading from *John* 15, presenting religious consecration as a being “grafted into Christ, like branches into the vine”, and “established to go and bear fruit that endures”. The mass was followed by an abundant breakfast. Then, around mid-day, everyone gathered for a real banquet, overflowing with joy and a sense of gratitude.

Less than two months later, on 17th September, Biyanu was ordained a deacon by the Archbishop of Asmara, Menghesteab Tesfamariam, mccc, in the parish of Sembel Kidane Mhret, where he served. Before the Eucharistic celebration began, the *Mahlet Zelelit* (song that priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church perform during the night to praise God) was sung, which was followed by a solemn ceremony, with a good number of concelebrating priests, many faithful, family members, relatives of Biyanu, numerous students of the Theological Institute, and many religious men and women. After emphasising how ordained ministers are called to live their lives for God and for his people, the Archbishop invited the new deacon to become a good shepherd of God's flock.

Father Gaim thanked God for Biyanu's gift to our Institute, his family for his generosity and all the faithful of the Sembel parish for their lively and joyful participation in the celebration.

ESPAÑA

Missionary Animation at the 2023 Book Fairs

As in previous years, the Province of Spain, with Mundo Negro Publishing House, was present in several book fairs organised in various locations,

from the end of April to mid-October. Mundo Negro P.H. was present in nine cities: Valencia, Granada, Valladolid, León, Guadalajara, Salamanca, Madrid, Palencia and Murcia. At each fair, the organising association or the municipality makes stands available for the display and sale of books. This space is a privileged place for missionary animation, where readers of our magazines, family members, friends, benefactors, and other interested people come to ask questions, get information and possibly purchase books.

During this 'campaign' that has just ended, we sold over 2,000 books from our publishing house; some Comboni missionaries, scholastics and volunteers close to our missionary animation activities also collaborated. We were able to present eight new books that we included in our 2022-23 catalogue and they were well received. In the coming years, the province will continue to repeat this type of activity which enriches and nourishes our missionary animation.

ETHIOPIA

Introductory Course for new arrivals

Lasting from 19th to 22nd September, the Comboni Missionaries and the Comboni Sisters organised a course for the missionaries who had just arrived in Ethiopia. The course took was held at the Provincial House of the Comboni Missionaries in Addis Ababa. The course was also open to other Institutes, through the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS). Five Comboni missionaries participated, as well as two Comboni Sisters, Sisters from the Congregation of Sant'Orsola of Lucca, and one Sister from the Contemplative Missionaries of Charles de Foucauld. The workshop began on Tuesday with a prayer led by Father Juan Antonio González Núñez, mccj, Apostolic Vicar of Hawassa, who was one of the facilitators. After welcoming everyone, Father Asfaha Yohannes, Provincial Superior, emphasised how difficult it is for those who do not know the history of Ethiopia well to understand the customs of its people, who are very religious and very attached to their own traditions. (*Father André Mbala Topa, mccj*).

KENYA

Kenya launches the celebration of its Golden Jubilee

On 24th September 2023, the Comboni missionaries working in Kenya launched the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of their presence in the country. The icing on the cake was the diaconal ordination of Muia Jacob Nzomo and Mutinda Joshua Musyoki.

The event took place at the 'Holy Cross' parish of Kacheliba, in the diocese of Kitale. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Msgr. Henry Juma Odonya, bishop of the diocese of Kitale. The double consecration marked 50 years of existence of the parish and of the Comboni presence in Kenya.

An immense crowd attended and actively participated in the Mass. Lively singing and dancing marked the celebration. The large joint choir of the missions of Kacheliba and Amakuriat enlivened everything. Numerous members of the Comboni Family and other religious institutes were present, as well as priests and lay people of the diocese. Local government leaders and members of parliament were also widely represented.

In his homily, Bishop Henry thanked the Comboni missionaries for their tireless and generous service. Furthermore, he prayed and asked God to bless the Comboni Missionaries with new vocations also from Kacheliba. Finally, he urged the new deacons to carry out their ministry with faith, zeal and commitment.

Father Andrew Wanjohi, Provincial Superior, thanked the leaders and the entire Christian community of Kacheliba for the excellent organisation of the celebrations. He also praised their continuous support for the training of Comboni students who are regularly sent to gain mission experience at Kacheliba mission. At the same time, he challenged them to willingly accept that their children join the Comboni missionaries in the work of evangelisation.

Adding joy to the celebration was the presence of Father Tomás Herreros Baroja and Father Filipe Miguel Oliveira Resende, who came from Italy and Portugal respectively to participate in the great event. Father Tomás worked for a long time in the Amakuriat mission, while Father Filipe served Kacheliba mission for a number of years.

The previous day, Joshua and Jacob had made their perpetual religious profession during a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Father Filipe, during which Father Andrew Wanjohi accepted their vows on behalf of Father Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General.

The Jubilee Year will end on 10th October 2024. To 'solemnise' the year, several events have been planned that will take place in the missions and parishes where the Comboni Missionaries have worked and still work. Bishops and a large group of other collaborators will be involved.

Worthy of note was the presence at the inaugural celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of Father Sireu Ang'Irotum Abraham, a Comboni missionary originally from Kacheliba, ordained a priest in 2016 and now engaged in missionary work in the diocese of Marsabit, in north-eastern Kenya. How could he not have been there, since he is a splendid confirmation

that the work of the Comboni missionaries in the area was not in vain? In him, Comboni's dream of "saving Africa with Africans" is a reality. (*Father Andrew Bwalya, mccj*)

ITALIA

The Padua community in the footsteps of Comboni

On Sunday, 8th October 2023, the Comboni community of Padua, including family, friends, volunteers and collaborators (in all, around fifty people), went on a pilgrimage to the most significant Comboni places: the house where he was born in Limone sul Garda, the Mother House in Verona, with the 'Comboni Chapel' and the African Museum, and, finally, to Valpolicella, where Comboni had good friends. Purpose of the pilgrimage: to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his canonisation, which took place in Rome on 5th October 2003.

There were three moments of 'Combonian' prayer: first on the bus, then the Holy Mass in the house where he was born, and, finally, a prolonged moment of listening to the Word of God and some significant passages from the Founder's *Writings* in the chapel of the Mother House, which houses the urn with Comboni's few mortal remains.

The journey was enriched by some life testimonies. Father Roberto Ardini, present with seven members of his family, spoke of his long mission in DR Congo, but also of the services rendered to the sick brothers in Verona, underlining how "the heart of the mission is to weave relationships of affection and respect with people to whom you are sent."

Three mothers of Comboni Missionaries told their beautiful 'stories': Marcellina, mother of Msgr. Christian Carlassare, Miledy, mother of Father Diego Dalle Corbonare, and Carmela, mother of Brother Simone Bauce. Three touching testimonies of their meeting with Comboni through their children, thus finding themselves involved in his missionary passion.

It was an intense day, spent 'in the company of Comboni'. The hearts of those present were full of joy and hope, and their common desire to continue their support was renewed. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj*)

MÉXICO

75 Years of Comboni Presence

Having arrived in Mexico for the first time in 1948, as they opened a work camp in Baja California, this year the Comboni missionaries celebrated with profound gratitude the 75th anniversary of their presence in this nation. To solemnise the closing of this anniversary, on 14th October, numerous confreres gathered first at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe,

a well-known Marian sanctuary located on Mount Tepeyac in Mexico City. On the 15th, however, they met again at the headquarters of the continental Comboni Novitiate in Xochimilco, also in the capital.

Monsignor Jaime Rodríguez Salazar, the first Mexican Comboni bishop, presided over the celebrations, while Father Rafael Güitrón Torres, Provincial Superior, enlightened us with his homilies and reflections.

Also present were two General Assistants, Father David Costa Domingues and Brother Alberto Lamana, as well as Father Juan Diego Calderón Vargas, provincial of Central America, and Father Enrique Sánchez González, former Provincial of Mexico.

The celebrations were held on the novitiate hill of Xochimilco and took place in a truly festive atmosphere. About two thousand friends, coming from the 13 Comboni communities, also sang, to the rhythm of mandolins and flutes, the 75th anniversary anthem, composed by Father Jesús Lobato. For the occasion, Msgr. Andrés Vargas Peña, the first Bishop of Xochimilco, honoured us with his presence and also gave us his blessing. We all returned home with grateful hearts and with the desire to continue to live out our missionary vocation intensely in the style of Saint Daniel Comboni. (*Father Ramón Orendáin, mccj*)

POLONIA

European CLM: Assembly of Coordinators

On 12th and 13th October, the Assembly of Representatives of the Comboni Lay Missionaries (LMC) from the various provinces of Europe was held in Krakow: Portugal (1), Spain (1), Germany (1), Italy (3), Poland (3). Also present were Alberto de la Portilla, coordinator of the Central Committee of the CLM, and the Comboni missionaries Father Arlindo Pinto, reference person of the General Council for the CLM, and Father Adam Zagaja, reference person of the Comboni Superiors of Europe.

The meeting had been postponed several times, first due to COVID-19 and then to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the refugee crisis it generated. We finally managed to find a few days to come together.

It was a great joy for all the participants to be able to meet in person. It was a simple meeting. We felt at home at all times thanks to the wonderful welcome received from the CLM and the Polish Comboni Missionaries. On 12th October, with everyone present, we began a shared analysis of the reality of each of our groups.

First of all, we had time to deepen our understanding of our CLM vocation and the life commitment it entails, rediscovering what we are called to as missionaries in Europe.

We also had the opportunity to reflect on our responsibility in mission outside our continent. Being involved in the mission wherever we are at a given moment does not take anything away from the other responsibilities we have at a global level, starting with our international communities present in Africa or America and everything that has to do with our international belonging. (*Alberto de la Portilla, Coordinator of the CLM Central Commission*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Alfredo Neres (24.03.1939 – 02.10.2023)

Behind the tall and slim physique, there was a man with a steely temperament, a frontier missionary, intrepid and with unshakable faith. An exemplary Comboni missionary, who spent more than half his life in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He was born in Montes da Senhora (Proença-a-Nova, Portugal), on 24th March 1939. His parents had married in 1930 and prayed every day to have a missionary son: 41 years later they saw their prayer answered with the priestly ordination of Father Alfredo. His vocation began on the day of the feast of the Ascension: the Gospel (*Mk 16.15-20*) touched him deeply and Father Alfredo made the decision to become a missionary even though, as he says, “I didn’t yet know what it meant exactly. I only had the limited experience of announcing the Gospel at the Ferreira Borges Commercial School, where I studied in the evenings: when there were free hours, we went into a room, read the New Testament and invited the young people who passed by to join us.” After the seminary in Viseu and Maia, he moved to the novitiate in Gozzano. He made his first profession on 9th September 1967 and went to the Venegono scholasticate.

In his second year of theology, he was sent to Brescia as assistant to the minor seminarians, with four other scholastics. Each of them followed a group of seminarians. At the end of the year, his superiors wanted to send him away, saying that he was not “cut out to be a priest.” But three scholastics participated for the first time in the General Chapter of 1969 as observers and Alfredo, despite not yet having renewed his vows, was chosen to represent the Iberian scholastics. On 9th September, the day of the renewal, he communicated to the Vicar General, Father Sina, that he wanted to renew his vows. Father Sina, who knew nothing of what had happened in Brescia, admitted him to the renewal of vows, together with the other two.

Having completed his fourth year of theology in Rome, he was ordained a priest in Paço de Arcos on 8th April 1971. After his priestly ordination, Father Alfredo was sent to Maia, where he worked for five years in the field of vocations and missionary animation (1971-1976). Later, he was sent to Zaire (now

DR Congo), to Ngilima, in the diocese of Dungu. Again, he remained there for five years and then went to Rome to prepare to be a novice master in Portugal. It was while he was in Rome, in December 1981, that he became involved with the Charismatic Renewal (CR) through a group of the Community of Mary that met in the crypt of the chapel of the house. "It was in that group that the gifts that the Spirit had granted me were recognised, those of healing and liberation. Six months later, I came to Santarém and the bishop, with the authorisation of the provincial, appointed me diocesan assistant of the CR and exorcist of the diocese." He remained in Santarém until 1990, when he was again sent to DR Congo, this time to Ango, a very large parish which at the time counted 103 villages and 16,700 km².

In 2006, after a course in Rome, he was sent to Kinshasa as a formator of scholastics and remained there for ten years.

Sent to Isiro, he initially worked in the parish, then in Magambe, in the parish of Sant'Anna, as director of the spirituality centre. Shortly afterwards he took on the role of assistant novice master.

In 2021 he returned home for holidays, but, at the beginning of August, he had a heart attack and underwent several bypasses. A stroke during his convalescence forced him to take to his bed where he experienced his identification with the Christ of the Passion and the Cross. He died in Viseu on 2nd October 2023. (*Padre José Rebelo, mccj*)

Father Ezio Filippi (10.04.1933 – 10.10.2023)

Father Ezio was born in Albiano (Trento) on 10th April 1933. He did his novitiate in Florence and continued his studies in Verona and Venegono. After his priestly ordination on 14th March 1959, he remained in Italy for two years and in 1961 he was assigned to Uganda, where he carried out his long missionary service until his return to Italy.

A letter from Father Ezio, written in April 2022 to the periodical *Communion and Mission*, of the Diocesan Missionary Center of Trento, helps us to briefly retrace his 'Ugandan history' and his youthful years.

"My dear friends, I am writing to send you some news regarding my long missionary life of 59 years already spent in this land of Uganda, a land of 24 martyrs. I am happy, indeed very happy to have imitated a little our holy founder, Daniel Comboni... for the evangelisation of our African loved ones: Jesus died and rose again for them too... Imitating a little the first apostles and Saint Paul in the first evangelisation of the world, after Pentecost, I was able to start two parishes and work in five other missions. I have baptised around 25,000 people including catechumens and children; blessed hundreds of married couples in their marriage; administered forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation to tens of thousands of Christians; I directed endless holy hours of adoration before the Eucharist..."

In 2023, Father Ezio returned to Italy to have a medical checkup. Father Renzo Piazza remembers: "Like a good Comboni member, he wanted a quick checkup and then return to Uganda despite having reached the age of 90. But a few days in Brescia were enough to understand his condition."

"He needed particular care and attention and, for this reason, he was diverted to the community of Castel d'Azzano, where he arrived on the morning of Friday, 6th October. We met in his room to exchange a few words... He told me of a journey from Kampala to Kalongo in which he had lost control of the car, but which, after invoking the Madonna, had ended well. He added other episodes that occurred during the war, with the rebels who terrorised the population, sacked the mission, burned the cars, and took the children away by force... He also felt protected by the snakes, because in the midst of the tall grass, the cobras were sometimes hiding. 'I have always been helped,' was his comment. Father Ezio stayed in Castel d'Azzano for a short time, not even 24 hours. On the morning of Saturday 7 October, he was taken to the emergency room, where he remained for just over 24 hours. On Sunday morning a place was found in the ward and in the evening, after the party with the relatives, I was able to visit him. It was the second and last meeting I had with him. I was surprised by his serenity."

He died on 10 October at the Borgo Roma hospital in Verona. A fatal attack of malaria had affected his already weakened cardiovascular situation. His funeral was celebrated on Thursday 12 October in the community of Castel d'Azzano. After the funeral, the remains were transferred to his hometown.

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Teklemariam, of Fr Alazar Abraha (ER); Boniface, of Fr Gbama Nsusu Boniface Junior (E); Teodoro, of Fr Castro Sánchez Jhon Jani (EC).

THE BROTHERS: Mario, of Fr Alois Deflorian (PE); Giacomo, of Fr Domenico Andriollo (I).

THE SISTERS: Liutgard, of Bro Kuno Stößer (PE); Assunta, of Fr Luigi Casagrande (MZ).

THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY: Germana Tosi.