

# Familia Comboniana

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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824

December 2023



**HAPPY CHRISTMAS**

## Perpetual professions

Dc. Biyanu Habtat Nuguse (ER)	Asmara (ER)	29.07.2023
Dc. Tekle Melaku Wolde (ET)	Addis Ababa (ET)	16.11.2023
Dc. Dario Ruben E. M. Tabasse Taramboui (RCA)	Donia (TCH)	17.11.2023
Br. Michael Avaga (UG)	Mbuya (U)	26.11.2023

## Ordinations

Fr. Tanga Tamirat Tegegn (ET)	Soddo (ET)	28.10.2023
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## Holy Redeemer Guild

December	01 – 15 PE	16 – 31 U
January	01 – 15 A	16 – 31 BR

## Prayer intentions

### December 2023

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.*

### January 2024

That there may be among us a growing awareness that it is in fraternity and solidarity that we build up peace, guarantee justice and overcome personal, social, and global crises. *Let us pray.*

## Comboni liturgical calendar

### DECEMBER

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

### DICEMBRE

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	The Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, <i>Patron of the Americas</i>	Mexico

## **Specialisations**

On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023, Father Sohouénou Cakpo Edènan Raoul was awarded a Licence in Moral Theology by the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy (Milan), defending the thesis “Cultures, religions and fraternity: The Challenge of Fraternity in the Context of the Cultural and Religious Pluralism of Benin”. Relator: Don Maurizio Chiodi. The final evaluation was *Magna cum Laude*. Congratulation to Father Sohouénou.

## CURIA

### **Annual reunion of the group “Tutti Fratelli”**

“Our experience of the Synod”. This was the interesting theme of the annual meeting of the group of religious Brother “Tutti Fratelli” which was held on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, at the Comboni Generalate in Rome. Taking part were about 70 Brothers from 15 religious institutes present in Rome to reflect together on the impact which the synodal process is having on the various aspects of the vocation of the Brothers. Among the participants were ten Superiors General.

The central part of the meeting consisted of a round table with interventions by three members who took part in the Synod on Synodality, two Brothers and one Priest: Bro. Mark Hilton, Superior General of the Sacred Heart Brothers, Bro. Ernesto Sánchez, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, and Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries.

The speakers presented the theme starting with how they lived the synod experience and underlining the elements that struck them most: the central role of Fraternity as a fundamental element for building community; the methodology used, very focused on mutual listening; discernment as an aspect that must accompany all the processes of the Church and the prophetic value of religious life as an element to be cultivated.

A persistent issue that continues to cause concern is the low visibility of the Brothers in the Church and the fact that little is known about this vocation. Furthermore, it is noted with some concern that a large number of Brothers are abandoning religious life and that the demand for this type of consecrated life is decreasing significantly.

“Tutti Fratelli”, a group promoted by the Union of Superiors General, has, since 2010, brought together Brothers from different institutes to reflect, on topics of common interest as well as on the vocation of the Brother in the Church.

The group has also promoted some initiatives in the various areas of formation. (*Fratel Alberto Lamana, mccj*)

## CURIA – GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR FINANCE

### **Annual meeting of the Financial Council**

The meeting of the Financial Council was held at the Generalate in Rome from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November. Continental representatives, technical advisors, and members of the General Economate participated. Among the participants was Father Pietro Ciuciulla, internal auditor of the General Administration and managing director of the Nigrizia Onlus Foundation in Verona (Italy).

Physically absent were Fr. Philip Zema who is also an auditor and provincial bursar (Togo-Ghana-Benin), who participated via Zoom, and Father Luigi Fernando Codianni, Assistant General, who was on an official visit to the Comboni province of Malawi/Zambia.

The most important topics discussed over the course of these days were: the analysis of the 2022 consolidated financial statements and the economic situation of the General Administration, updated to November 2023; proposals for the end of the year and estimates for 2024; reflection on the funds being established; in-depth information on the Institute's internal audit service and the report forms; evaluation and planning of the continental assemblies of bursars and training courses for scholasticates/CIF (International Brother Centres) and new bursars. Finally, the planning of the Treasurer's office for 2024 was made, highlighting objectives and strategies, as well as drawing up a calendar of activities.

The Economic Council meets three times a year: it is now standard practice that only the November meeting must be attended in person. The council is made up of the General Treasurer, who is responsible for it, the other members of the General Economate, four councillors representing continental representatives and two technical councillors. Its tasks cover different areas, from accounting control to the verification of administrative and management procedures, from the preparation of budgets and final balance sheets to the auditing of accounts, from the indication of economic planning choices to the study of the financial problems of the Institute and the global financial context.

The next meeting will be held online in January 2024 with the aim of analysing the estimates of scholasticates and CIF.

## BRASIL

### **Daniel's dream**

*Daniel's Dream - A Story of Humanity and faith in the Heart of Africa* is a book written by Wilson Marques and published by the Carlo Ubbiali

Association in collaboration with the Comboni Spirituality Group (GEC) of São Luís, Maranhão, Brazil. It is a book written mainly for children and teenagers, in simple language and with many illustrations. It was released on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Dreaming, believing, realising... Is it possible for a dream to be so desired that it becomes reality? Is it really so real that you can't tell the difference between what is a dream and what is reality? The boy Gino, one of the main characters of this story, relives the dream of a great Catholic missionary, Daniel Comboni, who was once a child dreamer.

Since he was 10 years old, Daniele had dreamed of going to Africa to learn about new cultures and new peoples. But, above all, to share joys, sufferings and dreams with children. And then, as an adult, having become a priest, Daniele Comboni realised his childhood dream of going to Africa. There, in an unknown land full of challenges, he begins to realise other new dreams.

Reading these exciting pages, written with mastery by the famous writer Wilson Marques, the young reader, like the boys Gino and Daniele, starts to dream, but with his eyes open! After all, it is typical of those who open up to life to imagine and discover what their mission is today, and what they want to do when they grow up. Perhaps the time has come for the young reader and dreamer to cultivate the gifts and abilities that he has within himself. But, above all, to show courage and audacity, so that he can make a difference in a society where many adults stop dreaming.  
*(Father Claudio Bombieri, mccj)*

## EGYPT-SUDAN

### **Cordi Jesu – Three years of chaplaincy for university students**

The chaplaincy for university students, located in the “Cordi Jesu” rectory, celebrated its first three years of life on 27<sup>th</sup> October. The celebration was an opportunity for African students, coming from over a dozen nations, to come together and give thanks for their journey of faith.

There are numerous university students present in public and private universities in Cairo. For many of them, “Cordi Jesu” is the only place where they can pray as Catholics, in English and other languages. The chaplaincy, a true centre of university pastoral care, stands out as a highly international community capable of offering these students spiritual formation and the possibility of walking together, in a vast and complex context like that of Cairo, where it would otherwise be easy to get lost. Father João Dinis, the chaplain, wants the community to continue its journey of

faith and to grow more and more in its being a “family”, where everyone takes care of their neighbour.

### **Visit by Brother Alberto Lamana to the Province**

Brother Alberto Lamana, Assistant General and reference advisor for APDESAM, paid a visit to the province of Egypt-Sudan lasting from 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Due to the war in Sudan, he had to limit his visit to the five communities in Egypt (Aswan, Cordi Jesu, Helwan, Sakakini and Zamalek), where he had the opportunity to speak with each of the confreres and meet each community for a moment of ongoing formation.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> November, Brother Alberto visited the Helwan cemetery, where the confreres who died in the province are buried, including those from the very first periods of our presence, such as Father Daniel Sorur and Father Casimiro Giacomelli. On Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, he led a day of retreat for the four communities present in the metropolis of Cairo, recalling the reflections made by the Chapter and the themes of the Synod (communion, participation, and mission).

On Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> November, he connected online with communities in Beirut, El Obeid, Port Sudan and Kosti. With these communities, there has been a very enriching sharing of the experiences that each of them is going through (unfortunately the war is far from over in Sudan and also threatens other countries in the Middle East).

Brother Alberto brought everyone the greetings and encouragement of the General Administration as well as appreciation for the commitment of all the confreres who face the current situations of uncertainty with missionary faith and pastoral generosity.

His visit ended with a fraternal moment of prayer and agape, during which almost all the confreres present in Cairo were able to thank him for his sharing and his precious inputs offered to the province, which proudly walks on the same dust that was walked on by our Founder, Saint Daniel Comboni.

The entire Province is grateful to Brother Alberto for his visit and reminds him of the ancient Nilotic proverb: «Whoever drinks from the waters of the Nile is destined to return again». (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mccj*).

SPAIN

### **Christmas Cribs**

The Mundo Negro African Museum in Madrid has opened the doors of the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of Nativity Scenes of the World. This year there are 210 nativity scenes that show the cultural creativity of many cultures in

representing the mystery of the Nativity with such great variety in the materials used: wood, fabric, clay, stone...

The Mundo Negro African Museum is no stranger to the reality that surrounds us and, in fact, in the exhibition, there are references to ignored wars: Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. The hope is that 2024 will be a year of peace for these nations.

Among the nativity scenes, the one from the Democratic Republic of Congo represents the daily life of a village in this country. The pieces of the composition were created by Bro. Duilio Plazzotta, a Comboni missionary.

The display will be open each day until 7<sup>th</sup> January from 5 pm to 8 pm. It will be closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Happy Christmas. (*Father Jaime Calvera. mccj*).

## ETHIOPIA

### **A new priest**

On Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> October, the Catholic parish of Saint Michael, in Hembecho, managed by the Capuchin friars of the apostolic vicariate of Soddo, in southern Ethiopia, was in festive mode to host the priestly ordination of one of its sons: Tanga Tamirat Tegegn, born on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1986, in Tiyo Hembecho. The morning rain did not discourage the faithful who, showing off their festive or traditional clothes, soon arrived and filled the large square church, built around a huge altar supported by twelve columns. Later the sun also appeared to embellish the event with its radiant light.

Presiding over the Eucharist and conferring the ordination was Bishop Tsegaye Keneni, apostolic vicar of Soddo, surrounded by forty priests (from the local clergy of the apostolic vicariates of Soddo and Hawassa and missionaries from various institutes). Also present were some Sisters and two deacons. The liturgy, celebrated in Amharic and Wolaytta, lasted for over three hours.

Father Tamirat chose *Luke 10:1-11* – “the mission of the seventy-two disciples” – as the Gospel for his ordination.

Four points were touched by Bishop Tsegaye in the homily: God always calls people from within a family; the new priest was ordained to be at the service of the Eucharist, which is the true centre of Christian life; his ministry represents the local Church of Soddo in the mission of the universal Church of Christ; the faithful must support him with their prayers.

Father Tamirat's parents "presented" their son for ordination, while Father Asfaha Yohannis, provincial superior of the Comboni Missionaries in Ethiopia, helped the newly ordained to vest in his liturgical vestments.

At the end of the ceremony, Father Asfaha, after expressing his gratitude to God, the bishop, Father Tamirat and his parents, to the parish and all those present, took the opportunity to evoke the life and charism of Saint Daniel Comboni.

The new priest also thanked everyone, speaking in English, Amharic and Wolaytta, and many of those present came up to greet him and "bless" him with many gifts, including money and a young bull. Lunch followed, during which tasty traditional dishes were served.

Father Tamirat concluded his theological training in the Lima scholasticate at the beginning of this year. In early November he will return to Peru, where he was assigned by the general council, to carry out his first missionary ministry. (*Father José Vieira, mccj*)

### **Perpetual profession and diaconate**

The scholastic Melaku Wolde Tekle made his final profession in the Institute on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The profession took place in the "San Daniele Comboni" postulancy at Asko, Addis Ababa. The solemn celebration was attended by twelve priests, ten Comboni Missionaries and two Diocesan priests of the Eparchy of Emdibir. Melaku's family and friends and some Comboni missionary Sisters were also present. The celebration was presided over by the provincial superior, Father Asfaha Yohannes. Before the Eucharistic celebration, the superior of the community, Father Joseph Anane, welcomed all the participants and expressed his joy at being able to host such a great event that motivates the postulants in their vocational discernment.

In his introduction to the ceremony, the provincial superior thanked the Lord for the gift granted to the Ethiopian Province through Melaku's decision to commit himself definitively to the Comboni Institute, pointing out that Melaku had begun his journey of training in the same postulancy where he was now preparing to complete it.

After the homily, Melaku professed his definitive commitment to the Institute through the vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. Immediately afterwards, he was given a crucifix.

The celebration was splendidly animated by the postulancy choir. After Mass, there was a time for photos and dinner.

Three days later, on Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> November, Melaku was ordained a deacon by Bishop Lesanuchristos Matheos, eparch of Bahirdar-Dessie, in the parish church of Genete-Selam Kidanemihret, in Bahirdar.



The celebration, in the Ethiopian Catholic rite, was attended by Comboni Missionaries, Sisters, local clergy, Jesuits, Vincentians and faithful from the parish.

During his moving homily, Bishop Lesanuchristos highlighted the role of the deacon as a “minister of service” and reminded Melaku of the great responsibility that comes with this position, urging him to be a beacon of the love, compassion and service of Christ to his brothers and sisters and to the Christian community.

On behalf of the Comboni family, Father Asfaha Yohannes expressed his deepest gratitude to Bishop Lesanuchristos and to all the participants who offered their prayers and support to Melaku. The new deacon will continue his ministry in Gublak, one of the two missions entrusted to the Comboni Missionaries in the Eparchy of Bahirdar-Dessie.

*(Father Joseph Anane, mcccj, and Father Asfaha Yohannes, mcccj)*

## ITALIA

### **Approval of the Six-Year Plan of the Province**

From 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November, the provincial assembly of the Comboni Missionaries present in Italy was held in Verona. 40 confreres from almost all communities participated (only two did not participate). Present on behalf of the general council was Father Elias Sindjalim Essognimam, general assistant.

The assembly had two objectives: to hear the reports of the provincial superior and the secretariats and to approve the six-year plan.

Before these two specific moments of the assembly, the participants listened as Luca Casarini (an Italian activist known for having been one of the leaders of the Italian anti-global movement, invited to the synod directly by Pope Francis) shared his experience of the synod. His testimony left its mark for its simplicity, but also its clarity and depth, followed by an intense exchange of ideas during questions.

Regarding the two objectives, the provincial and the secretaries presented the activities carried out during the year and future prospects; the six-year plan was approved in all its parts. Now, duly corrected, it will be delivered to the communities - to be presented and used for the review of activities also proposed through the Community Charter - and to the General Council for the necessary approval.

## **COP28 – A campaign of prayer and support for ecological conversion**

The publication of Pope Francis' exhortation *Laudate Deum* (LD) has relaunched the commitment of the entire Catholic world for immediate and effective intervention to combat climate change and its impacts. LD was written in view of COP28 (28<sup>th</sup> United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change), which aims to address three decisive challenges, which are also opportunities for courageous shared choices, worthy of the responsibility entrusted to leaders and negotiators of the countries that will gather in Dubai from 30<sup>th</sup> November to 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023. It is about energy transition, climate justice and the voice of the least important in the negotiations.

Aware of the enormity of these challenges, but also of the need for COP28 to make decisive progress, the Comboni missionaries working in Italy have launched an appeal to negotiators and political leaders to ask all countries to contribute significantly to the success of the Conference. If we remain in the logic of the search for solutions «through the miserable prism of human interests» (Comboni, *Writings* 2742; 1871), there will be no authentic progress. Instead, trusting in the presence of the Risen One in history, in the work of his Spirit that transforms hearts and situations, even when all seems lost, the Comboni Missionaries have launched a prayer campaign throughout COP28, so that the Holy Spirit may accompany negotiators and political leaders, enlighten them, inspire them and support them in this delicate and decisive service to their countries and to all humanity. (cf. <https://www.comboni.org/contenuti/115764>).

### **Pope Francis in Verona**

With great joy, Father Fabio Carlo Baldan, provincial superior of Italy, announced that on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, at 11.00, in an extraordinary press conference held at the bishop's curia, the bishop of Verona, Monsignor Domenico Pompili, announced that «Pope Francis will come to Verona on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024.» It will be his first visit to the region of Veneto. Immediately after his arrival, he will participate in the “*Arena of Peace 2024*”, an event that will bring together ecclesial and civil forces around a series of topics, ranging from peace to disarmament, from integral ecology to migration, as well as employment, democracy, rights and lifestyles.

## MALAWI-ZAMBIA

### **Celebration of the Golden Jubilee**

The celebrations are continuing for the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Comboni missionaries in Malawi, which occurred at the end of 1973 with the arrival of Father Giuseppe Gusmini in the Archdiocese of Blantyre. The following year, the first four parishes in the southeast of Malawi, around the Mount Mulanje massif, were entrusted to the Comboni Missionaries. The celebrations began last August in the diocese of Lilongwe (Malawi).

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, it was the turn of the Comboni Missionaries of the Shire area, in southern Malawi, to celebrate this important anniversary. They did so by inviting to Lirangwe, one of the first missions undertaken in the south of the country, as well as the seat of the first provincial house, Father Luigi Casagrande (still engaged in the mission of Chikowa, in Zambia), who was the first provincial superior when the province of Malawi-Zambia was established in 1984.

The guests of honor were: the Archbishop of Blantyre, Monfort Thomas Mzuza, Father Michael Nyowani Mumba, provincial superior, a member of the Malawian parliament and the local chief. The many Christians from every corner of the parish, from distant chapels and from parishes once managed by the Comboni Missionaries, such as Phalombe, Chiringa, Muloza, Gambula, Mthawira and Chipini, made the occasion a real celebration.

Concelebrating with the archbishop were thirteen Comboni priests. Also present were two Comboni Brothers from Lunzu Technical School, three scholastics and 21 postulants. But, without a doubt, the person most sought after, greeted, and “blessed” with words of profound gratitude was Father Silvio Zanardi, the oldest of the Comboni Missionaries in Malawi, today still working in Lilongwe, but very well known and loved in Lirangwe where he spent many years as parish priest.

Archbishop Mzuza had words of appreciation for the work carried out by the Comboni Missionaries in the archdiocese of Blantyre, starting with the mission of Mulanje, with the “great” - and still remembered - Father Gusmini, followed by many others. He then praised their involvement in important initiatives beyond the scope of the Institute, first of all, the launch of the Inter-congregational Seminary (ICS), which in 2010 became the Inter-congregational Institute (ICI), based in Balaka. For many years this work witnessed the precious commitment of Father Pino Giannini, in collaboration with Montfortian and Carmelite missionaries, all driven by the great dream of having a real philosophical faculty which is today capable

of hosting 130 postulants and Sisters of various religious institutes and congregations.

Saint Daniel Comboni wrote: “The missionary works in an undertaking of the highest merit, but one that is, nonetheless, hard and difficult. He will have to understand that he is a stone hidden under the earth, which will perhaps never come to light, but which will become part of the foundation of a vast new building, that only those who come after him will see rising from the ground” (Rules of 1871, *Writings*, n. 2701). Fifty years ago, some missionaries came. They spent themselves totally for these people, but they did not work in vain, because they laid the foundations of something truly great. Today they are considered “ancestors” by tens of thousands of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, their true “posterity”. Yesterday, in Lirangwe, I clearly felt this truth, almost touching it with my hands. (*Father Zeitz Michael Martin, mcc*)

### **Fr. David Domingues and Fr. Luigi Codianni visit the Province**

The visit – from 12<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – of the Vicar General Father David Costa Domingues and the Assistant General Father Luigi Codianni to our Comboni Province of Malawi/Zambia was welcomed with joy and great expectations. It was a moment of grace, communion and hope for all the brothers.

For Father David Domingues and Father Luigi Codianni, it was a rush from one community to another which however brought joy and satisfaction to the hearts of the confreres. Every confrere, without exception, experienced the joy of feeling listened to and, at the same time, of being able to share with a free heart his joys and the difficulties encountered in his missionary service. From Lilongwe to Lunzu, from Chama to Lusaka, the General Assistants were able to view the missionary service that the confreres of the Province carry out with great commitment and great dedication towards the poorest and most abandoned.

Certainly, a reason for hope that appeared very clear in the eyes of our assistants is the fact that they met one of the “youngest” Provinces of the entire Institute. In fact, the percentage of young confreres who form it is very high. The Institute also entertains its hopes, and not without good reason. A Malawian proverb says “The waters of the river do not forget their source”. The long-awaited visit meant that the waters, that is, our Province, could bring to mind and heart the province feeling of being part of a source that still has within itself great strength and missionary passion.

Grateful and re-motivated in our desire to give ourselves passionately to the mission, we, the members of the Province, resume our journey with

more vigour and enthusiasm, knowing that the mission does not belong to us but that we are simple workers at the service of a mission that continually surpasses us and stimulates us to love God's Mission more and more, which is the ultimate goal for which we live it as a personal response to the call made to us.

The communities visited, not always easy to reach - at times it was a real marathon for our Assistants - expressed a sense of satisfaction and appreciation towards the General Administration which, through its Assistants, showed interest and attention to what the Province is carrying out in the field of pastoral care, training and social development, especially with the two projects of Lunzu, in Malawi, and Chikowa, in Zambia. The challenges of fields, territories, or peoples of first evangelisation, present in our Province, are still many. The human energy and closeness of the General Administration can only help us look to the future with hearts full of that hope which has its deep roots in Christ, in Comboni and in all the missionaries who still today, fearlessly and on all fronts, announce the Gospel "sine glossa". (*Father Antonio Guarino, mccj*)

## MEXICO

### **Fr. David Domingues and Bro. Alberto Lamana visit the Province**

Father David Costa Domingues, General Assistant and Vicar General of the Institute, and Brother Alberto Lamana Cónsola, General Assistant, visited our province from 6<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and witnessed, on behalf of the General Council, the closing acts of the Platinum Jubilee – 75 years – of our presence in Mexico.

During their visit of almost three weeks, they had time to travel – in a real marathon – across the Mexican territory and visit the communities in which we are present, from La Paz to the mountains of Guerrero and Comalapa, to meet each member of the Province personally and learn about the various places of apostolate in which we Combonians of Mexico carry out our missionary work, our formation houses and the Saint Daniel Comboni Oasis, where our elderly and sick confreres are taken care of.

The visit coincided with the closing celebration of our Platinum Jubilee of our presence in Mexico: first with a solemn Mass of thanksgiving in the Basilica of Guadalupe and then with a day of celebration in the headquarters of the continental novitiate in La Noria, at which Monsignor Andrés Vargas, bishop of Xochimilco, participated.

Having returned to Rome after their visit, Father David and Brother Alberto wrote a letter to the Province in which they expressed thanks for the

welcome received and encouraged us to continue to be “beacons of hope for the people we serve, walking with them and making ours their pains, their sorrows and also their joys, as Comboni taught us.” «May the conclusion of this celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee – we read at the end of the letter – be for all of you a new beginning of renewed enthusiasm and commitment to serve, to bear witness and to flourish where God leads you as Comboni Missionaries who find in the Heart of Jesus the inexhaustible source of their strength and missionary dynamism”. (*Father Ismael Piñón, mccj*)

## PERÚ

### **XXVI “Missionary Afternoon” 2023**

Last 14<sup>th</sup> October, in Lima, at the house of the provincial headquarters, the “Missionary Afternoon 2023” was held, as per tradition. About 400 people were present, including family members, friends and collaborators of the Comboni missionaries in Peru, Comboni Sisters and lay Comboni missionaries. It was an afternoon of thanks to the friends who share our love for the missions.

The celebration began with the words of welcome from Father Nelson Mitchell, provincial superior. Immediately afterwards, Sister Rosemary Apaza led the opening prayer and Brother José Valverde projected a video to introduce the Comboni Missionaries working in Peru and abroad. The most moving moment was when the images portraying Father Graziadio, better known as Father Graziano, were shown. It was he, for many years, who motivated and organised the “Missionary Afternoon” with joy and dedication, and all those present expressed their thanks to him with long and warm applause.

After some nice refreshments, we played bingo, a lottery draw was held, and we danced with the folklore group of the parish of Cristo Misionero del Padre.

At the end of an afternoon full of emotions and blessings for the Comboni family in Peru, Father Nelson thanked everyone present, inviting all to meet again next year. (*Brother José Valverde, mccj*)

### **85 years of mission**

This year, 2023, the Comboni mission in Peru celebrates 85 years of missionary presence.

The first three German Comboni Missionaries (MFSC) arrived in Peru in 1938 to provide pastoral assistance to the members of the Austro-German colony of Pozuzo, in the department of Pasco.

The following year, the bishop of Huánuco called Father Michael Wagner as formator in the diocesan seminary and, in 1940, Father Andreas Riedl followed in his footsteps. A few years later, new missions were opened. In 1954, a Comboni community settled in Lima, in the parish of Saint Pius X, in the newly created neighbourhood called Unidad Vecinal de Mirones. The first parish priest was Father Karl Wetzel.

These first years of the Comboni mission were the seed and the beginning of the future Comboni province in Peru which, it must be remembered, was the first Comboni presence on the American continent.

An important aspect to underline in this assessment of our presence in the Andean country is that many of these pastoral presences have already been handed over to the respective dioceses, after having achieved a stable pastoral structure. This is an aspect in line with the characteristic of the Comboni charism, so that the local Church assumes the commitments of its own development, as Saint Daniel Comboni wanted. And even if at times it seems that there is not much pastoral continuity, we cannot give up this characteristic of our missionary commitment.

This Comboni anniversary must help us to deepen the missionary spirit that inspired the courageous Comboni missionaries who arrived here 85 years ago. Furthermore, we must never forget that we are part of a missionary Church *ad gentes* and “outgoing”, according to the spirit of Pope Francis and in the style of Saint Daniel Comboni. In this sense, we are also called to continue to give missionary encouragement to this local Peruvian Church, so that it may continue to open itself to the universal mission. (*Father Valentín García, mcccj*)

## CHAD

### **Renewing life guided by the Spirit of God**

After a week of spiritual exercises preached by Father Fermo Bernasconi (in charge of the accompaniment service of the confreres) which had as their central theme “I urge you to revive the charism of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 *Tim* 1,6), on 17<sup>th</sup> November, the scholastic Dario Ruben Ebed Melek Tabasse Taramboui, from the Central African Republic, pronounced his perpetual vows in Donia (Chad).

The superior of the delegation, Father Marco Vailati, together with all the confreres who work in the delegation, presided over the Eucharistic celebration, animated by the Franciscan Sisters of Donia. In his homily, Father Marco urged the scholastic Ruben to remain faithful to Christ, underlining that his membership in the Comboni Institute is for life.

Two days later, on 9<sup>th</sup> November, Ruben was ordained deacon in Moïssala, through the imposition of the hands of Monsignor Miguel Angel Sebastián Martínez, bishop of Sarh. The festive celebration was animated by the community where Dario Ruben has provided his missionary service in recent months and saw the participation of many brothers from the delegation.

The bishop encouraged the new deacon to take care of the poorest and reminded him that the deacon is at the service of the Word of God and the sacraments. «You must fall in love – he told him – with the most holy humanity of Christ and, when you stand before our Redeemer, tell him: “I adore you, Lord, I ask you for forgiveness, wash me, purify me, inflame me, teach me to love” ».

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Father Zabala Iturrade Victor (5.10.1948 – 24.10.2023)**

Victor was born in the parish of Santa María de Uribarri, in Durango, in the province of Vizcaya, in northern Spain, on October 5, 1948, into a very Catholic family. Already as a boy, he wanted to become a missionary and entered the Apostolic School that the Comboni Missionaries run in Corella. On 6<sup>th</sup> September 1969, he commenced his novitiate in Moncada. Two years later, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1971, he took his first religious vows.

To study philosophy, he remained in Moncada until June 1973 and then moved to the scholasticate of Granada for theological studies. On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1975, Victor was in Limone sul Garda, on the occasion of a meeting of Comboni scholastics studying in the international scholasticates of Europe. In the chapel of Comboni's birthplace, he had the happy opportunity to renew his temporary vows in front of Father Enrico Farè, long-time provincial superior of Spain, but recently appointed superior of the Mother House of Verona, who had come to Limone as a delegate of the Superior General.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1976, Victor made his final profession and on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1977, he was ordained a priest in the parish of Durango by Msgr. Juan Maria Uriarte, auxiliary bishop of Bilbao. Several times and insistently, he asked to be able to leave for the mission immediately after ordination, but he has already received an official assignment to the province of Spain from Father Tarcisio Agostoni, as of 1<sup>st</sup> July. Victor, therefore, went to Santiago de Compostela, where he was the bursar of the community and formator in the minor seminary for just over a year, and then, until 1982, he was placed in charge of vocation promotion.

In March 1983, the letter finally arrived from Father Salvatore Calvia, Superior General, with the long-awaited news of his departure for the



mission. He was appointed to the then Comboni province of Central Africa-Chad. Victor, after a short updating course, went to Paris to study French. Before the end of the year, he went to Tokoyo, a suburb of Bangassou, the centre of the diocese of the same name, to learn the local language. He stayed there for three years, engaged in ministry, and then moved to the parish-mission of Boda, in the diocese of Bangui, first as bursar, then as parish priest, until June 1992.

After he had spent ten years in Central Africa, his major superiors proposed that he return to Spain, after a renewal course in Rome.

In 1998 he again obtained the green light for the mission and returned to Central Africa, appointed to the Grimari mission, where there was also a catechetical centre. He remained there for four years.

In 1999, Victor returned home for health reasons, recovered and returned to Grimari for a short period. In October 2002 he went to Trento for a period of rest and remained there until September 2003. After a few months of family vacation, he returned to Central Africa, assigned to the parish of Mbata in the diocese of M'Baïki, where he worked in ministry and was also the community bursar.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 2005, he returned home, assigned to the community of Palencia. Six months later, he moved to Santiago de Compostela, in charge of missionary animation. In 2008, he was a member of the Moncada community and remained there until January 2014, when he was called to Madrid, to the provincial residence.

In April 2019, his health forced him to retire permanently to the Centre for the Elderly and Sick in Moncada. He found it necessary to remain either in bed or in a wheelchair. He died on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023, surrounded by the care and prayers of his confreres. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, in the chapel of the Moncada community, the funeral mass was celebrated, presided over by Father Miguel Ángel Llamazares, provincial superior of Spain. In addition to members of the community and numerous friends, six brothers and two nephews of Father Victor were also present. *(F.M.)*

### **Father Alfonso Zulianello (2 August 1935 – 25 October 2023)**

The last of the eight missionaries who landed in Lomé, on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January 1964, has now reached his final port of call: to meet his heavenly Father, who will certainly have already welcomed him, with open arms, in the welcoming company of the other seven who preceded him. They had received the missionary crucifix from the hands of Monsignor Dosseh, Archbishop of Lomé, in the church of San Nicolò in Verona, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1963. He had said: «To those who come to my diocese, I want to

say that the people await you and will welcome you with great joy.” And so it was, on that unforgettable Sunday.

Father Alfonso – 88 years of life, 68 of Comboni consecrated life, 61 of priesthood, 55 in Togo and Benin, 4 in Italy – was “the useless servant” who wanted to remain until the end in those countries that he loved so much and for which he gave his life with love and generosity. A worker and evangeliser, he was, as Pope Francis often repeats, the shepherd who smells of the sheep, who always remains on the outskirts, without titles and honours. Blessed is that good and faithful servant!

Born on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1935 in San Stino di Livenza, in northern Italy, he went through all the stages of his Comboni education - Padua and Brescia (middle school and high school), Gozzano and Florence (novitiate), Verona (high school and philosophy), Venegono (theology) – with the desire to prepare well for the mission. Notes on his school results can still be found in the archives.

Ordained a priest in Milan on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1962 by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Saint Paul VI, he remained a year in Italy (Sulmona) before being chosen among the eight missionaries destined for the new mission in Togo. Arriving in Lomé, with two other brothers, he spent the first months in the parish of Amoutivé studying éwé - a language that would always remain, throughout his life, a passion for communicating with people and entering their lives. In his room, he had an old computer with all the biblical and liturgical texts in this language and every day he spent time reading, consulting and reviewing the texts in view of the celebrations.

His first mission was Afagnan, and the first baptism celebrated was that of little Médard Timothée Kouassi Amedjikpoto Hounaké, registered at no. 96 in the parish baptism register. He would become Father Timothée Hounaké, a Comboni missionary, and current provincial superior of the Togo-Ghana-Benin province. Father Alfonso was also present at his priestly ordination on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1993 in Afagnan, 29 years later.

In July 1965, Father Alfonso was sent to Kouvé, where he would spend long years of intense missionary activity and evangelisation in the centre and in the numerous villages in the area. He zealously accompanied the catechumenates, the preparation for baptism and the other sacraments. He was a gifted organiser of the manual labour of the mission. (Between 1969 and 1970, he also spent a year in Adjido, a parish facing the ocean.) With him on the mission, there was also Brother Bernardo Bettani, «temporarily appointed to Kouvé» states the letter of assignment. Temporary became definitive with the death of his young brother on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1971, at just 29 years old.

In 1982, Father Alfonso returned to Italy for a rotation period which he began with an updating course. He lived in Naples, at Casavatore, in charge of missionary animation in the parishes, enjoying a beautiful experience made up of meetings, preaching, contacts to share his passion for the mission with people.

His heart, however, was in Africa. In 1987, he returned to Togo and, this time, it would be for good. The superiors asked him to lend a hand to the confreres in Benin, where the Comboni Missionaries had been present since 1974 in the diocese of Lokossa with two communities: Lobogo and Bopa. They were preparing to leave these parishes to the diocesan clergy to take on other missionary commitments. Father Alfonso would be the last Comboni missionary present in Bopa.

In 1989 he moved to Vogon together with father Pierino Re, “fada lolo”. He worked with the same zeal, the same enthusiasm, the same courage announcing the Gospel in an environment where the traditional religion, Voodoo, is rooted. Even in the eyes of people, Alfonso was a simple and poor man, eager to live his vocation to the end. He was present at the time of Father Pierino’s death on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1994 – a sudden death that deeply touched the hearts of everyone in Vogon.

Father Alfonso continued his pastoral work for another few years, before handing the parish over to the diocesan clergy. In fact, after a thirty-year presence of the Comboni Missionaries, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1994, the deanery of the south-east, Aného, was erected as a Diocese, led by Bishop Victor Dovi Hounaké.

The Comboni Missionaries left Vogon on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2000 to settle in Akoumapé, one of the large secondary stations of the parish which, on the same day, became an autonomous parish with Father Alfonso as curate. Akoumapé was handed over to the diocesan clergy on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2008, and Father Alfonso was sent to Asrama, in the diocese of Kpalimé. There, on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2012, he celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of priesthood. Before the end of 2013, Asrama was returned to the diocesan clergy and Fr. Alfonso was sent to Tabligbo (a secondary station of Kouvé, which became a parish in 1986), where he spent the last ten years of his life, always busy visiting the villages, to animate the community and making common cause with people.

Father Alfonso always wanted to die in Africa and his life testimony says more than many speeches. Last year he celebrated sixty years of priesthood surrounded by his bishop, Msgr. Isaac Gaglo, by his brothers and parishioners. From the bishop he received the anointing of the sick, in preparation for the meeting with the Father.

Now he can see his sister again, Sister Armida, of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Cajetan, who, as a missionary, worked for many years in Ivory Coast. A beautiful friendship linked Father Alfonso to the Sisters of Providence in Kouvé.

On the eve of the celebration of sixty years of Comboni presence in Togo (1964-2024) and fifty years of presence in Ghana and Benin (1974-2024), Father Alfonso's return to the Father tells us that this missionary embodied the words of Jesus in a way that was profound, discreet and with no fuss at all: "If the grain of wheat that falls into the ground does not die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much fruit" (*Jn 12:24*). Yes, Father Alfonso contributed with his whole life to the growth of a local Church which, today, accompanies him to the gates of heaven and presents him to the Father so that he can receive the reward of a good servant.

Saint Daniel Comboni wrote: "In a word, the Missionary of Africa must often reflect and meditate that he works in a work of the highest merit, yes, but extremely arduous and laborious, for it is a hidden stone that perhaps will never come to light" (*Writings*, 2701). Father Alfonso is one of these hidden stones, the foundation of a growing Church, a missionary disciple for the world. (*Father Girolamo Miante, mccj*)

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

**THE MOTHER:** Luciana, of Father Flavio Mazzata (I).

**THE BROTHER:** Vittorio, of Father Mario Benedetti (I).

**THE SISTERS:** Regina, of Father Giovanni Ferracin († Khartoum) and cousin of Father Egidio Ferracin († U); Adele, of Father Walter Borghesi (BR); Margarita, of Father González Fernández Fidel (C); Bruna, of Mons. Lorenzo Ceresoli (I); Theresia, of Father Andreas Thorwarth (DSP).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Sr. Vicenzi Bianca Silvia; Sr. Maria de Deus Meirinho Dias.